

**FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES
RETOLD**

**FIFTY FAMOUS
STORIES RETOLD**

BY

JAMES BALDWIN

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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CONCERNING THESE STORIES

THERE are numerous time-honored stories which have become so incorporated into the literature and thought of our race that a knowledge of them is an indispensable part of one's education. These stories are of several different classes. To one class belong the popular fairy tales which have delighted untold generations of children, and will continue to delight them to the end of time. To another class belong the limited number of fables that have come down to us through many channels from hoar antiquity. To a third belong the charming stories of olden times that are derived from the literatures of ancient peoples, such as the Greeks and the Hebrews. A fourth class includes the half-legendary tales of a distinctly later origin, which have for their subjects certain romantic episodes in the lives of well-known heroes and famous men, or in the history of a people.

It is to this last class that most of the fifty stories contained in the present volume belong. As a matter of course, some of these stories are better known, and therefore more famous, than others. Some have a slight historical value; some are useful as giving point to certain great moral truths; others are products solely of the fancy, and are intended only to amuse. Some are derived from very ancient sources, and are current in the literature of many

lands; some have come to us through the ballads and folk tales of the English people; a few are of quite recent origin; nearly all are the subjects of frequent allusions in poetry and prose and in the conversation of educated people. Care has been taken to exclude everything that is not strictly within the limits of probability; hence there is here no trespassing upon the domain of the fairy tale, the fable, or the myth.

That children naturally take a deep interest in such stories, no person can deny; that the reading of them will not only give pleasure, but will help to lay the foundation for broader literary studies, can scarcely be doubted. It is believed, therefore, that the present collection will be found to possess all educative value which will commend it as a supplementary reader in the middle primary grades at school. It is also hoped that the book will prove so attractive that it will be in demand out of school as well as in.

Acknowledgments are due to Mrs. Charles A. Lane, by whom eight or ten of the stories were suggested.

KING ALFRED AND THE CAKES

MANY years ago there lived in England a wise and good king whose name was Alfred. No other man ever did so much for his country as he; and people now, all over the world, speak of him as Alfred the Great.

In those days a king did not have a very easy life. There was war almost all the time, and no one else could lead his army into battle so well as he. And so, between ruling and fighting, he had a busy time of it indeed.

A fierce, rude people, called the Danes, had come from over the sea, and were fighting the English. There were so many of them, and they were so bold and strong, that for a long time they gained every battle. If they kept on, they would soon be the masters of the whole country.

At last, after a great battle, the English army was broken up and scattered. Every man had to save himself in the best way he could. King Alfred fled alone, in great haste, through the woods and swamps.

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Late in the day the king came to the hut of a woodcutter. He was very tired and hungry, and he begged the woodcutter's wife to give him something to eat and a place to sleep in her hut.

The woman was baking some cakes upon the hearth, and she looked with pity upon the poor, ragged fellow who seemed so hungry. She had no thought that he was the king.

"Yes," she said, "I will give you some supper if you will watch these cakes. I want to go out and milk the cow; and you must see that they do not burn while I am gone."

King Alfred was very willing to watch the cakes, but he had far greater things to think about. How was he going to get his army together again? And how was he going to drive the fierce Danes out of the land? He forgot his hunger; he forgot the cakes; he forgot that he was in the woodcutter's hut. His mind was busy making plans for to-morrow.

In a little while the woman came back. The cakes were smoking on the hearth. They were burned to a crisp. Ah, how angry she was!

"You lazy fellow!" she cried. "See what you have done! You want something to eat, but you do not want to work!"

I have been told that she even struck the king with a stick; but I can hardly believe that she was so ill-natured.

KING ALFRED AND THE CAKES



The king must have laughed to himself at the thought of being scolded in this way; and he was so hungry that he did not mind the woman's angry words half so much as the loss of the cakes.

I do not know whether he had anything to eat that night, or whether he had to go to bed without his supper. But it was not many days until he had gathered his men together again, and had beaten the Danes in a great battle.

KING ALFRED AND THE BEGGAR

AT one time the Danes drove King Alfred from his kingdom, and he had to lie hidden for a long time on a little island in a river.

