ШАРЛЬ ПЕРРО

THE FAIRY TALES OF CHARLES PERRAULT

Шарль Перро

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

"Avec ardeur il aima les beaux arts."
Griselidis

Charles Perrault must have been as charming a fellow as a man could meet. He was one of the best-liked personages of his own great age, and he has remained ever since a prime favourite of mankind. We are fortunate in knowing a great deal about his varied life, deriving our knowledge mainly from D'Alembert's history of the French Academy and from his own memoirs, which were written for his grandchildren, but not published till sixty-six years after his death. We should, I think, be more fortunate still if the memoirs had not ceased in mid-career, or if their author had permitted himself to write of his family affairs without reserve or restraint, in the approved manner of modern autobiography. We should like, for example, to know much more than we do about the wife and the two sons to whom he was so devoted.

Perrault was born in Paris in 1628, the fifth son of Pierre Perrault, a prosperous parliamentary lawyer; and, at the age of nine, was sent to a day-school – the Collège de Beauvais. His father helped him with his lessons at home, as he himself, later on, was accustomed to help his own children. He can never have been a model schoolboy, though he was always first in his class, and he ended his school career prematurely by quarrelling with his master and bidding him a formal farewell.

The cause of this quarrel throws a bright light on Perraults subsequent career. He refused to accept his teacher's philosophical tenets on the mere ground of their traditional authority. He claimed that novelty was in itself a merit, and on this they parted. He did not go alone. One of his friends, a boy called Beaurain, espoused his cause, and for the next three or four years the two read together, haphazard, in the Luxembourg Gardens. This plan of study had almost certainly a bad effect on Beaurain, for we hear no more of him. It certainly prevented Perrault from being a thorough scholar, though it made him a man of taste, a sincere independent, and an undaunted amateur.

In 1651 he took his degree at the University of Orléans, where degrees were given with scandalous readiness, payment of fees being the only essential preliminary. In the mean-time he had walked the hospitals with some vague notion of following his brother Claude into the profession of medicine, and had played a small part as a theological controversialist in the quarrel then raging, about the nature of grace, between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. Having abandoned medicine and theology he got called to the Bar, practised for a while with distinct success, and coquetted with a notion of codifying the laws of the realm. The Bar proved too arid a profession to engage for long his attention; so he next sought and found a place in the office of another brother, Pierre, who was Chief Commissioner of Taxes in Paris. Here Perrault had little to do save to read at large in the excellent library which his brother had formed.

For want of further occupation he returned to the writing of verse, one of the chief pleasures of his boyhood. His first sustained literary effort had been a parody of the sixth book of the "Æneid"; which, perhaps fortunately for his reputation, was never published and has not survived. Beaurain and his brother Nicholas, a doctor of the Sorbonne, assisted him in this perpetration, and Claude made the pen-and-ink sketches with which it was illustrated. In the few years that had elapsed since the writing of this burlesque Perrault had acquired more sense and taste, and his new poems – in particular the "Portrait d'Iris" and the "Dialogue entre l'Amour et l'Amitié" – were found charming by his contemporaries. They were issued anonymously, and Quinault, himself a poet of established reputation, used some of them to forward his suit with a young lady, allowing her to think that they were his own. Perrault, when

told of Quinault's pretensions, deemed it necessary to disclose his authorship; but, on hearing of the use to which his work had been put, he gallantly remained in the background, forgave the fraud, and made a friend of the culprit.

Architecture next engaged his attention, and in 1657 he designed a house at Viry for his brother and supervised its construction. Colbert approved so much of this performance that he employed him in the superintendence of the royal buildings and put him in special charge of Versailles, which was then in process of erection. Perrault flung himself with ardour into this work, though not to the exclusion of his other activities. He wrote odes in honour of the King; he planned designs for Gobelin tapestries and decorative paintings; he became a member of the select little Academy of Medals and Inscriptions which Colbert brought into being to devise suitable legends for the royal palaces and monuments; he encouraged musicians and fought the cause of Lulli; he joined with Claude in a successful effort to found the Academy of Science.

