

## THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

ONCE upon a time there lived a King and Queen, who loved each other tenderly. The only drawback to their happiness was that they had no children; so when, after many years, a little daughter came to them you may be sure there were great rejoicings.

It was a beautiful little baby, with blue eyes and a fair skin; and it scarcely ever cried. The King and Queen were so pleased that they ordered a large sum of money to be given to the poor; and great preparations were at once made for the christening. Every fairy in the land was invited to act as a god-mother to the little Princess, for her fond parents thought the fairies would be sure to shower gifts and graces upon her, as was the custom of fairies in those days.

But in sending out the cards of invitation a great mistake was made. One old fairy, of nasty temper, who was really a witch, was by



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christening.

accident left out. She had been travelling abroad, and the King's chamberlain did not know she had returned, or he would certainly have been on the safe side and sent her an invitation.

When the christening was over, all the guests passed into the great hall, where a splendid banquet was served. The King and Queen made every effort to do honour to their company; and each of the seven fairies who had come as godmothers was provided with a plate of pure gold to eat from, and a case containing a knife, fork, and spoon, enriched with rubies and emeralds, as a token of respect and gratitude. The feast had only just begun when the cross old fairy came hobbling in, and in a sulky tone desired that room should be made for her among the other fairies. This was done at once, and she sat down to the table. But, as she had not been invited or expected, no gold plate or jewelled knife and fork had been provided for her. When she was served and saw that her things were not so good and costly as those set before the other fairies, she fell into a great rage and began muttering between her teeth that she would be revenged.

Luckily, one of the fairies noticed these

black looks, and, knowing the old hag's character, felt sure she would cast some wicked spell over the innocent little baby. So when the banquet was over, this good fairy hid herself behind the tapestry hangings of the hall, so that when the other fairies offered their gifts to the Princess she might come last, and avert any mischief the old hag might try to do.

As she stood there, the good fairy heard the other fairies talking about the little child: one said what pretty eyes it had; another admired its fat little hands, and another its soft brown hair. And all the while the wicked old hag stood apart, muttering to herself.

When the time came, the fairies went forward and bestowed their gifts and good wishes on the little baby Princess. The first promised her beauty, the second cleverness, the third sweetness of temper, and so on until each had given her some good quality. Then it came to the turn of the wicked old hag to speak.

She walked into the middle of the hall, and stretching out her hand and shaking her head spitefully, exclaimed, "My gift to the Princess is that she shall prick her finger with a spindle and die of the wound."

All who heard were surprised and horrified

at this, wicked wish, and stood looking at the fairy, doubtful whether she could have spoken in earnest. But once more she stretched out her hand and, pointing to the baby Princess, repeated her words. Then, with a yell of laughter and a look of the deadliest spite, she vanished.

Every one, from the King on the throne to the little scullion who peeped behind the door, felt inclined to weep as they realized the terrible fate in store for the babe. But at this moment the good fairy stepped from behind the tapestry and said in a gentle voice:

“Do not grieve, good friends, for things are not so bad as you imagine. The old fairy has spoken in hate and malice; but I can partly avert the effect of her anger, though not completely. Your daughter shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle,” she continued, turning to the King and Queen; “but she shall not die of the wound: she shall only be cast into a deep sleep. For a hundred years she will be insensible to everything around her, but at the appointed time the appointed person will come to wake her.” When the good fairy had thus spoken she and her sisters vanished, and the christening party broke up in sadness.

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The King and Queen took great pains with the education of their little daughter, and as she grew up the effects of the fairy gifts were seen by all. Every day she became more beautiful and more clever; and, what was of even greater consequence, she was so kind and gentle that every one loved and admired her. Nurses and governesses had no trouble with her, and even the great gruff house dog, who lived in the kennel in the castle yard, and who barked at every one else, would snigger, and wag his tail, and tumble with delight, directly the little Princess came in view; he would let her put garlands of flowers round his neck, and the more she pulled his ears the better he was pleased.

Remembering what the witch had said, the King was careful to have every spindle in the palace destroyed, and forbade all his servants and subjects, under pain of instant death, to use one. Nobody was even to utter the word "spindle"; and some people say the King even went so far as to discharge three of his footmen because they had spindle-shanks!

But, as you will shortly see, all this care was useless.