One day, all who were on the island, except the king and queen and one servant, went out to fish. It was a very lonely place, and no one could get to it except by a boat. About noon a ragged beggar came to the king's door, and asked for food.

The king called the servant, and asked, "How much food have we in the house?"

"My lord," said the servant, "we have only one loaf and a little wine."

Then the king gave thanks to God, and said, "Give half of the loaf and half of the wine to this poor man."

The servant did as he was bidden. The beggar thanked the king for his kindness, and went on his way.

In the afternoon the men who had gone out to fish came back. They had three boats full of fish,

KING ALFRED AND THE BEGGAR

and they said, "We have caught more fish to-day than in all the other days that we have been on this island."

The king was glad, and he and his people were more hopeful than they had ever been before.

When night came, the king lay awake for a long time, and thought about the things that had happened that day. At last he fancied that he saw a great light like the sun; and in the midst of the light there stood an old man with black hair, holding an open book in his hand.

It may all have been a dream, and yet to the king it seemed very real indeed. He looked and wondered, but was not afraid.

"Who are you?" he asked of the old man.

"Alfred, my son, be brave," said the man; "for I am the one to whom you gave this day the half of all the food that you had. Be strong and joyful of heart, and listen to what I say. Rise up early in the morning and blow your horn three times, so loudly that the Danes may hear it. By nine o'clock, five hundred men will be around you ready to be led into battle. Go forth bravely, and within seven days your enemies shall be beaten, and you shall go back to your kingdom to reign in peace."

Then the light went out, and the man was seen no more.

In the morning the king arose early, and crossed over to the mainland. Then he blew his horn

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three times very loudly; and when his friends heard it they were glad, but the Danes were filled with fear.

At nine o'clock, five hundred of his bravest soldiers stood around him ready for battle. He spoke, and told them what he had seen and heard in his dream; and when he had finished, they all cheered loudly, and said that they would follow him and fight for him so long as they had strength.

So they went out bravely to battle; and they beat the Danes, and drove them back into their own place. And King Alfred ruled wisely and well over all his people for the rest of his days.

KING CANUTE ON THE SEASHORE

A HUNDRED years or more after the time of Alfred the Great there was a king of England named Canute. King Canute was a Dane; but the Danes were not so fierce and cruel then as they had been when they were at war with King Alfred.

The great men and officers who were around King Canute were always praising him.

“You are the greatest man that ever lived,” one would say.

Then another would say, “O king! there can never be another man so mighty as you.”

And another would say, “Great Canute, there is nothing in the world that dares to disobey you.”

The king was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches.

One day he was by the seashore, and his officers were with him. They were praising him, as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he bade them

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set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

“Am I the greatest man in the world?” he asked.

“O king!” they cried, “there is no one so mighty as you.”

“Do all things obey me?” he asked.

“There is nothing that dares to disobey you, O king!” they said. “The world bows before you, and gives you honor.”

“Will the sea obey me?” he asked; and he looked down at the little waves which were lapping the sand at his feet.

The foolish officers were puzzled, but they did not dare to say “No.”

“Command it, O king! and it will obey,” said one.

“Sea,” cried Canute, “I command you to come no farther! Waves, stop your rolling, and do not dare to touch my feet!”

But the tide came in, just as it always did. The water rose higher and higher. It came up around the king’s chair, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and wondering whether he was not mad.

Then Canute took off his crown, and threw it down upon the sand.

KING CANUTE ON THE SEASHORE



“Sea, I command you to come no farther!”

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“I shall never wear it again,” he said. “And do you, my men, learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King who is all-powerful; and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you ought to praise and serve above all others.”

THE SONS OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

THERE was once a great king of England who was called William the Conqueror, and he had three sons.

One day King William seemed to be thinking of something that made him feel very sad; and the wise men who were about him asked him what was the matter.

“I am thinking,” he said, “of what my sons may do after I am dead. For, unless they are wise and strong, they cannot keep the kingdom which I have won for them. Indeed, I am at a loss to know which one of the three ought to be the king when I am gone.”