Claude Perrault had something of his brother's versatility and shared his love for architecture, and the two now became deeply interested in the various schemes which were mooted for the completion of the Louvre. Bernini was summoned by the King from Rome, and entrusted with the task; but the brothers Perrault intervened. Charles conceived the idea of the great east front and communicated it to Claude, who drew the plans and was commissioned to carry them out. The work was finished in 1671, and is still popularly known as Perrault's Colonnade.

In the same year Charles was elected to the Academy without any personal canvas on his part for the honour. His inaugural address was heard with such approval that he ventured to suggest that the inauguration of future members should be a public function. The suggestion was adopted, and these addresses became the most famous feature of the Academy's proceedings and are so to the present day. This was not his only service to the Academy, for he carried a motion to the effect that future elections should be by ballot; and invented and provided, at his own expense, a ballot-box which, though he does not describe it, was probably the model of those in use in all modern clubs and societies.

The novelty of his views did not always commend them to his brother 'Immortals.' Those expressed in his poem "Le Siècle de Louis XIV," which he read as an Academician of sixteen years' standing, initiated one of the most famous and lasting literary quarrels of the era. Perrault, in praising the writers of his own age, ventured to disparage some of the great authors of the ancient classics. Boileau lashed himself into a fury of opposition and hurled strident insults against the heretic. Racine, more adroit, pretended to think that the poem was a piece of ingenious irony. Most men of letters hastened to participate in the battle. No doubt Perrault's position was untenable, but he conducted his defence with perfect temper and much wit; and Boileau made himself not a little absurd by his violence and his obvious longing to display the extent of his learning. Perrault's case is finally stated in his four volumes, "Le Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes," which were published in 1688-1696. He evidently took vastly more pride in this dull and now almost forgotten work than in the matchless stories which have made him famous for ever.

After twenty years in the service of Colbert, the sun of Perrault's fortunes passed its zenith. His brother, the Commissioner of Taxes, had a dispute with the Minister and was disgraced. Then Perrault got married to a young lady of whom we know nothing except that her marriage was the subject of some opposition from his powerful employer. In a matter of the sort Perrault, though a courtier, could be relied on to consider no wishes save those of his future wife and himself. Colbert's own influence with the King became shaky, and this affected his temper. So Perrault, then just fifty-five, slid quietly from his service in the year 1683.

Before he went, he succeeded in frustrating a project for closing the Tuileries Gardens against the people of Paris and their children. Colbert proposed to reserve them to the royal use, but Perrault persuaded him to come there one day for a walk, showed him the citizens taking the air and playing with their children; got the gardeners to testify that these privileges were never abused, and carried his

point by declaring, finally, that "the King's pleasaunce was so spacious that there was room for all his children to walk there."

Sainte-Beuve, seventy years ago, pleaded that this service to the children of Paris should be commemorated by a statue of Perrault in the centre of the Tuileries. The statue has never been erected; and, to the present day, Paris, so plentifully provided with statues and pictures of the great men of France, has neither the one nor the other to show that she appreciates the genius of Perrault. Indeed, there is no statue of him in existence; and the only painting of him with which I am acquainted is a doubtful one hung far away in an obscure corner of the palace of Versailles.

The close of Perrault's official career marked the beginning of his period of greatest literary activity. In 1686 he published his long narrative poem "Saint Paulin Evesque de Nole" with "a Christian Epistle upon Penitence" and "an Ode to the Newly-converted," which he dedicated to Bossuet. Between the years 1688 and 1696 appeared the "Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes" to which I have already referred. In 1693 he brought out his "Cabinet des Beaux Arts," beautifully illustrated by engravings, and containing a poem on painting which even Boileau condescended to admire. In 1694 he published his "Apologie des Femmes." He wrote two comedies – "L'Oublieux" in 1691, and "Les Fontanges." These were not printed till 1868. They added nothing to his reputation. Between 1691 and 1697 were composed the immortal "Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé" and the "Contes en Vers." Toward the end of his life he busied himself with the "Éloges des Hommes Illustres du Siècle de Louis XIV." The first of these two stately volumes came out in 1696 and the second in 1700. They were illustrated by a hundred and two excellent engravings, including one, by Edelinck, of Perrault himself and another of his brother Claude. These biographies are written with kindly justice, and form a valuable contribution to the history of the reign of the Roi Soleil. I have not exhausted the list of Perrault's writings, but, to speak frankly, the rest are not worth mentioning.

