

THE BOOK OF LEGENDS

**THE BOOK OF
LEGENDS**

BY

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YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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This edition, first published in 2006 by Yesterday's Classics, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by Houghton Mifflin Co. in 1900. For a complete listing of the books published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Project which presents the complete text of dozens of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com under the editorship of Lisa M. Ripperton and T. A. Roth.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-030-1

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-030-7

Yesterday's Classics
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

PREFACE

THIS little book follows the general design of *The Book of Fables* and *The Book of Folk Stories*. Literature, in one form or another, recognizes a number of stories which are current in many tongues, and may or may not have had a single origin. Such is the tale of William Tell. There are legends also which sprang up in the popular mind about some hero of real life, and, in ages which knew a marked separation between literate and illiterate, these stories, treasured by uncritical minds, came to express in supernatural terms facts and incidents which at other times would have been held fast in more exact biography. Such are the legends of "St. Christopher" and "St. George and the Dragon." Again, there are stories like "The Bell of Justice" and "The Image and the Treasure" which were the invention of mediæval preachers of a lively turn of imagination, and have found a place in such collections as *Gesta Romanorum*.

These tales, springing from various sources, have been taken up into literature of a more conscious sort, and have been made the basis of poem or story or drama. Their antiquity and their persistence mark them as corresponding to elemental conditions of human nature, and thus they have seemed to me peculiarly acceptable to the young, whose imagination is vivid and uncritical. But for the most part these stories are not accessible in a form

easily apprehended by young readers, and it has been my pleasure to tell them over again in simple language. Perhaps some of the readers of this book will find a keener pleasure in after-life when they take up, for example, Longfellow's "King Robert of Sicily," or hear an opera by Wagner, because the story in each case had become familiar in childhood.

H. E. S.

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THE PROUD KING

THERE was once a king who ruled over many lands; he went to war, and added one country after another to his kingdom. At last he came to be emperor, and that is as much as any man can be. One night, after he was crowned emperor, he lay awake and thought about himself.

“Surely,” he said, “no one can be greater than I am, on earth or in heaven.”

The proud king fell asleep with these thoughts. When he awoke, the day was fair, and he looked out on the pleasant world.

“Come,” he said to the men about him; “to-day we will go a-hunting.”

The horses were brought, the dogs came leaping, the horns sounded, and the proud king with his courtiers rode off to the sport. They had hunted all the morning, and were now in a deep wood. In the fields the sun had beat upon their heads, and they were glad of the shade of the trees; but the proud king wished for something more. He saw a lake not far off, and he said to his men:—

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“Bide ye here, while I bathe in the lake and cool myself.”

Then he rode apart till he came to the shore of the lake. There he got down from his horse, laid aside his clothes, and plunged into the cool water. He swam about, and sometimes dived beneath the surface, and so was once more cool and fresh.

Now while the proud king was swimming away from the shore and diving to the bottom, there came one who had the same face and form as the king. He drew near the shore, dressed himself in the king's clothes, mounted the king's horse and rode away. So when the proud king was once more cool and fresh, and came to the place where he had left his clothes and his horse, there were no clothes to be seen, and no horse.

The proud king looked about, but saw no man. He called, but no one heard him. The air was mild, but the wood was dark, and no sunshine came through to warm him after his cool bath. He walked by the shore of the lake and cast about in his mind what he should do.

“I have it,” he cried at last. “Not far from here lives a knight. It was but a few days ago that I made him a knight and gave him a castle. I will go to him, and he will be glad enough to clothe his king.”

The proud king wove some reeds into a mat and bound the mat about him, and then he walked to the castle of the knight. He beat loudly at the gate of the castle and called for the porter. The porter

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came and stood behind the gate. He did not draw the bolt at once, but asked:—

“Who is there?”

“Open the gate,” said the proud king, “and you will see who I am.”

The porter opened the gate, and was amazed at what he saw.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“Wretch!” said the proud king; “I am the emperor. Go to your master. Bid him come to me with clothes. I have lost both clothes and horse.”

“A pretty emperor!” the porter laughed. “The great emperor was here not an hour ago. He came with his court from a hunt. My master was with him and sat at meat with him. But stay you here. I will call my master. Oh, yes! I will show him the emperor,” and the porter wagged his beard and laughed, and went within.

He came forth again with the knight and pointed at the proud king.

“There is the emperor!” he said. “Look at him! look at the great emperor!”

“Draw near,” said the proud king to the knight, “and kneel to me. I gave thee this castle. I made thee knight. I give thee now a greater gift. I give thee the chance to clothe thy emperor with clothes of thine own.”