“O king!” said the wise men, “if we only knew what things your sons admire the most, we might then be able to tell what kind of men they will be. Perhaps, by asking each one of them a few questions, we can find out which one of them will be best fitted to rule in your place.”

FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES RETOLD

“The plan is well worth trying, at least,” said the king. “Have the boys come before you, and then ask them what you please.”

The wise men talked with one another for a little while, and then agreed that the young princes should be brought in, one at a time, and that the same questions should be put to each.

The first who came into the room was Robert. He was a tall, willful lad, and was nicknamed Short Stocking.

“Fair sir,” said one of the men, “answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?”

“A hawk,” answered Robert. “I would rather be a hawk, for no other bird reminds one so much of a bold and gallant knight.”

The next who came was young William, his father’s namesake and pet. His face was jolly and round, and because he had red hair he was nicknamed Rufus, or the Red.

“Fair sir,” said the wise man, “answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?”

“An eagle,” answered William. “I would rather be an eagle, because it is strong and brave. It is feared by all other birds, and is therefore the king of them all.”

THE SONS OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

Lastly came the youngest brother, Henry, with quiet steps and a sober, thoughtful look. He had been taught to read and write, and for that reason he was nicknamed Beauclerc, or the Handsome Scholar.

“Fair sir,” said the wise man, “answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?”

“A starling,” said Henry. “I would rather be a starling, because it is good-mannered and kind and a joy to every one who sees it, and it never tries to rob or abuse its neighbor.”

Then the wise men talked with one another for a little while, and when they had agreed among themselves, they spoke to the king.

“We find,” said they, “that your eldest son, Robert, will be bold and gallant. He will do some great deeds, and make a name for himself; but in the end he will be overcome by his foes, and will die in prison.

“The second son, William, will be as brave and strong as the eagle but he will be feared and hated for his cruel deeds. He will lead a wicked life, and will die a shameful death.

“The youngest son, Henry, will be wise and prudent and peaceful. He will go to war only when he is forced to do so by his enemies. He will be loved at home, and respected abroad; and he will die in peace after having gained great possessions.”

FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES RETOLD

Years passed by, and the three boys had grown up to be men. King William lay upon his death-bed, and again he thought of what would become of his sons when he was gone. Then he remembered what the wise men had told him; and so he declared that Robert should have the lands which he held in France, that William should be the King of England, and that Henry should have no land at all, but only a chest of gold.

So it happened in the end very much as the wise men had foretold. Robert, the Short Stocking, was bold and reckless, like the hawk which he so much admired. He lost all the lands that his father had left him, and was at last shut up in prison, where he was kept until he died.

William Rufus was so overbearing and cruel that he was feared and hated by all his people. He led a wicked life, and was killed by one of his own men while hunting in the forest.

And Henry, the Handsome Scholar, had not only the chest of gold for his own, but he became by and by the King of England and the ruler of all the lands that his father had had in France.

THE WHITE SHIP

KING HENRY, the Handsome Scholar, had one son named William, whom he dearly loved. The young man was noble and brave, and everybody hoped that he would some day be the King of England.

One summer Prince William went with his father across the sea to look after their lands in France. They were welcomed with joy by all their people there, and the young prince was so gallant and kind, that he won the love of all who saw him.

But at last the time came for them to go back to England. The king, with his wise men and brave knights, set sail early in the day; but Prince William with his younger friends waited a little while. They had had so joyous a time in France that they were in no great haste to tear themselves away.

Then they went on board of the ship which was waiting to carry them home. It was a beautiful ship with white sails and white masts, and it had been fitted up on purpose for this voyage.

The sea was smooth, the winds were fair and no one thought of danger. On the ship, everything

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had been arranged to make the trip a pleasant one. There was music and dancing, and everybody was merry and glad.

The sun had gone down before the white-winged vessel was fairly out of the bay. But what of that? The moon was at its full, and it would give light enough; and before the dawn of the morrow, the narrow sea would be crossed. And so the prince, and the young people who were with him, gave themselves up to merriment and feasting and joy.