He died, aged seventy-five, in 1703, deservedly admired and regretted by all who knew him. This was not strange. For he was clever, honest, courteous, and witty. He did his duty to his family, his employer, his friends, and to the public at large. In an age of great men, but also of great prejudices, he fought his own way to fame and fortune. He served all the arts, and practised most of them. Painters, writers, sculptors, musicians, and men of science all gladly made him free of their company. As a good Civil Servant he was no politician, and he showed no leaning whatever toward what was regarded in his time as the greatest of all professions – that of arms. These two deficiencies, if deficiencies they be, only endear him the more to us. Every one likes a man who deserves to enjoy life and does, in fact, enjoy it. Perrault was such a man. He was more. He was the cause of enjoyment to countless of his fellows, and his stories still promise enjoyment to countless others to come.

It is amazing to remember that Perrault was rather ashamed of his "Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé" – perhaps better known as "Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye," or "Mother Goose's Tales," from the rough print which was inserted as a frontispiece to the first collected edition in 1697. He would not even publish them in his own name. They were declared to be by P. Darmancour, Perrault's young son. In order that the secret might be well kept, Perrault abandoned his usual publisher, Coignard, and went to Barbin. The stories had previously appeared from time to time, anonymously, in Moetjens' little magazine the "Recueil," which was published from The Hague. "La Belle au Bois Dormant" ("Sleeping Beauty") was the first: and in rapid succession followed "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" ("Red Riding-Hood"), "Le Maistre Chat, ou le Chat Botté" ("Puss in Boots"), "Les Fées" ("The Fairy"), "Cendrillon, ou la Petite Pantoufle de Verre" ("Cinderella"), "Riquet à la Houppe" ("Riquet of the Tuft"), and "Le Petit Poucet" ("Tom Thumb").

Perrault was not so shy in admitting the authorship of his three verse stories – "Griselidis," "Les Souhaits Ridicules," and "Peau d'Asne." The first appeared, anonymously it is true, in 1961; but, when it came to be reprinted with "Les Souhaits Ridicules" and "Peau d'Asne" in 1695, they were entrusted to the firm of Coignard and described as being by "Mr Perrault, de l'Academie Françoise." La Fontaine had made a fashion of this sort of exercise.

It would not be fair to assume that P. Darmancour had no connection whatever with the composition of the stories which bore his name. The best of Perrault's critics, Paul de St Victor and Andrew Lang among others, see in the book a marvellous collaboration of crabbed age and youth. The boy, probably, gathered the stories from his nurse and brought them to his father, who touched them up, and toned them down, and wrote them out. Paul Lacroix, in his fine edition of 1886, goes as far as to attribute the entire authorship of the prose tales to Perrault's son. He deferred, however, to universal usage when he entitled his volume "Les Contes en prose de Charles Perrault."

"Les Contes du Temps Passé" had an immediate success. Imitators sprung up at once by the dozen, and still persist; but none of them has ever rivalled, much less surpassed, the inimitable originals. Every few years a new and sumptuous edition appears in France. The best are probably those by Paul Lacroix and André le Fèvre.

The stories soon crossed the Channel; and a translation "by Mr Samber, printed for J. Pote" was advertised in the "Monthly Chronicle" of 1729. "Mr Samber" was presumably one Robert Samber of New Inn, who translated other tales from the French, for Edmond Curl the bookseller, about this time. No copy of the first edition of his Perrault is known to exist. Yet it won a wide popularity, as is shown by the fact that there was a seventh edition published in 1795, for J. Rivington, a bookseller, of Pearl Street, New York.

No English translation of Perrault's fairy tales has attained unquestioned literary pre-eminence. So the publishers of the present book have thought it best to use Samber's translation, which has a special interest of its own in being almost contemporary with the original. The text has been thoroughly revised and corrected by Mr J. E. Mansion, who has purged it of many errors without detracting from its old-fashioned quality. To Mr Mansion also is due the credit for the translation of the "Les Souhaits Ridicules" and for the adaptation of "Peau d'Asne." "Griselidis" is excluded from this book for two good reasons; firstly, because it is an admitted borrowing by Perrault from Boccaccio; secondly, because it is not a 'fairy' tale in the true sense of the word.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary for me to add anything about Mr Clarke's illustrations. Many of the readers of this book will be already familiar with his work. Besides, I always feel that it is an impertinence to describe pictures in their presence. Mr Clarke's speak for themselves. They speak for Perrault too. It is seldom, indeed, that an illustrator enters so thoroughly into the spirit of his text. The grace, delicacy, urbanity, tenderness, and humour which went to the making of Perrault's stories must, it seems, have also gone in somewhat similar proportions to the making of these delightful drawings. I am sure that they would have given pleasure to Perrault himself.