One day, when the Princess was just fifteen years old, the King and Queen left the palace almost for the first time since the birth of their daughter; for generally they preferred to stay at home, entertaining their lords and ladies, and the foreign guests who came to see them, in their own palace, as a king and queen ought to do. But on this occasion it happened that they were both compelled to go from home and would be absent for a day or two on important affairs of state. The Princess, left to herself, was rather at a loss to know how to spend the time. Having tired of books and music, and being in a restless mood, she thought she would explore the castle, and especially have a look at a number of holes and corners she had never before seen. Thus she came at last to the most ancient tower of the castle and, climbing by the dusty stairs to the top-most storey, came to a little room. Pushing open the door, which hung on a rusty and creaking hinge, she stopped in amazement. For seated on a low, old-fashioned stool in a corner of the room, and humming a tune in a funny, cracked voice, was an old woman, spinning with a distaff and spindle. The poor old creature



had been allowed for years to live in this turret-room; and as she seldom left it, except to go to the royal kitchen to fetch the broken victuals that were allowed her, and as she was moreover very deaf, she had never heard of the King's edict, and did not dream, worthy soul! that she was doing wrong.

"What are you doing, goody?" asked the Princess.

"I am spinning, pretty lady," was the reply, when at last the old dame understood the question.

"How pretty it looks!" said the Princess; "I wish I could spin too;—will you let me try?"

The old dame of course had no idea that her visitor was the Princess, and she at once consented. The Princess took the distaff, but, never having handled such a thing before, was so awkward that in a moment she had pricked her finger. At once the fairy spell began to work. The Princess looked at her wound, uttered a little scream, and fell into a deep sleep.

The old woman, much alarmed, called lustily for help, and in a few moments the ladies-in-waiting and many of the servants

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came running up the stairs. When they learned what had happened there was a great commotion. One loosened the Princess's girdle; another sprinkled cold water on her face; another tried to revive her by rubbing her hands; and a fourth wetted her temples with scent. But all their efforts were vain.

There lay the Princess, beautiful as an angel, the colour still in her lips and cheeks, and her bosom heaving, but her eyes fast closed in a death-like sleep.

When the King and Queen came home they saw at once that there was no remedy but patience. The wicked fairy's curse had been fulfilled. But they did not entirely despair, for they remembered also what the good fairy had said, and knew that although they themselves would probably never again see their beloved child awake, she was not really dead.

The King gave orders that his daughter should be laid on a magnificent couch, covered with velvet and embroidery, in the best room of the palace, and that guards should be stationed at the chamber door night and day.

Feeling too sorrowful to remain in the palace, the King and Queen then went away to a distant part of the kingdom.

The very next day the good fairy, who was thousands of leagues away, heard of her god-child's misfortune, and rushed to the palace in her chariot, drawn by fiery dragons.

Invisible to all, she passed through the palace, touching with her wand as she went every living thing. Immediately a deep sleep fell on all she touched. Ladies-in-waiting, maids of honour, officers, gentlemen-in-waiting, cooks, scullions, guards, pages, porters, even the very horses in the stables and the cats in front of the fires—fell asleep; and the strangest circumstance was that they all went to sleep in a moment, without having time to finish what they were about. The very spits before the kitchen fire ceased turning when they were only half way round, and the Princess's little lap-dog stood on only three legs.

In a few days a thick and thorny hedge grew up all round the place, and the forest trees intertwined their branches to form a wall that neither man nor beast could get through.

A hundred years is a very long time, and many things happen as the days roll on. The King died, and the Queen died, and, as they had no other children, the throne passed to

another branch of the royal family. As year succeeded year the very existence of the castle was forgotten, except that now and then one peasant would tell another the tale of the christening of the beautiful Princess, to which all the great lords and ladies had been invited, and the fairies too; and how the Princess had vanished, no one knew whither, but was supposed to be lying asleep, on a bed of gold and silver, in a wonderful enchanted castle somewhere in the wood.

At last a century passed away.