The earlier hours of the night passed by; and then there was a cry of alarm on deck. A moment afterward there was a great crash. The ship had struck upon a rock. The water rushed in. She was sinking. Ah, where now were those who had lately been so heart-free and glad?

Every heart was full of fear. No one knew what to do. A small boat was quickly launched, and the prince with a few of his bravest friends leaped into it. They pushed off just as the ship was beginning to settle beneath the waves. Would they be saved?

They had rowed hardly ten yards from the ship, when there was a cry from among those that were left behind.

“Row back!” cried the prince. “It is my little sister. She must be saved!”

The men did not dare to disobey. The boat was again brought alongside of the sinking vessel. The prince stood up, and held out his arms for his

THE WHITE SHIP

sister. At that moment the ship gave a great lurch forward into the waves. One shriek of terror was heard, and then all was still save the sound of the moaning waters.

Ship and boat, prince and princess, and all the gay company that had set sail from France, went down to the bottom together. One man clung to a floating plank, and was saved the next day. He was the only person left alive to tell the sad story.

When King Henry heard of the death of his son, his grief was more than he could bear. His heart was broken. He had no more joy in life; and men say that no one ever saw him smile again.

Here is a poem about him that your teacher may read to you, and perhaps, after a while, you may learn it by heart.

HE NEVER SMILED AGAIN

The bark that held the prince went down,
The sweeping waves rolled on;
And what was England's glorious crown
To him that wept a son?
He lived, for life may long be borne
Ere sorrow breaks its chain:
Why comes not death to those who mourn?
He never smiled again.

There stood proud forms before his throne,
The stately and the brave;
But who could fill the place of one,—
That one beneath the wave?

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Before him passed the young and fair,
 In pleasure's reckless train;
But seas dashed o'er his son's bright hair—
 He never smiled again.

He sat where festal bowls went round;
 He heard the minstrel sing;
He saw the tourney's victor crowned
 Amid the knightly ring.
A murmur of the restless deep
 Was blent with every strain,
A voice of winds that would not sleep—
 He never smiled again.

Hearts, in that time, closed o'er the trace
 Of vows once fondly poured,
And strangers took the kinsman's place
 At many a joyous board;
Graves which true love had bathed with tears
 Were left to heaven's bright rain;
Fresh hopes were born for other years—
 He never smiled again!

MRS. HEMANS

KING JOHN AND THE ABBOT

I. THE THREE QUESTIONS

THERE was once a king of England whose name was John. He was a bad king; for he was harsh and cruel to his people, and so long as he could have his own way, he did not care what became of other folks. He was the worst king that England ever had.

Now, there was in the town of Canterbury a rich old abbot who lived in grand style in a great house called the Abbey. Every day a hundred noble men sat down with him to dine; and fifty brave knights, in fine velvet coats and gold chains, waited upon him at his table.

When King John heard of the way in which the abbot lived, he made up his mind to put a stop to it. So he sent for the old man to come and see him.

“How now, my good abbot?” he said. “I hear that you keep a far better house than I. How dare you do such a thing? Don’t you know that no man in

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the land ought to live better than the king? And I tell you that no man shall.”

“O king!” said the abbot, “I beg to say that I am spending nothing but what is my own. I hope that you will not think ill of me for making things pleasant for my friends and the brave knights who are with me.”

“Think ill of you?” said the king. “How can I help but think ill of you? All that there is in this broad land is mine by right; and how do you dare to put me to shame by living in grander style than I? One would think that you were trying to be king in my place.”

“Oh, do not say so!” said the abbot. “For I”—

“Not another word!” cried the king. “Your fault is plain, and unless you can answer me three questions, your head shall be cut off, and all your riches shall be mine.”

“I will try to answer them, O king!” said the abbot.

“Well, then,” said King John, “as I sit here with my crown of gold on my head, you must tell me to within a day just how long I shall live. Secondly, you must tell me how soon I shall ride round the whole world; and lastly, you shall tell me what I think.”

“O king!” said the abbot, “these are deep, hard questions, and I cannot answer them just now.

KING JOHN AND THE ABBOT

But if you will give me two weeks to think about them, I will do the best that I can.”