THOMAS BODKIN

Little Red Riding-Hood

Once upon a time, there lived in a certain village, a little country girl, the prettiest creature was ever seen. Her mother was excessively fond of her; and her grand-mother doated on her much more. This good woman got made for her a little red riding-hood; which became the girl so extremely well, that every body called her Little Red Riding-Hood.

One day, her mother, having made some girdle-cakes, said to her:

"Go, my dear, and see how thy grand-mamma does, for I hear she has been very ill, carry her a girdle-cake, and this little pot of butter."

Little Red Riding-Hood set out immediately to go to her grand-mother, who lived in another village. As she was going thro' the wood, she met with Gaffer Wolf, who had a very great mind to eat her up, but he durst not, because of some faggot-makers hard by in the forest.

He asked her whither she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and hear a Wolf talk, said to him:

"I am going to see my grand-mamma, and carry her a girdle-cake, and a little pot of butter, from my mamma."

"Does she live far off?" said the Wolf.

"Oh! ay," answered Little Red Riding-Hood, "it is beyond that mill you see there, at the first house in the village."

"Well," said the Wolf, "and I'll go and see her too: I'll go this way, and you go that, and we shall see who will be there soonest."

The Wolf began to run as fast as he could, taking the nearest way; and the little girl went by that farthest about, diverting herself in gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and making nosegays of such little flowers as she met with. The Wolf was not long before he got to the old woman's house: he knocked at the door, *tap, tap*.

"Who's there?"

"Your grand-child, Little Red Riding-Hood," replied the Wolf, counterfeiting her voice, "who has brought you a girdle-cake, and a little pot of butter, sent you by mamma."

The good grand-mother, who was in bed, because she found herself somewhat ill, cry'd out:

"Pull the peg, and the bolt will fall."

The Wolf pull'd the peg, and the door opened, and then presently he fell upon the good woman, and ate her up in a moment; for it was above three days that he had not touched a bit. He then shut the door, and went into the grand-mother's bed, expecting Little Red Riding-Hood, who came some time afterwards, and knock'd at the door, *tap, tap*.

"Who's there?"

Little Red Riding-Hood, hearing the big voice of the Wolf, was at first afraid; but believing her grand-mother had got a cold, and was hoarse, answered:

"'Tis your grand-child, Little Red Riding-Hood, who has brought you a girdle-cake, and a little pot of butter, mamma sends you."

The Wolf cried out to her, softening his voice as much as he could, "Pull the peg, and the bolt will fall."

Little Red Riding-Hood pulled the peg, and the door opened. The Wolf seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bedclothes:

"Put the cake, and the little pot of butter upon the bread-bin, and come and lye down with me."

Little Red Riding-Hood undressed herself, and went into bed; where, being greatly amazed to see how her grand-mother looked in her night-cloaths, she said to her:

"Grand-mamma, what great arms you have got!"

"That is the better to hug thee, my dear."

"Grand-mamma, what great legs you have got!"
"That is to run the better, my child."
"Grand-mamma, what great ears you have got!"
"That is to hear the better, my child."
"Grand-mamma, what great eyes you have got!"
"It is to see the better, my child."
"Grand-mamma, what great teeth you have got!"
"That is to eat thee up."

And, saying these words, this wicked Wolf fell upon poor Little Red Riding-Hood, and ate her all up.