One day the son of the reigning King was hunting in the woods, and went deeper into the forest than usual. Fancying he saw the turrets of a castle at a distance above the trees, he questioned his attendants, but they could tell him nothing. On passing through a neighbouring village he ordered his servants to make inquiries; but either the people knew nothing about the castle, or they were unwilling to tell. At last a very old peasant came forward and told the Prince the story of the enchanted palace. "My father," he added, "told it to me when a boy, full fifty years ago: he said the people used often to talk of it when I was little. He said all the people in the castle had

disappeared on a certain day, and the castle itself was lost to view; for the wood was too thick for anyone to get through; and it was said no one could enter till the appointed time. My father himself was young when it occurred, so that, to my thinking, the hundred years have nearly passed."

These words of the old man set the Prince thinking deeply. He was fond of adventure, as most young princes are; and the more he thought about it, the more convinced he felt that it behoved him to solve the mystery. He went to sleep that night determined to try his fortune on the morrow.

Early next morning the Prince set out alone on his adventure. When he reached the wood he sprang from his horse and drew his sword to cut a path through the thick undergrowth. To his surprise, the branches gave way, and the brambles and thorns opened a passage as he proceeded. He noticed, however, that they closed behind him as dense as ever. Greatly wondering, he went on bravely till he reached the castle porch.

Here a company of musicians had been playing, and the King's fool, in his suit of motley, had been listening. All were fast

asleep, and a man who had been singing had not even had time to shut his mouth.

Inside the gateway a hunting party had just arrived. All seemed to have turned to stone as they had ridden into the yard. Some had alighted, others were still in the saddle, but all alike were fast asleep, men and horses and dogs.

A little farther on sat a Court lady and a knight. The knight had been amusing himself and the lady with a tame raven. A page stood by them with refreshments on a tray, but these were still untouched.

What struck the Prince as much as anything was the deathless silence. Not a voice spoke, not a leaf stirred, the very air seemed to be motionless.

He went on through the lower or basement storey. A groom stood fast asleep, his ear at a keyhole, a sly look of wisdom on his face.

The next room through which the Prince passed was the butler's. He had been arrested by the fairy's touch while in the very act of taking a glass of his master's choicest wine.

In another room was a scullery-maid, fast asleep, with a dish she had been wiping a hundred years before in her hand; by her fat



and lazy appearance, the Prince thought it was perhaps not an uncommon occurrence for her to fall asleep over her work.

In the servants' hall the footmen and grooms were all fast asleep. One sat behind the door: he had been drawing on his boots when the fairy threw him into the enchanted sleep, and there he sat with one boot off and the other one on. In the great kitchen the chief cook sat in a chair before the fire, with the dripping-ladle in one hand and a sop in the other. One bite he had taken out of his sop, then sleep had come upon him, and he sat there, the very picture of contentment and repose. Never was there such a sleepy household since Kings first kept castles and had servants to attend them.

A dozen or more turnspit dogs, little fellows with long bodies and short legs, had been employed in turning the wheel which kept the joints of meat and poultry moving round and round, as they roasted before the fire; but not a single spit was turning, and the little dogs, one and all, were fast asleep.

In the passage, standing with his nose close to the ground, and watching intently, was the Queen's favourite cat, a Persian with a feathery

