Every one said they should like to hear it, and Sidney began :—

"THROUGH THE WOOD."

A FIRELIGHT STORY.

THE castle stood at the top of the hill; the cottage stood at the bottom of the hill; between them there was a thick wood.

Every day the two little boys who lived in the cottage looked over the tree-tops towards the crimson flag that waved on the castle turrets; every day they sighed, for, "You must not go yet," said the old woman who lived with them in the cottage. "It is an enchanted wood, where no one can walk safely, except on the night before the king's birthday."

"When will the king's birthday be?" said the two boys; but the old woman shook her head, and was always very busy when they asked her this question.

At other times she would talk to the boys about the castle, and tell them how a wicked fairy had enchanted the king's children, who lived there, and turned them into animals; and how every year, on the morning of his birthday, the king stood on the castle roof, and looked

towards the wood, in the hope of seeing the champion come through it, who was to restore his children; and how for many years he had turned sorrowfully away, for the champion never came.

"What will the champion be like? and what will he do?" asked the boys.

"He will look like a king," said the old woman; "he will have shoes on his feet that can never wear out, and a priceless robe over his shoulders; he will have a crystal cup in his hand, and he will take water in it from the fountain that rises up in the king's pleasure-gardens. Since the wicked fairies have had power the water in the fountain has been blood-red, but when the champion comes it will turn white again. With this he will sprinkle the king's children, and they will be restored to their former shape. Then the king will put a gold chain round the champion's neck, and make him his prime minister, and all the courtiers will do him homage."

"I should like to be a prime minister," said Max.

"And I to restore the king's children," said Pax, his younger brother.

One day a raven flew past the cottage and struck

against the window of the room in which Max slept. The old woman threw open the window and looked out; the two boys heard her muttering to herself; then she drew in her head again, and shut the window. Afterward they heard her sigh very deeply as she went about her work.

The next day a sparrow-hawk flew past and tapped the window with his beak. The old woman looked out three times; then she drew her stool near the fire, and sat still all the rest of the day without speaking. The third day an eagle came and perched on the window-ledge. Then the old woman jumped up, and went to her meal-tub, and began in great haste to make a cake of white bread. When she had baked it she went out towards the wood, and did not return till evening.

Max and Pax were standing at the garden-gate when she came up to it. The setting sun stood directly over the castle, and all the trees of the forest were covered with gold; they bowed their heads and waved their branches, and it seemed to Max as if a whole army of men in golden armour nodded and beckoned to him.

"Now," he said, "you shall tell me on what day is the

king's birthday, for I see the path that leads through the forest to the castle quite plainly."

The old woman looked a long time at the forest, and then she said, "To-morrow is the king's birthday; and to-night you, Max, must pass through the enchanted wood."

"Good news! Good news!" cried Max; but Pax looked grave, and took hold of his brother's hand.

"Let us go together," he said.

"That you cannot do," answered the old woman. "Max must go alone; and it will be best for him to set off directly: the sun is setting, and he will have a long journey to go before it rises to-morrow."

"But where are my shoes," said Max, "and the fine clothes I am to wear when I go to the castle?"

"I cannot give you these," said the old woman; "you must seek them in the wood. I have, however, made you a cake, which will refresh you on your journey."

Max took the cake in great haste, and put it in his pocket; then, without waiting to wish any one good bye, he set off running down the pathway which led from the cottage to the borders of the wood.

Pax leant over the cottage gate and sent farewells and kisses after his brother. The kisses spread their little gauzy wings and flew swiftly after him: they would have rested on his brow and lips, and kept off the cold night air; but Max was running so quickly that he puffed them all away, and they were obliged to fly back again, and nestle in Pax's bosom.

THE SUPPER IN THE WOOD.

The sun had not set when Max reached the outskirts of the forest. Its level rays shone directly into his eyes, and dazzled them so that he could not see anything distinctly. Now it seemed as if all the trees came dancing out of their places to meet him; now as if from the highest boughs strange faces bent down, and looked curiously into his eyes. As he entered the wood he thought that a white hand was stretched out from a thick oak-tree and rested on his shoulder. He turned round; it was only a straggling branch of a wild rose-tree that had caught him by the collar. Three roses hung from the branch and three monstrous thorns.

