

Choice Literature.

THE YOUNG KING AND THE OLD BOOK.

Many years ago, say the wise men, so many years, indeed, that it was before the days of King Arthur, who ruled this whole great land of England with a rule so wise and proper that no man yet has been able to find fault with it—but we all look for the day to come when another king as great and good as he shall be over us—a king and queen ruled over the middlemost part of the land. Now the queen I speak of was both wise and good, and in the king truly was no great evil at first, only that he listened to the wicked counsels of the barons and earls who came from over the sea in ships as black as night and with sharpened beaks, and who dwelt with their king and whispered in his ear shameful things concerning his blameless queen. So that the king was evilly persuaded and shut her up in a great tower, the walls of which were of so unheard of a thickness that even if a man were to lay his ear close against them, of what was going on inside he could not hear a sound howsoever faint.

And in the thickness of these walls there was but one window, so that the poor queen was never able to see through it the glad light of day, or the pleasant sun, or the green trees, but dwelt always sad and alone in twilight and dusk. Meanwhile the king, now that he had put his wife away, gave himself up to the wickedness that is in the heart of every man, be he king or villain, and spent his time in feasts and jousts and all manner of delights and joyousness, so that the hearts of his people were sad within them for that they thought inwardly that this was no meet and worthy way of living for a king, but chiefly in that they had to give of their own substance to find means for him to spend in such like foolish rioting. But though they murmured in their own homes, to the king they said nothing, and he knew not of their grief. Such indeed is the fashion both of peoples and of kings in our day as in theirs. Let this be as it may, it came to pass that the king died, as all men, even kings, must do, and his young son was put in his place.

Now the young king had been brought up by his father and the wicked barons, who had his ear, to do nothing but feast and take his pleasure the whole day through, so that when he was made king he knew not how to rule, and things in his kingdom went from bad to worse.

At last it came to the young king's ears that unless some change were made, and that right quickly, he would soon have no people over whom to rule; for one of his neighbours, a king who was exceeding powerful, would come and take his kingdom away from him, and no man would say him nay unless it should be the wicked barons, and they could not do much, so slothful were they and so cowardly. In this strait the young king made up his mind that he would ask advice from his mother, who had been shut up in the tower because the old king said she was a witch and knew too much. To her then came the young man, not as a son should come to his mother, with words of love upon his lips and reverence in his heart, but as one is wont to go to the hut of a witch with fear and trembling. And when he asked her to come out of the tower and to live in a fine castle he had built for her on condition that she should give him a spell wherewith he might prevail over his enemies, she sadly refused. "Thy father put me here," she said to him, "and here I shall stay until, as a son should, thou shalt ask me to come forth. As for spells I am no witch and have not of them, only as thou art my son, though a wicked and a cruel one, this casket I will give to thee, which if thou usest it aright thou shalt prevail over those who will thee harm!" and through the window of her tower she handed to her son a casket richly set with all manner of precious stones.

The young king when he saw the casket was glad, for he recked not of his mother's unwillingness to come forth, and thought only of the treasure which, from the richness of the casket, he thought it must contain. Judge then of his grief, which was also rage, when, on opening the lid, he saw only a book, the cover of which was of leather, brown and wrinkled with age. He cast it from him into a corner with scorn and anger, and, taking the casket, he sold it to a Jewish merchant who had come that way with his goods, and spent the money so gained in feasting. This, though, was soon gone, and he found his state even more parlous than before, and his misery was great. While he was thus brooding over his sad state, his old nurse, who loved him as though he were her own son, came to him and said: "Look you now, since you have gained no great good from the gift of the witch, your mother, why not seek for counsel from others who are wise in the things we common folk wot not of?" and then she told him how, in the land which lay to the south and west of his kingdom, there dwelt a little old man in a black gown, who could tell him what he wanted to know.

And the young king listened, and made up his mind to lock up his palace and to journey forth in search of the little old man; and calling to him the three wicked barons he bade them mount their horses and set out with him to the land which lay to the south and to the west where dwelt the little old man in the black gown.

And it came to pass that when they had ridden for a day and for a night they met an old woman who sat by the wayside, and by the bag which lay in front of her they saw that she was a beggar: and as they passed by she begged alms from them. And the three barons scoffed at her and would have gone on their way without heeding, but the young king turned his horse, and, riding up to her, cast into her bag all the money which was in his purse, wherewith the elder ones laughed at him and made merry.

And so they rode for another day and a night, and in the morning they came to a swamp which stretched on either side as far as the eye could see, though the width of it was not so great but that firm land could be seen on the other side thereof. Now the barons would have turned back saying that to cross it at all was not in their power seeing that before they had ridden a bow shot they would be swallowed up in it and would die an unworthy death. But the young king would not hearken to their counsel, but bade them cut down branches of the trees and make fagots of them, and casting these fagots before them he and the three that were with him rode over as though over dry land, and so reached the other side in safety.