The Moral

From this short story easy we discern
What conduct all young people ought to learn.
But above all, young, growing misses fair,
Whose orient rosy blooms begin t'appear:
Who, beauties in the fragrant spring of age,
With pretty airs young hearts are apt t'engage.
Ill do they listen to all sorts of tongues,
Since some inchant and lure like Syrens' songs.
No wonder therefore 'tis, if over-power'd,
So many of them has the Wolf devour'd.
The Wolf, I say, for Wolves too sure there are
Of every sort, and every character.
Some of them mild and gentle-humour'd be,
Of noise and gall, and rancour wholly free;
Who tame, familiar, full of complaisance
Ogle and leer, languish, cajole and glance;
With luring tongues, and language wond'rous sweet,
Follow young ladies as they walk the street,
Ev'n to their very houses, nay, bedside,
And, artful, tho' their true designs they hide;
Yet ah! these simpering Wolves! Who does not see
Most dangerous of Wolves indeed they be?

The Fairy

There was, once upon a time, a widow, who had two daughters. The eldest was so much like her in the face and humour, that whoever looked upon the daughter saw the mother. They were both so disagreeable, and so proud, that there was no living with them. The youngest, who was the very picture of her father, for courtesy and sweetness of temper, was withal one of the most beautiful girls ever seen. As people naturally love their own likeness, this mother even doated on her eldest daughter, and at the same time had a horrible aversion for the youngest. She made her eat in the kitchen, and work continually.

Among other things, this poor child was forced twice a day to draw water above a mile and a half off the house, and bring home a pitcher full of it. One day, as she was at this fountain, there came to her a poor woman, who begged of her to let her drink.

"O ay, with all my heart, Goody," said this pretty maid; and rinsing immediately the pitcher, she took up some water from the clearest place of the fountain, and gave it to her, holding up the pitcher all the while, that she might drink the easier.

The good woman having drank, said to her:

"You are so very pretty, my dear, so good and so mannerly, that I cannot help giving you a gift" (for this was a Fairy, who had taken the form of a poor country-woman, to see how far the civility and good manners of this pretty girl would go). "I will give you for gift," continued the Fairy, "that at every word you speak, there shall come out of your mouth either a flower, or a jewel."

When this pretty girl came home, her mother scolded at her for staying so long at the fountain.

"I beg your pardon, mamma," said the poor girl, "for not making more haste," and, in speaking these words, there came out of her mouth two roses, two pearls, and two diamonds.

"What is this I see?" said her mother quite astonished, "I think I see pearls and diamonds come out of the girl's mouth! How happens this, child?" (This was the first time she ever called her child.)

The poor creature told her frankly all the matter, not without dropping out infinite numbers of diamonds.

"In good faith," cried the mother, "I must send my child thither. Come hither, Fanny, look what comes out of thy sister's mouth when she speaks! Would'st not thou be glad, my dear, to have the same gift given to thee? Thou hast nothing else to do but go and draw water out of the fountain, and when a certain poor woman asks thee to let her drink, to give it her very civilly."

"It would be a very fine sight indeed," said this ill-bred minx, "to see me go draw water!"

"You shall go, hussey," said the mother, "and this minute."

So away she went, but grumbling all the way, taking with her the best silver tankard in the house.

She was no sooner at the fountain, than she saw coming out of the wood a lady most gloriously dressed, who came up to her, and asked to drink. This was, you must know, the very Fairy who appeared to her sister, but had now taken the air and dress of a princess, to see how far this girl's rudeness would go.

"Am I come hither," said the proud, saucy slut, "to serve you with water, pray? I suppose the silver tankard was brought purely for your ladyship, was it? However, you may drink out of it, if you have a fancy."

"You are not over and above mannerly," answered the Fairy, without putting herself in a passion. "Well then, since you have so little breeding, and are so disobliging, I give you for gift, that at every word you speak there shall come out of your mouth a snake or a toad."

So soon as her mother saw her coming, she cried out: "Well, daughter?"

"Well, mother?" answered the pert hussey, throwing out of her mouth two vipers and two toads.

"O mercy!" cried the mother, "what is it I see! O, it is that wretch her sister who has occasioned all this; but she shall pay for it"; and immediately she ran to beat her. The poor child fled away from her and went to hide herself in the forest, not far from thence.

The King's son, then on his return from hunting, met her, and seeing her so very pretty, asked her what she did there alone, and why she cried.

"Alas! sir, my mamma has turned me out of doors."

The King's son, who saw five or six pearls, and as many diamonds, come out of her mouth, desired her to tell him how that happened. She thereupon told him the whole story; and so the King's son fell in love with her; and, considering with himself that such a gift was worth more than any marriage-portion whatsoever in another, conducted her to the palace of the King his father, and there married her.