“Two weeks you shall have,” said the king; “but if then you fail to answer me, you shall lose your head, and all your lands shall be mine.”

The abbot went away very sad and in great fear. He first rode to Oxford. Here was a great school, called a university, and he wanted to see if any of the wise professors could help him. But they shook their heads, and said that there was nothing about King John in any of their books.

Then the abbot rode down to Cambridge, where there was another university. But not one of the teachers in that great school could help him.

At last, sad and sorrowful, he rode toward home to bid his friends and his brave knights good-bye. For now he had not a week to live.

II. THE THREE ANSWERS

As the abbot was riding up the lane which led to his grand house, he met his shepherd going to the fields.

“Welcome home, good master!” cried the shepherd. “What news do you bring us from great King John?”

“Sad news, sad news,” said the abbot; and then he told him all that had happened.

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“Cheer up, cheer up, good master,” said the shepherd. “Have you never yet heard that a fool may teach a wise man wit? I think I can help you out of your trouble.”

“You help me!” cried the abbot. “How? how?”

“Well,” answered the shepherd, “you know that everybody says that I look just like you, and that I have sometimes been mistaken for you. So, lend me your servants and your horse and your gown, and I will go up to London and see the king. If nothing else can be done, I can at least die in your place.”

“My good shepherd,” said the abbot, “you are very, very kind; and I have a mind to let you try your plan. But if the worst comes to the worst, you shall not die for me. I will die for myself.”

So the shepherd got ready to go at once. He dressed himself with great care. Over his shepherd’s coat he threw the abbot’s long gown, and he borrowed the abbot’s cap and golden staff. When all was ready, no one in the world would have thought that he was not the great man himself. Then he mounted his horse, and with a great train of servants set out for London.

Of course the king did not know him.

“Welcome, Sir Abbot!” he said. “It is a good thing that you have come back. But, prompt as you are, if you fail to answer my three questions, you shall lose your head.”

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“You shall live until the day that you die.”

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“I am ready to answer them, O king!” said the shepherd.

“Indeed, indeed!” said the king, and he laughed to himself. “Well, then, answer my first question: How long shall I live? Come, you must tell me to the very day.”

“You shall live,” said the shepherd, “until the day that you die, and not one day longer. And you shall die when you take your last breath, and not one moment before.”

The king laughed.

“You are witty, I see,” he said. “But we will let that pass, and say that your answer is right. And now tell me how soon I may ride round the world.”

“You must rise with the sun,” said the shepherd, “and you must ride with the sun until it rises again the next morning. As soon as you do that, you will find that you have ridden round the world in twenty-four hours.”

The king laughed again. “Indeed,” he said, “I did not think that it could be done so soon. You are not only witty, but you are wise, and we will let this answer pass. And now comes my third and last question: What do I think?”

“That is an easy question,” said the shepherd. “You think that I am the Abbot of Canterbury. But, to tell you the truth, I am only his poor shepherd, and I have come to beg your pardon for him and for me.” And with that, he threw off his long gown.

KING JOHN AND THE ABBOT

The king laughed loud and long.

“A merry fellow you are,” said he, “and you shall be the Abbot of Canterbury in your master’s place.”

“O king! that cannot be,” said the shepherd; “for I can neither read nor write.”

“Very well, then,” said the king, “I will give you something else to pay you for this merry joke. I will give you four pieces of silver every week as long as you live. And when you get home, you may tell the old abbot that you have brought him a free pardon from King John.”

A STORY OF ROBIN HOOD

IN the rude days of King Richard and King John there were many great woods in England. The most famous of these was Sherwood forest, where the king often went to hunt deer. In this forest there lived a band of daring men called outlaws.

They had done something that was against the laws of the land, and had been forced to hide themselves in the woods to save their lives. There they spent their time in roaming about among the trees, in hunting the king's deer, and in robbing rich travelers that came that way.

There were nearly a hundred of these outlaws, and their leader was a bold fellow called Robin Hood. They were dressed in suits of green, and armed with bows and arrows; and sometimes they carried long wooden lances and broad-swords, which they knew how to handle well. Whenever they had taken anything, it was brought and laid at the feet of Robin Hood, whom they called their king. He then divided it fairly among them, giving to each man his just share.