“You dog!” cried the knight. “You fool! I have just ridden with the emperor, and have come

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back to my castle. Here!" he shouted to his servants, "beat this fellow and drive him away from the gate."

The porter looked on and laughed.

"Lay on well," he said to the other servants. "It is not every day that you can flog an emperor."

Then they beat the proud king, and drove him from the gate of the castle.

"Base knight!" said the proud king. "I gave him all he has, and this is how he repays me. I will punish him when I sit on my throne again. I will go to the duke who lives not far away. Him I have known all my days. He will know me. He will know his emperor."

So he came to the gate of the duke's great hall, and knocked three times. At the third knock the porter opened the gate, and saw before him a man clad only in a mat of reeds, and stained and bleeding.

"Go, I pray you, to the duke," said the proud king, "and bid him come to me. Say to him that the emperor stands at the gate. He has been robbed of his clothes and of his horse. Go quickly to your master."

The porter closed the gate between them, and went within to the duke.

"Your Grace," said he, "there is a madman at the gate. He is unclad and wild. He bade me come to you and tell you that he was the emperor."

"Here is a strange thing indeed," said the duke; "I will see it for myself."

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So he went to the gate, followed by his servants, and when the porter opened it there stood the proud king. The proud king knew the duke, but the duke saw only a bruised and beaten madman.

“Do you not know me?” cried the proud king. “I am your emperor. Only this morning you were on the hunt with me. I left you that I might bathe in the lake. While I was in the water, some wretch took both my clothes and my horse, and I—I have been beaten by a base knight.”

“Put him in chains,” said the duke to his servants. “It is not safe to have such a man free. Give him some straw to lie on, and some bread and water.”

The duke turned away and went back to his hall, where his friends sat at table.

“That was a strange thing,” he said. “There was a madman at the gate, he must have been in the wood this morning, for he told me that I was on the hunt with the emperor, and so I was; and he told me that the emperor went apart to bathe in the lake, and so he did. But he said that some one stole the clothes and the horse of the emperor, yet the emperor rode back to us cool and fresh, and clothed and on his horse. And he said”—And the duke looked around on his guests.

“What did he say?”

“He said that he was the emperor.”

Then the guests fell to talking and laughing, and soon forgot the strange thing. But the proud

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king lay in a dark prison, far even from the servants of the duke. He lay on straw, and chains bound his feet.

“What is this that has come upon me?” he said. “Am I brought so low? Am I so changed that even the duke does not know me? At least there is one who will know me, let me wear what I may.”

Then, by much labor, he loosed the chains that bound him, and fled in the night from the duke’s prison. When the morning came, he stood at the door of his own palace. He stood there awhile; perhaps some one would open the door and let him in. But no one came, and the proud king lifted his hand and knocked; he knocked at the door of his own palace. The porter came at last and looked at him.

“Who are you?” he asked, “and what do you want?”

“Do you not know me?” cried the proud king. “I am your master. I am the king. I am the emperor. Let me pass;” and he would have thrust him aside. But the porter was a strong man; he stood in the doorway, and would not let the proud king enter.

“You my master! you the emperor! poor fool, look here!” and he held the proud king by the arm while he pointed to a hall beyond. There sat the emperor on his throne, and by his side was the queen.

“Let me go to her! she will know me,” cried the proud king, and he tried to break away from the

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porter. The noise without was heard in the hall. The nobles came out, and last of all came the emperor and the queen. When the proud king saw these two, he could not speak. He was choked with rage and fear, and he knew not what.

“You know me!” at last he cried. “I am your lord and husband.”

The queen shrank back.

“Friends,” said the man who stood by her, “what shall be done to this wretch?”

“Kill him,” said one.

“Put out his eyes,” said another.

“Beat him,” said a third.

Then they all hustled the proud king out of the palace court. Each one gave him a blow, and so he was thrust out, and the door was shut behind him.

The proud king fled, he knew not whither. He wished he were dead. By and by he came to the lake where he had bathed. He sat down on the shore. It was like a dream, but he knew he was awake, for he was cold and hungry and faint. Then he knelt on the ground and beat his breast, and said:—

“I am no emperor. I am no king. I am a poor, sinful man. Once I thought there was no one greater than I, on earth or in heaven. Now I know that I am nothing, and there is no one so poor and so mean. God forgive me for my pride.”

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As he said this, tears stood in his eyes. He wiped them away and rose to his feet. Close by him he saw the clothes which he had once laid aside. Near at hand was his horse, eating the soft grass. The king put on his clothes; he mounted his horse and rode to his palace. As he drew near, the door opened and servants came forth. One held his horse; another helped him dismount. The porter bowed low.

“I marvel I did not see thee pass out, my lord,” he said.