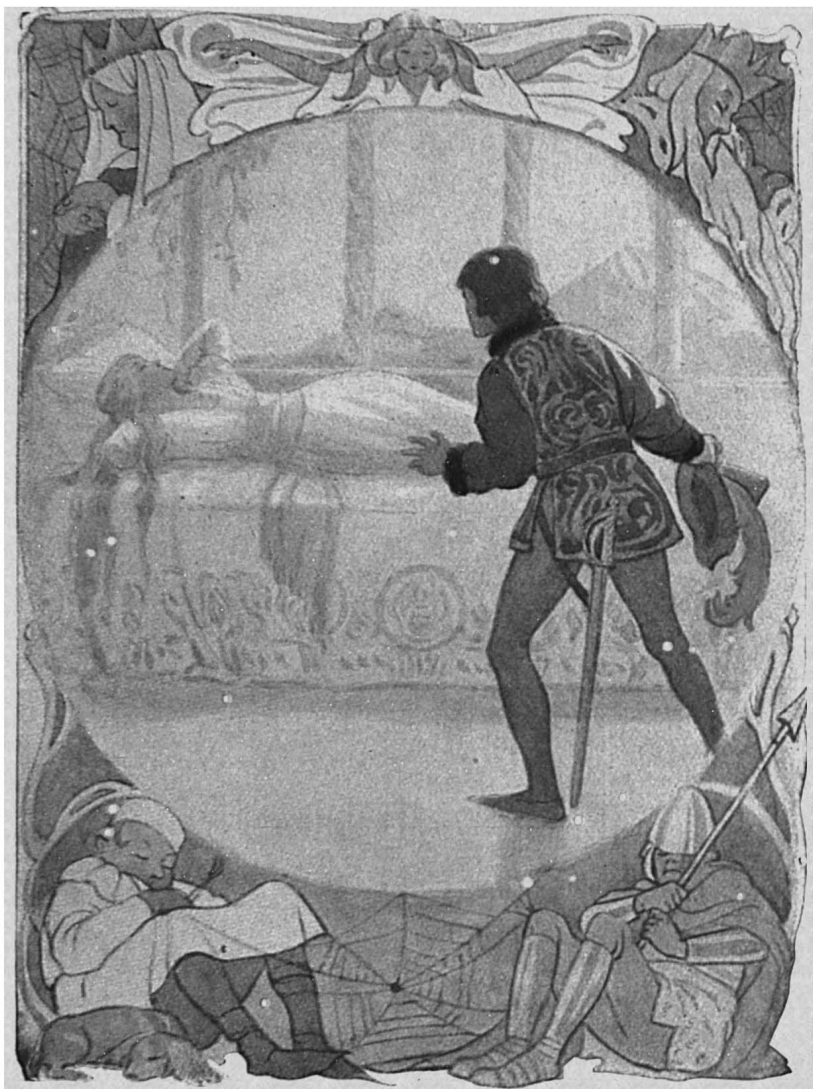
tail. He had imagined, just a hundred years before, that he smelt a mouse somewhere near; and he had been waiting a hundred years for that mouse.

At the end of a long passage the Prince came to a grand staircase, and at the head of this was a tall arched doorway, with a rich velvet curtain before it. He guessed that this doorway led to some room of importance; for above the door was a great crown and two flags drooped over the entrance. Here stood, too, a number of soldiers in full armour, with helmets, breast-plates, and tall spears. Very handsome and martial they looked; but each man's head had sunk upon his breast; and if the old Roman law had been put into force which pronounces death against every soldier found asleep at his post, the Princess's guards would have been executed to a man. Walking past them, the Prince brushed aside the curtains, and there, on a couch in the centre of the room, lay the Princess, as fresh and sweet and blooming as any Princess could possibly be. She looked, indeed, like a rosebud in a bed of leaves, and as if she had gone to sleep but an hour before.

The Prince could not restrain his admiration. Bending over her, he looked long and earnestly; and the longer he looked, the more he admired. Then he did what most men would have done; that is to say he gave her a kiss! At least that is the general belief, but as nobody saw, and the Princess never told, we cannot be quite sure.

Instantly there was a stir and a hum all through the castle. The enchantment was broken, and, with a great sigh of relief, men, women, children, and animals all woke up. Outside the Princess's room a loud clash was heard, as of armed men dressing their ranks and clattering their weapons. The fat cook in the kitchen finished the sop from which he had taken only a bite; the butler drank the glass of wine he was about to pour out a hundred years before; the scullery-maid finished wiping the dish; the groom finished pulling on his boot; the Persian cat started again to go after the mouse he had sniffed at a hundred years before; and the little dogs resumed their work of turning the spits in front of the kitchen fire.

Exactly what the Prince said to the Princess has never been told, but of course



The Prince brushed aside the curtains, and there, on a couch in the centre of a splendid room, lay the Princess, looking as if she had gone to sleep but an hour before.

when she saw him she knew the spell had been broken, and as he was as handsome a Prince as maid could wish for they were soon on the best of terms.

When the Prince presently appeared, leading the beautiful Princess by the hand, you may be sure the guards were wide awake. Every man among them stood at his post, his pike firmly grasped in his right hand, his head well up. The maidens of the castle strewed flowers in the path of the happy pair, and there was general rejoicing.

The wedding was the grandest that had been known for a hundred years. The Princess rather hoped the good fairies would come to the ceremony, as they had come to the christening, only, as it was possible the bad fairy would come with them, no formal invitations were sent. But as the Prince and Princess lived happily together for many years, with scarcely a wry word the whole time, we may be fairly sure the fairies knew all about them and still looked after their beautiful godchild.