"It is as well to have one's eyes about one in an

enchanted wood," said Max to himself; so he broke off the three thorns and put them into his pocket.

He went on a little farther, and came to a place where many trees had been cut away, and where a fountain bubbled up from a bed of soft grass. "I will stay here and eat my supper," he said; "farther on the path becomes so narrow that there will be no place where I can sit down."

He took the cake out of his pocket, and was just beginning to eat it when a thin old dog came from the darkest part of the wood, and sat upright on the grass beside him. Max spread his handkerchief on his lap to catch the crumbs; the dog drew one corner carefully over his own knees. Max broke off a piece of the cake; the dog held out his paw. "How forward! I am sure I don't mean to give him any supper," said Max, helping himself to the first mouthful.

The dog crossed his fore-paws on his breast, and looked steadily in Max's face. "This begins to be very tiresome," said Max to himself. "I want as much cake as ever I can get for myself; and yet I should be ashamed of offering him a very small piece, he looks so

respectable, not like a common beggar. I think I had better eat as fast as ever I can, and pretend all the time that I don't see him;" so Max put up one shoulder, and sat a little sideways on his seat.

"Ehem!" said the dog.

It was such a strange cough for a dog to give that Max could not help turning round to look. The dog had got up and was walking away. He left foot-marks behind him on the grass; they were long, and shaped like the print of a human foot.

"Strange, when I see his dog's paws so plainly," said Max; "but, however, it does not signify. I shall now eat my supper in peace."

As he spoke, he felt something cold touch his cheek. He turned sharply round, and saw that a young fawn was leaning its head on his shoulder. Its hairy face touched Max's chin; but it did not feel hairy: it felt soft and smooth and warm, like a human face, and the eyes turned wistfully on the cake in Max's hand.

"So you are a beggar, too, are you?" said Max, angrily. The fawn drew its head back, as if startled by the noise, and Max lost sight of it in an instant, only, as it vanished

he fancied he saw something white, like the skirt of a lady's dress, fluttering among the trees.

By-and-bye a bird flew down and stood on Max's wrist. He had eaten all his cake, except a few crumbs, which he had gathered up in his hand. "These are not worth giving away," he said to himself, and he threw them all into his own mouth.

As the bird flew away Max felt something fall on his hand; it was a tear, clear and round. He tried to rub it off; but it left an ugly red mark behind it.

THE GOLDEN SHOES.

The sun sank lower and lower behind the castle; the shadows grew longer and longer. Max walked with trembling steps, for I can tell you it is no joke walking during the twilight in an enchanted wood. The very fallen leaves in the path seemed to be alive, and when Max came near them they stood bolt upright, and hopped away on their tiny stalks; and if he happened to tread on a worm or a beetle, it was sure to turn up a dwarfish head, and make a face at him. I don't mean that this did him harm, but it certainly was not pleasant. Max

did not mind *hurting* worms and beetles; but he did not like to have faces made at him for doing so.

By-and-bye there was a rustling among the branches to the left of the pathway, and a little figure stepped out about a yard before him. Was it an old woman leaning on a stick, or a child with golden hair, or a tall yellow lily, with spreading leaves, blown along by the wind? It looked like all of these in turn; but when Max came up to it, there was nothing but a peahen with a bonnet and shawl on, and a basket under her wing.

"Good evening," said Max to the peahen. "What have you got in your basket?"

"Only a pair of golden shoes to sell."

"What will you take for them?" asked Max.

"Nothing under a rose," said the peahen.

"Would not a thorn do as well? It is a very big one," said Max, taking one out of his pocket.

"I could not think of taking such a thing," said the peahen.

"Two or three, then?" persisted Max; but the peahen shook her head till Max fancied he saw a quantity of golden curls peeping out of her bonnet.

"Tiresome, stupid thing," said Max. "I am certain thorns are worth more than roses; or, at all events, I know how to make them so, for those golden shoes I must have."

Just then they passed under a thick oak that cast a very deep shadow over the path. Max took his largest thorn in his hand, and run it into the peahen's wing, just in the place where she was holding the basket. The bird flapped her wings, and the basket fell to the ground. Max snatched it up, and ran away as fast as he could. He did not look behind him once to see what became o the peahen; but he fancied he heard a rustling of wings and then a mocking sound, as if all the trees were tossing up their heads and laughing at him.