The king entered, and again saw the nobles in the great hall. There stood the queen also, and by her side was the man who called himself emperor. But the queen and the nobles did not look at him; they looked at the king, and came forward to meet him.

This man also came forward, but he was clad in shining white, and not in the robes of the emperor. The king bowed his head before him.

“I am thy angel,” said the man. “Thou wert proud, and made thyself to be set on high. Therefore thou hast been brought low. I have watched over thy kingdom. Now I give it back to thee, for thou art once again humble, and the humble only are fit to rule.”

Then the angel disappeared. No one else heard his voice, and the nobles thought the king had bowed to them. So the king once more sat on the throne, and ruled wisely and humbly ever after.

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

IN the country of Libya in Asia Minor there was a town called Silene, and near the town was a pond, and this pond was the roving place of a monster dragon. Many times had great armies been sent to slay him, but never had they been able to overcome him. Instead, he had driven them back to the walls of the city.

Whenever this dragon drew near the city walls, his breath was so full of poison that it caused the death of all who were within reach of it; and so, to save the city, it was the custom to throw each day two sheep to feed the dragon and satisfy his hunger. So it went on, until not a sheep was left, and not one could be found in the neighborhood.

Then the people took counsel, and they drew lots, and each day a man or a woman and one of their cattle were given to the dragon, so that he might not destroy the whole city. And their lot spared no one. Rich or poor, high or low, some one must each day be sacrificed to the dreadful dragon.

Now it came to pass one day that the princess herself was drawn by lot. The king was filled with

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horror. He offered in exchange his gold, his silver, and half his realm if she might but be spared. All he could obtain was a respite of eight days, in which to mourn the fate of the girl. At the end of that time, the people came to the palace and said:—

“Why do you spare your daughter and kill your subjects? Every day we are slain by the breath of the monster.” So the king knew he must part with his daughter. He dressed her in her richest apparel, and kissed her, and said:

“Ah, my dearest daughter! what an end is this! I had thought to die and leave you happy. I hoped to have invited princes to your wedding, and to have had music and dancing. I hoped to see your children, and now I must send you to the dragon.”

The princess wept and clung to her father, and begged him to bless her. So he did, weeping bitterly, and she left him, and went, like those before her, to the lake where the dragon dwelt.

Now these people of Libya were heathen, but in Cappadocia, not far away, was a Christian named George, and this George was a young man of noble bearing. He heard in a vision that he was to go to Libya, and so he rode his horse toward the city, and he was hard by the lake, when he saw the princess standing alone, weeping bitterly. He asked her why she wept, and she only said:—

“Good youth, mount your horse again quickly and fly, lest you perish with me.” But George said to her:—

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“Do not fear. Tell me what you await, and why the vast crowd yonder are watching you.”

Again she begged him to fly.

“You have a kind and noble heart, sir, I perceive,” said she, “yet fly, and at once.”

“Not so,” said George; “I will first hear your tale.”

Then she told him all.

“Be of good courage,” said he. “It was for this I was sent. In the name of Jesus Christ I will defend you.”

“I do not know that name, brave knight,” said she. “Do not seek to die with me. It is enough that I should perish. You can neither save me nor yourself from this terrible dragon.” At that moment, the dragon rose with a great bellowing from the lake. “Fly! fly!” said the trembling princess. “Fly, sir knight!”

But George, nothing daunted, made the sign of the cross, and went forward boldly to meet the dragon, commending himself to God. He raised his spear, and flung it with all his force at the neck of the monster. So surely did the spear fly that it pierced the neck and pinned the dragon to the ground.

Then he bade the princess take her girdle and pass it round the spear, and fear nothing. She did so, and the dragon rose and followed her like a docile hound. George led his horse and walked beside her, and thus they entered the city. The people began to

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flee when they saw the dread beast, but George stayed them.

“Fear not,” said he. “This monster can no longer harm you. The Lord sent me to deliver you;” and so the multitude followed, and they came before the palace, where the king sat sorrowing. And when the king heard the mighty rejoicing, he came forth and saw his beloved daughter, safe, with the dragon at her heels.

Then George took his sword and smote off the dragon’s head, and all the people hailed him as their deliverer. But George bade them give glory to the Lord; and he remained and taught them the new faith, so that the king and the princess and all the people were baptized. And when George died he was called St. George, and it fell out finally that he became the patron saint of merry England.

THE BELL OF JUSTICE

A ROMAN emperor had the ill fortune to lose his sight. He wished that his people might not be the worse for this loss; so he hung a bell in his palace, and a law was made that any one who had a wrong to be righted must pull the rope with his own hands and thus ring the bell. When the bell rang, a judge went down to hear the complaint and right the wrong.