As for her sister, she made herself so much hated that her own mother turned her off; and the miserable wretch, having wandered about a good while without finding anybody to take her in, went to a corner in the wood and there died.

The Moral

Money and jewels still, we find,
Stamp strong impressions on the mind.
But sweet discourse more potent riches yields;
Of higher value is the pow'r it wields.

Another

Civil behaviour costs indeed some pains,
Requires of complaisance some little share;
But soon or late its due reward it gains,
And meets it often when we're not aware.

Blue Beard

There was a man who had fine houses, both in town and country, a deal of silver and gold plate, embroidered furniture, and coaches gilded all over with gold. But this man had the misfortune to have a blue beard, which made him so frightfully ugly, that all the women and girls ran away from him.

One of his neighbours, a lady of quality, had two daughters who were perfect beauties. He desired of her one of them in marriage, leaving to her the choice which of the two she would bestow upon him. They would neither of them have him, and each made the other welcome of him, being not able to bear the thought of marrying a man who had a blue beard. And what besides gave them disgust and aversion, was his having already been married to several wives, and nobody ever knew what became of them.

Blue Beard, to engage their affection, took them, with the lady their mother, and three or four ladies of their acquaintance, with other young people of the neighbourhood, to one of his country seats, where they stayed a whole week. There was nothing then to be seen but parties of pleasure, hunting, fishing, dancing, mirth and feasting. Nobody went to bed, but all passed the night in playing tricks upon each other. In short, every thing succeeded so well, that the youngest daughter began to think the master of the house not to have a beard so very blue, and that he was a mighty civil gentleman. As soon as they returned home, the marriage was concluded.

About a month afterwards Blue Beard told his wife that he was obliged to take a country journey for six weeks at least, about affairs of very great consequence, desiring her to divert herself in his absence, to send for her friends and acquaintances, to carry them into the country, if she pleased, and to make good cheer wherever she was.

"Here," said he, "are the keys of the two great wardrobes, wherein I have my best furniture; these are of my silver and gold plate, which is not every day in use; these open my strong boxes, which hold my money, both gold and silver; these my caskets of jewels; and this is the master-key to all my apartments. But for this little one here, it is the key of the closet at the end of the great gallery on the ground floor. Open them all; go into all and every one of them; except that little closet which I forbid you, and forbid it in such a manner that, if you happen to open it, there will be no bounds to my just anger and resentment."

She promised to observe, very exactly, whatever he had ordered; when he, after having embraced her, got into his coach and proceeded on his journey.

Her neighbours and good friends did not stay to be sent for by the newmarried lady, so great was their impatience to see all the rich furniture of her house, not daring to come while her husband was there, because of his blue beard which frightened them. They ran thro' all the rooms, closets, and wardrobes, which were all so rich and fine, that they seemed to surpass one another.

After that, they went up into the two great rooms, where were the best and richest furniture; they could not sufficiently admire the number and beauty of the tapestry, beds, couches, cabinets, stands, tables, and looking-glasses in which you might see yourself from head to foot; some of them were framed with glass, others with silver, plain and gilded, the finest and most magnificent which were ever seen. They ceased not to extol and envy the happiness of their friend, who in the mean time no way diverted herself in looking upon all these rich things, because of the impatience she had to go and open the closet of the ground floor. She was so much pressed by her curiosity, that, without considering that it was very uncivil to leave her company, she went down a little back-stair-case, and with such excessive haste, that she had twice or thrice like to have broken her neck.

Being come to the closet door, she made a stop for some time, thinking upon her husband's orders, and considering what unhappiness might attend her if she was disobedient; but the temptation was so strong she could not overcome it. She took then the little key, and opened it trembling; but could not at first see any thing plainly, because the windows were shut. After some moments she

began to perceive that the floor was all covered over with clotted blood, in which were reflected the bodies of several dead women ranged against the walls: these were all the wives whom Blue Beard had married and murdered one after another. She was like to have died for fear, and the key, which she pulled out of the lock, fell out of her hand.