"I have got the golden shoes, at all events," he said, when he stopped running.

Then he took them out of the basket and put them on his feet. They pinched very much, and hurt him as he walked. "But that does not signify, for they are gold," he said.

THE FRINGED CLOAK.

Now it was moonlight; the flowers had shut their eyes, and the trees had put on their silver-fringed night-dresses. The pathway looked like a ribbon checked black and white. Sometimes Max trod on the black, sometimes on the white; but whether in light or shade, he kept his eyes fixed on his golden shoes.

Presently he came to the stump of an elder-tree, on which sat a stork, reading an old book. He had a pair of spectacles on his eyes, and a purple cloak fastened round his shoulders. The cloak hung down round the tree-stump, and ended in a long gold fringe. When Max came up, the stork shut the book, and looked at him over the rim of his spectacles.

"Good evening," said Max. "Don't you find it rather cold reading out there in the moonlight?"

"Not at all," said the stork; "you see, I have put my bad-weather cloak on; though now you mention it, I think I will get down and walk a little."

The stork tucked his book under his wing, and put his feet to the ground.

"Is not your cloak rather too long for you?" said Max. "You had better let me hold it up."

The cloak, however, would not be held up; it slipped from Max's fingers, stood upright on the edge of the fringe, and walked after the stork, moving all its twisted golden threads like so many brisk little yellow legs.

"That's a handsome cloak of yours," said Max.

"Well, I flatter myself that it is fashionable," answered the stork, turning his head round to look at it behind, and flattening out a crease or two with his long beak.

"You could not sell it, I suppose?" said Max.

"Not unless you happened to have such a thing as a rose about you," answered the stork.

"It seems rather tight for you round the neck," said Max; "perhaps you'll allow me;" and he put his hand under the stork's beak, as if he were going to loosen the clasp a little. He had a sharp thorn in his hand; but just as he was preparing to run it into the stork's white neck he felt a splash of cold water in his face, the cloak fell empty on the ground at his feet, and instead of the stork, an ugly black face looked up from it, and winked at him with its little red eye. "This is a strange place,"

said Max to himelf; "one can never tell what one is about; but so long as I get what I want, I don't care whether a witch or a stork gives it me." So saying, he lifted the cloak from the ground, and threw it over his shoulders. It was terribly heavy, and the lively little gold threads of the fringe pricked and bit his legs at every step.

"But one must bear a great deal if one wants to look like a king's son," said Max to himself.

THE CRYSTAL CUP.

The moon went under a cloud, and it was nearly dark Max looked about for some place where he could sit down and rest. He saw a light shining among the trees, and making his way through the underwood, he came out on a small open space, in the midst of which was a blazing fire, before the fire was a table, and at the table sat six little dormice drinking their tea. They had acorn-cups to drink from, as you will guess, and there were plates of buttered chestnuts on the table, and saucers of haw preserve.

"Let me come and sit with you," said Max; and the dormice said, "Come."

"It is a poor enough entertainment," said Max, though the dormice gave him the best of everything; and while he ate he could do nothing but look at his tea-cup. It was made of crystal, and had the most beautiful little gold stars painted on it that you can imagine.

"How I wish it were mine!" said Max a hundred times to himself.

Then he pulled out the last of his thorns, and while the lady dormouse was giving him a fresh cup of tea he pushed it into her hand, and snatched the cup from her. As he jumped up to run away he caught his foot in a stone, and tumbled down into a bed of nettles. He lay rolling about for some time. When he got up the fire had gone out, the table had vanished, and the dormice were all gone; but he still held the crystal cup in his hand.

"Now I have got all I want," he said; and he made as much haste as ever he could to come out again on the pathway.

THE BRIDGE.

The morning began to dawn, the path widened, the trees stood at greater distances from each other. Max

went on, and at last he came to the river that divided the forest from the king's road. A cedar bridge spanned it, and thick trees dipped their branches into the water on either side. Beyond the shade of the farther trees stood the king's servants, waiting to see if the champion would come.

As Max stepped on the bridge he saw a little child leaning over it, trying to catch the water in her hand.

"Lend me your crystal cup," she said, "for I am dying for want of a little water."