A STORY OF ROBIN HOOD

Robin never allowed his men to harm anybody but the rich men who lived in great houses and did no work. He was always kind to the poor, and he often sent help to them; and for that reason the common people looked upon him as their friend.

Long after he was dead, men liked to talk about his deeds. Some praised him, and some blamed him. He was, indeed, a rude, lawless fellow; but at that time, people did not think of right and wrong as they do now.

A great many songs were made up about Robin Hood, and these songs were sung in the cottages and huts all over the land for hundreds of years afterward.

Here is a little story that is told in one of those songs:—

Robin Hood was standing one day under a green tree by the roadside. While he was listening to the birds among the leaves, he saw a young man passing by. This young man was dressed in a fine suit of bright red cloth; and, as he tripped gayly along the road, he seemed to be as happy as the day.

“I will not trouble him,” said Robin Hood, “for I think he is on his way to his wedding.”

The next day Robin stood in the same place. He had not been there long when he saw the same young man coming down the road. But he did not seem to be so happy this time. He had left his scarlet coat at home, and at every step he sighed and groaned.

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“Ah the sad day! the sad day!” he kept saying to himself.

Then Robin Hood stepped out from under the tree, and said,—

“I say, young man! Have you any money to spare for my merry men and me?”

“I have nothing at all,” said the young man, “but five shillings and a ring.”

“A gold ring?” asked Robin.

“Yes,” said the young man, “it is a gold ring. Here it is.”

“Ah, I see!” said Robin; “it is a wedding ring.”

“I have kept it these seven years,” said the young man; “I have kept it to give to my bride on our wedding day. We were going to be married yesterday. But her father has promised her to a rich old man whom she never saw. And now my heart is broken.”

“What is your name?” asked Robin.

“My name is Allin-a-Dale,” said the young man.

“What will you give me, in gold or fee,” said Robin, “if I will help you win your bride again in spite of the rich old man to whom she has been promised?”

A STORY OF ROBIN HOOD



“I have no money,” said Allin, “but I will promise to be your servant.”

“How many miles is it to the place where the maiden lives?” asked Robin.

FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES RETOLD

“It is not far,” said Allin. “But she is to be married this very day, and the church is five miles away.”

Then Robin made haste to dress himself as a harper; and in the afternoon he stood in the door of the church.

“Who are you?” said the bishop, “and what are you doing here?”

“I am a bold harper,” said Robin, “the best in the north country.”

“I am glad you have come,” said the bishop kindly. “There is no music that I like so well as that of the harp. Come in, and play for us.”

“I will go in,” said Robin Hood; “but I will not give you any music until I see the bride and bride-groom.”

Just then an old man came in. He was dressed in rich clothing, but was bent with age, and was feeble and gray. By his side walked a fair young girl. Her cheeks were very pale, and her eyes were full of tears.

“This is no match,” said Robin. “Let the bride choose for herself.”

Then he put his horn to his lips, and blew three times. The very next minute, four and twenty men, all dressed in green, and carrying long bows in their hands, came running across the fields. And as they marched into the church, all in a row, the foremost among them was Allin-a-Dale.

A STORY OF ROBIN HOOD

“Now whom do you choose?” said Robin to the maiden.

“I choose Allin-a-Dale,” she said blushing.

“And Allin-a-Dale you shall have,” said Robin; “and he that takes you from Allin-a-Dale shall find that he has Robin Hood to deal with.”

And so the fair maiden and Allin-a-Dale were married then and there, and the rich old man went home in a great rage.

“And thus having ended this merry wedding,
The bride looked like a queen:
And so they returned to the merry green wood,
Amongst the leaves so green.”

BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

THERE was once a king of Scotland whose name was Robert Bruce. He had need to be both brave and wise, for the times in which he lived were wild and rude. The King of England was at war with him, and had led a great army into Scotland to drive him out of the land.