After having somewhat recovered her senses, she took up the key, locked the door, and went up stairs into her chamber to recover herself; but she could not, so much was she frightened. Having observed that the key of the closet was stained with blood, she tried two or three times to wipe it off, but the blood would not come off; in vain did she wash it, and even rub it with soap and sand, the blood still remained, for the key was a Fairy, and she could never make it quite clean; when the blood was gone off from one side, it came again on the other.

Blue Beard returned from his journey the same evening, and said, he had received letters upon the road, informing him that the affair he went about was ended to his advantage. His wife did all she could to convince him she was extremely glad of his speedy return. Next morning he asked her for the keys, which she gave him, but with such a trembling hand, that he easily guessed what had happened.

"What," said he, "is not the key of my closet among the rest?"

"I must certainly," answered she, "have left it above upon the table."

"Fail not," said Blue Beard, "to bring it me presently."

After putting him off several times, she was forced to bring him the key. Blue Beard, having very attentively considered it, said to his wife:

"How comes this blood upon the key?"

"I do not know," cried the poor woman, paler than death.

"You do not know," replied Blue Beard; "I very well know, you were resolved to go into the closet, were you not? Mighty well, Madam; you shall go in, and take your place among the ladies you saw there."

Upon this she threw herself at her husband's feet, and begged his pardon with all the signs of a true repentance for her disobedience. She would have melted a rock, so beautiful and sorrowful was she; but Blue Beard had a heart harder than any rock.

"You must die, Madam," said he, "and that presently."

"Since I must die," answered she, looking upon him with her eyes all bathed in tears, "give me some little time to say my prayers."

"I give you," replied Blue Beard, "half a quarter of an hour, but not one moment more."

When she was alone, she called out to her sister, and said to her:

"Sister Anne" (for that was her name), "go up I beg you, upon the top of the tower, and look if my brothers are not coming; they promised me that they would come to-day, and if you see them, give them a sign to make haste."

Her sister Anne went up upon the top of the tower, and the poor afflicted wife cried out from time to time, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see any one coming?"

And sister Anne said:

"I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass growing green."

In the mean while Blue Beard, holding a great scimitar in his hand, cried out as loud as he could bawl to his wife:

"Come down instantly, or I shall come up to you."

"One moment longer, if you please," said his wife, and then she cried out very softly:

"Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see any body coming?"

And sister Anne answered:

"I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass growing green."

"Come down quickly," cried Blue Beard, "or I will come up to you."

"I am coming," answered his wife; and then she cried:

"Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see any one coming?"

"I see," replied sister Anne, "a great dust that comes this way."

"Are they my brothers?"

"Alas! no, my dear sister, I see a flock of sheep."

"Will you not come down?" cried Blue Beard.

"One moment longer," said his wife, and then she cried out:

"Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see nobody coming?"

"I see," said she, "two horsemen coming, but they are yet a great way off."

"God be praised," she cried presently, "they are my brothers; I am beckoning to them, as well as I can, for them to make haste."

Then Blue Beard bawled out so loud, that he made the whole house tremble. The distressed wife came down, and threw herself at his feet, all in tears, with her hair about her shoulders.

"Nought will avail," said Blue Beard, "you must die"; then, taking hold of her hair with one hand, and lifting up his scimitar with the other, he was going to take off her head.

The poor lady turning about to him, and looking at him with dying eyes, desired him to afford her one little moment to recollect herself.

"No, no," said he, "recommend thyself to God," and was just ready to strike.

At this very instant there was such a loud knocking at the gate, that Blue Beard made a sudden stop. The gate was opened, and presently entered two horsemen, who drawing their swords, ran directly to Blue Beard. He knew them to be his wife's brothers, one a dragoon, the other a musqueteer; so that he ran away immediately to save himself; but the two brothers pursued so close, that they overtook him before he could get to the steps of the porch, when they ran their swords thro' his body and left him dead. The poor wife was almost as dead as her husband, and had not strength enough to rise and welcome her brothers.

Blue Beard had no heirs, and so his wife became mistress of all his estate. She made use of one part of it to marry her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had loved her a long while; another part to buy captains' commissions for her brothers; and the rest to marry herself to a very worthy gentleman, who made her forget the ill time she had passed with Blue Beard.

The Moral

O curiosity, thou mortal bane!
Spite of thy charms, thou causest often pain
And sore regret, of which we daily find
A thousand instances attend mankind:
For thou – O may it not displease the fair —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.