And they rode on for a day and a night, and in the morning came to a river so broad that, strain their eyes as they

might, they could not spy the further side of it. Then the barons were for turning back seeing that they had no boat or skiff, and if they tried to ford it they would certainly be drowned. But the young king would not listen to them, but bidding them to follow him, and they dare not say nay, he spurred his horse to the bank and boldly plunged in. Now when he had once entered the water the river seemed to shrink so that it was no wider than a stream, nor anywhere did the water rise above his horse's withers, and he and the three who followed came safe and sound to the further side.

After they had ridden for another day and a night they came to the country where the men who work in white and red iron live, and, without a great deal of trouble, they found the castle of the little old man in the black gown. It was on the top of a high mountain, and under it were the mines where the white and red iron is found. When the young king came before him he knew him for what he was and called him by his name, asking him why he had come from his own land which lay to the north and to the east. And the young king told him and asked him for a charm wherewith he might keep his kingdom. The little old man frowned and said: "If thou hadst not done as thou hast done on the way hither sad and sore would be thy lot. But thou hast charity, for I was the beggar whom thou hast succoured. Thou hast cunning, for I was the swamp which thou hast bridged. Thou hast boldness, for I was the river which thou hast forded. As for these, thy followers, they have none of these things and shall work in my mines until they die!" and the barons were led off to live in gloom and darkness until they died. Then said the little old man to the young king: "Without a charm thou shalt wend thy way back to the middle country, and as thou doest so shall it befall thee, but ere thou goest I will tell thee a tale." Then was the young king sore cast down, but he said naught, only listened to the tale which the little old man told, and this it was:—

"Once upon a time a king went into a wood to hunt; but as it fell out, he wandered far from those that were with him, and lost himself. For three days and nights he wandered, until he was sore afraid and cried out: 'Half of my kingdom and one of my daughters to wife will I give to whomsoever shall lead me out of this wood!' No sooner had he said this than a toad hopped from the roots of a tree near by, and said: 'Follow me and abide by thy promise!' and he hopped before the king and showed him the way out of the wood. The king thanked him heartily, and when he came to his palace straightway forgot all about him.

"A year and a day passed, and sore trouble fell upon the king and all his people. Plague harried the people, and the land was laid waste by the Northmen. One day the king was walking in his garden and bemoaning his sad fate, when he heard a voice say: 'Do what is right and no ill can befall thee!' He looked around, but no one was in sight. Then he looked down, and at his feet squatted the ugly little toad who had led him out of the wood. And the king knew he had done wrong, and said: 'I will give thee half of my kingdom as I promised,' but the toad answered not a word. Then the king said very quickly, and as if he had not finished what he had to say when he stopped before: 'I will give thee one of my daughters to wife!' and the toad said: 'It is well'; and hopped before him into the palace. Here the king called the eldest of his three daughters to him, and said:—

"My daughter, I have promised thee in marriage to this toad'; but the princess cried out in anger and said: 'Thou must have been mad to think that I, a princess, would mate with so foul a thing!' and she made as though to kick it with her foot; but, as she did so, she became a lump of stone, and the toad hopped away into the forest again and was lost to sight.

"A year and a day passed away, and the king's plight was even more evil than before. Of his three castles he had lost one, and sorely did he grieve thereat. It was of these things that he was thinking as he walked in his garden, when, as before, he heard a voice say: 'Do what is right whate'er betide!' and looking down he saw the toad. The king knew at once what he wanted, and so did not waste words. 'Come with me,' he said, 'and I will give thee my second daughter to wife.'

"The toad hopped off into the palace, the king followed, and when he was come there called for his second daughter. As soon as she had entered the room he said: 'There is thy husband,' and pointed to the toad; but she laughed with scorn and said: 'Old man, of a truth it is true that they speak when they say thou art in thy dotage, and so hast lost one of thy castles; and she made as though to spurn the toad with her foot, but on that instant was turned to stone. And the toad hopped away as before without turning to answer the king who piteously called after him.

"When another year and a day had gone by the king had lost another castle and was in sorer plight than ever. Once more he walked in his garden, and once more the toad came to him and asked that the promise might be redeemed. This time when they had come into the palace the king sent for his youngest daughter, who was so much more beautiful than her elder sisters had been that between them there was no compare. 'My daughter,' said the king, 'I have promised thee in marriage to this toad here, who, when I was in sore straits, delivered me.'

"As thou hast promised, father,' said the maiden, 'so must thou perform'; and she bowed her head in token of assent.

"Dost thou not fear to marry such a one as I?" asked the toad.

"What is right," answered the maiden, 'is never feared!' and as she said that the toad hopped upward and disappeared, and in his place there stood a beautiful young prince as brave as he was good. And to him was the princess married, and by his help the king won back his two castles, and nothing but good befell the kingdom from that time forward; and when the old king died, the prince, his son-in-law, reigned in his stead until he, too, and his wife in their turn died, leaving their children to reign after them!"