It chanced that a serpent had its home under the end of the bell-rope. Here it brought forth its young, and one day, when the little serpents could leave the place, it led them out for fresh air. While they were gone, a toad came and took a fancy to the place. Nor would he go away when the serpent came back.

The serpent could not drive the toad out, so it coiled its tail about the bell-rope, and rang the bell of justice. Down came the judge, but saw nobody, and went back. Again the serpent rang the bell in the same way.

This time the judge looked about with care and espied the serpent and the toad. He went back to the emperor and told him what he had seen.

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“It is very clear,” said the emperor, “that the toad is in the wrong. Go down, drive out the toad, kill it, and let the serpent have its place again.”

All this was done. Now, not many days after, as the emperor lay in his bed, the serpent came into the room, and toward the emperor’s bed. The servants were about to drive the serpent away, but the emperor forbade them.

“It will do me no harm,” said he; “I have been just to it. Let us see what it will do.”

At that the serpent glided up the bed and laid a precious stone, which it carried in its mouth, upon the emperor’s eyes. Then it slipped out of the room and no one saw it again. But no sooner had the stone lain on the eyes of the emperor than his sight was restored and he could see as well as other men.

HOW THE LAME MAN AND THE BLIND MAN HELPED EACH OTHER

A CERTAIN king made a great feast, and invited many guests to it. There was to be much eating and drinking, and every one besides was to have a present. The servants of the king gave the bidding to one and another, and in jest bade two men to the feast, one of whom was strong but stone blind, while the other had good sight but was dead lame.

“What a pity it is,” said the blind man, “that we cannot go to the feast, for we should have enough to eat and drink, and a present beside. But I am blind and cannot see the way, and you are lame and cannot walk.”

“Take my counsel,” said the lame man, “and we can both go to the feast.”

“Why, how may that be?”

“It is easily done,” said the lame man. “You are strong and I can see. Let me mount your back. You can carry me, and I will show you the way.”

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“Well said,” quoth the blind man. So he took the lame man on his back and trudged along, and both sat down at the king’s feast.

KING COPHETUA AND THE BEGGAR MAID

THERE was in Africa a rich and powerful king, and his name was Cophetua. He lived in a fine palace and had gold and silver dishes on his table, and his bedstead was made of ivory, and there were weavers in the palace who were always weaving new and beautiful clothes for this rich and powerful king.

But though Cophetua had all these goods, he lacked one thing. He had no wife, and he was lonely. He was not an old man,—not at all. He was young and fair to look at; and he was, beside, not spoiled by his riches and his power. He treated every one about him kindly, and he was known throughout his kingdom as a good and generous king.

The people wished him to marry, and his old counsellors wagged their heads together and named over all the young princesses in the neighboring kingdoms. They took journeys to see the different princesses, but could not agree amongst themselves. One princess was ill-tempered; another thought of nothing but her clothes; another was silly; and then, what they disliked most, all the princesses wanted so

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much to marry King Cophetua that they behaved ridiculously whenever his name was mentioned.

So it was that the king, for all his riches and power, led a lonely life. But he did not sit down and mope. He went cheerfully about his daily duties, and, to tell the truth, he had seen so many foolish princesses that he came to feel a great contempt for women. Mother and sisters had he none, and in his country it was not the way for young kings to see any women but princesses and slaves.

But one day, as King Cophetua was riding out to hunt with his nobles, there stood by the wayside a blind old man, and by his side was his daughter, a young maid, in poor clothing. They were beggars, for even when a king is rich he may have beggars in his kingdom. King Cophetua was about to toss a coin into the out-stretched hand of the old man, when he caught sight of the girl's face. He stopped his horse.

"What is your name?" he asked the girl.

"Penelophon," said she. Now it sounded oddly in the ears of his nobles that she did not say, "Penelophon, your Majesty," but in fact the beggar girl did not know this was the king, and so she answered simply, and looked up into his face with her clear, trusting eyes.

King Cophetua had never seen such a face as hers. It was not only beautiful; it showed at once a beautiful soul behind it. The king forgot in a moment his disdain for women. He sprang from his horse to the ground, and took the girl's hand.

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“Wilt thou love me and be my wife?” he asked, a little fear in his voice, lest she should say him nay. She looked at him and saw that he was a true man. No one ever had asked her that question before, and she answered very simply, “Yes.”

“Then back to the palace,” shouted King Cophetua, joyously. “There shall be no hunt to-day.” Amazed were the nobles, and amazed were the people, when they heard the news, but King Cophetua wedded the beggar maid, and together they reigned over a happy people.