Battle after battle had been fought. Six times had Bruce led his brave little army against his foes; and six times had his men been beaten, and driven into flight. At last his army was scattered, and he was forced to hide himself in the woods and in lonely places among the mountains.

One rainy day, Bruce lay on the ground under a rude shed, listening to the patter of the drops on the roof above him. He was tired and sick at heart, and ready to give up all hope. It seemed to him that there was no use for him to try to do anything more.

As he lay thinking, he saw a spider over his head, making ready to weave her web. He watched her as she toiled slowly and with great care. Six times she tried to throw her frail thread from one beam to another, and six times it fell short.

BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

“Poor thing!” said Bruce: “you, too, know what it is to fail.”

But the spider did not lose hope with the sixth failure. With still more care, she made ready to try for the seventh time. Bruce almost forgot his own troubles as he watched her swing herself out upon the slender line. Would she fail again? No! The thread was carried safely to the beam, and fastened there.

“I, too, will try a seventh time!” cried Bruce.

He arose and called his men together. He told them of his plans, and sent them out with messages of cheer to his disheartened people. Soon there was an army of brave Scotchmen around him. Another battle was fought, and the King of England was glad to go back into his own country.

I have heard it said, that, after that day, no one by the name of Bruce would ever hurt a spider. The lesson which the little creature had taught the king was never forgotten.

THE BLACK DOUGLAS

IN Scotland, in the time of King Robert Bruce, there lived a brave man whose name was Douglas. His hair and beard were black and long, and his face was tanned and dark; and for this reason people nicknamed him the Black Douglas. He was a good friend of the king, and one of his strongest helpers.

In the war with the English, who were trying to drive Bruce from Scotland, the Black Douglas did many brave deeds; and the English people became very much afraid of him. By and by the fear of him spread all through the land. Nothing could frighten an English lad more than to tell him that the Black Douglas was not far away. Women would tell their children, when they were naughty, that the Black Douglas would get them; and this would make them very quiet and good.

There was a large castle in Scotland which the English had taken early in the war. The Scottish soldiers wanted very much to take it again, and the Black Douglas and his men went one day to see what they could do. It happened to be a holiday, and most of the English soldiers in the castle were eating

THE BLACK DOUGLAS

and drinking and having a merry time. But they had left watchmen on the wall to see that the Scottish soldiers did not come upon them unawares; and so they felt quite safe.

In the evening, when it was growing dark, the wife of one of the soldiers went up on the wall with her child in her arms. As she looked over into the fields below the castle, she saw some dark objects moving toward the foot of the wall. In the dusk, she could not make out what they were, and so she pointed them out to one of the watchmen.

“Pooh, pooh!” said the watchman. “Those are nothing to frighten us. They are the farmer’s cattle, trying to find their way home. The farmer himself is enjoying the holiday, and he has forgotten to bring them in. If the Douglas should happen this way before morning, he will be sorry for his carelessness.”

But the dark objects were not cattle. They were the Black Douglas and his men, creeping on hands and feet toward the foot of the castle wall. Some of them were dragging ladders behind them through the grass. They would soon be climbing to the top of the wall. None of the English soldiers dreamed that they were within many miles of the place.

The woman watched them until the last one had passed around a corner out of sight. She was not afraid, for in the darkening twilight they looked indeed like cattle. After a little while she began to sing to her child:—

FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES RETOLD

“Hush ye, hush ye, little pet ye,
Hush ye, hush ye, do not fret ye,
The Black Douglas shall not get ye.”



“Don’t be so sure about that!”

THE BLACK DOUGLAS

All at once a gruff voice was heard behind her, saying, "Don't be so sure about that!"

She looked around, and there stood the Black Douglas himself. At the same moment a Scottish soldier climbed off a ladder and leaped upon the wall; and then there came another and another and another, until the wall was covered with them. Soon there was hot fighting in every part of the castle. But the English were so taken by surprise that they could not do much. Many of them were killed, and in a little while the Black Douglas and his men were the masters of the castle, which by right belonged to them.

As for the woman and her child, the Black Douglas would not suffer any one to harm them. After a while they went back to England; and whether the mother made up any more songs about the Black Douglas I cannot tell.