When the little old man in the black gown had finished his tale he was no more to be seen, and the young king had no more to do but to ride back to his country. This he did with ease, for no river or swamp was now in his way to hinder. But as he rode he thought and thought and kept on thinking, so that when he came to his own palace and unlocked the door, the first thing he did was to go to the tower, and, bending low in duty and reverence, to ask his mother, the queen, to come and dwell with him, and to be

honoured as a mother should be honoured by her son. And the next thing the young king did was to hunt through every corner of his palace until he had found the book which he had aforetime cast aside so scornfully. For indeed from the little old man he had learned that a son must esteem his mother and that the outside is no guide to what is within.

And when he had found the book and opened it he found therein all that he wanted to know in order to rule his kingdom with wisdom. There was nothing needful which he did not find in the book, and his land grew in riches and all men praised him for that he was a good and a wise king. And when he died his son reigned after him, and learned from this book how to rule as his father had ruled before him. But in the days of his son the book was lost, nor hath it ever yet been found, and wise men say that until that takes place no king or no queen shall rule over England as well or wisely as those who read its pages. I know not, but it may be so—*Horace Townsend, in the Independent.*

THE ELEPHANT'S SAGACITY.

A writer in the *Illustrated American* says that in work which requires the application of great strength combined with good judgment the elephant is supreme; but as a more puller and hauler he is not of great value. In piling logs, for example, the creature soon learns the exact manner of arranging them, and will place them upon each other with a regularity not to be excelled by a human workman. Sir Emerson Tennent, in his work on Ceylon, mentions a pair of elephants who used to raise their wood piles to a great height by rolling the logs up an inclined plane of sloping beams. The same writer was once riding near Kandy, toward the scene of the massacre of Major Davies' party in 1803. He heard a queer sound in the jungle, like the repetition, in a hoarse and discontented tone, of the ejaculation of "Urmph, urmph!" Presently a tame elephant hove in sight, unaccompanied by any attendant. He was labouring painfully to carry a heavy beam of timber which he balanced across his tusks, but, the pathway being narrow, he had to keep his head bent in a very uncomfortable posture to permit the burden to pass endways, and the exertion and inconvenience combined led him to utter the dissatisfied noise which had frightened the horse. When the creature saw the horse and rider halt, he raised his head, reconnoitered them for a moment, and then he flung down the timber, thoroughly appreciating the situation, and pushed himself backward among the bushwood so as to leave a passage for the horse. But as the horse did not avail itself of the pathway, the elephant impatiently thrust himself deeper into the jungle, repeating his cry of "Urmph!" but in a voice meant to invite and encourage. Still the horse trembled, and the rider, anxious to observe the instinct of the two intelligent creatures, forbore any interference with them. Again the elephant wedged himself farther in among the trees and waited for the horse to pass, and after the horse had done so timidly and tremblingly, the wise creature stooped, took up his heavy burden, and, balancing it on his tusks, resumed his route, hoarsely snorting his discontented grunt as before.—*Science.*

MENTAL OVER-PRESSURE.

As the school season approaches, the subject of mental over-pressure becomes important enough not only for parental consideration but for scientific investigation. The capacity of the child, the number and nature of the studies, and especially the length of the recitations, are features which ought not to be overlooked or be left to the discretion of educators. That much can be gained by experimental study of over-pressure is shown by a paper read by Dr. Burgenstein, of Vienna, before the Congress of Hygiene in London, upon "The Working Curve of an Hour." The writer had for his object the study of the mental power of children, and he arranged his experiments with a view to demonstrating the fluctuations of brain power in children during one hour's occupation with a familiar subject. Simple addition and multiplication sums were given to two classes of girls, of an average age of eleven years and eleven years and ten months, and two classes of boys, of the average age of twelve years and two months and thirteen years and one month. After ten minutes' work the sums were taken away from the children, after a pause of ten minutes the work was resumed, the alternation continuing for an hour, so that there were three periods of work. The results were interesting. During the whole experiment the 162 children worked out 135,010 figures, making 6,504 mistakes. It was found that the number of mistakes increased in the different periods, and that during the third period the quality of work was at the lowest. The general result showed, according to the investigator, that "children of the ages stated become fatigued in three quarters of an hour, that the organic material is gradually exhausted; that the power of work gradually diminishes to a certain point during the third quarter of the hour, returning with renewed force at the fourth quarter. The recommendation was made that no school lesson should last longer than three-quarters of an hour, and should be followed by a quarter of an hour's rest. Such a study is of especial benefit at the beginning of the school year. Children are often reprimanded for inattention when they are over-fatigued, and are spurred forward when their minds need rest. "Mental over-pressure" is the usual result.—*Boston Journal.*