"What is that to me?" said Max; and he passed on.

In the middle of the bridge sat an old man, whose white beard touched the ground. "Let me come under the shelter of your cloak," he said, "for I am perishing with cold."

"It is not my business to warm you. I am in haste to visit the king," said Max; and he passed on.

At the end of the bridge stood a boy with naked, bleeding feet; he said nothing, but he looked sadly in Max's face, and pointed downwards. Max kicked him away with his golden shoes, and passed on. As he stepped out of the shade of the forest he turned his

head round, and saw that three white swans were swimming down the river.

THE FOUNTAIN.

"The champion! the champion!" shouted all the people; and Max lifted up his head and said, "Yes, the champion."

Then all the drums sounded, and the fifes played, and the king came down from the castle-roof, where he had sat all night watching.

"There is no doubt about his being the real champion," said all the courtiers. "Look only at his cloak, and his golden shoes, and his proud air."

So they formed a procession round him, and led him in triumph to the pleasure-gardens, where the enchanted fountain threw up its blood-red waters in the air.

For several yards round the fountain there was a barren space; neither tree nor flower could live on which its water fell; but toads, and frogs, and serpents crawled round it, and hideous heads poked out from the marble basin, and disappeared under the water.

These loathsome creatures had once been men and

animals, who had rashly approached the fountain, and been transformed by its enchanted water.

"Here we must stop," said the courtiers; "but you who are the true champion, and wear the charmed clothes, may march boldly on."

Then Max trembled from head to foot. He would gladly have turned back, but he could not; he felt as if invisible hands were drawing him slowly towards the fountain. As he marched along he heard sighs and groans on every side; they came from the unhappy crawling creatures whom he crushed at every step he took by the weight of his golden shoes.

At last he stood on the stone steps, and put out his hand with the crystal cup in it to catch some of the water. Then three hands rose suddenly out of the middle of the basin: one seized the crystal cup, one dragged the purple cloak from him, and another the golden shoes, and disappeared with them under the water. There rose a great shout from the people. Max bent over the fountain to look after his lost clothes—a hideous face of a toad looked up at him from the water. He started back with horror, and turned to another

side of the basin; but wherever he turned, the same face followed him. "Croak, croak, croak," cried Max, for he himself was the toad, and that was the only way in which he could speak.

"The wicked fairies have cheated us again," said the king, as he walked sadly back to the castle. "It was the wrong champion, in spite of his beautiful clothes."

As he entered the house, a dog, and a fawn, and a bird met him; and the bird stood on his shoulder, and whispered in his ear, "It was the fault of the way in which he got the clothes."

THE WHITE BIRD.

Morning and evening Pax stood at the garden-gate, and looked over the forest towards the castle. Every night as he turned sadly back to the cottage he said, "To-morrow my brother will come. By sunrise I shall see him riding through the forest, with his servants and courtiers, and the king's beautiful children." But the to-morrows came, and Max did not come.

One evening, as Pax was eating his supper, and throwing a handful of crumbs, as he always did, to the birds,

he noticed a white and blue bird, which did not fly away as soon as it had had enough, as the others did, but kept hopping backwards and forwards from the railings to the ground, from the ground to the railings, and looking at him. Just as he thought it was preparing at last to fly away, a sparrow-hawk flew down upon it, and seized it in his claws.

Pax drove the hawk away, and took up the wounded bird. He stroked and kissed it, but it struggled to be free; so he opened his hand and let it fly away. When it had gone, he saw that three golden feathers had fallen from its breast on his hand. He took them into the house, and showed them to the old woman. As soon as she saw them she turned very pale, and told Pax to go to bed directly.

The next morning, when he came downstairs, she was stooping over her meal-tub, and all day she was busy kneading and baking cakes. A great many of them were burned so black by the fire that they could not be eaten; but at last, towards evening, one came crisp and white out of the oven. Then the old woman called Pax, and made him stand with her at the garden-gate.

"Look round, and tell me what you see," she asked.

"I see the bees laden with honey flying home to their hives," said Pax.

"What else do you see?"

"I see a stork carrying his old father home on his back."

"What else do you see?"

'I see a pelican feeding her young ones with the blood from her own breast."

"You have learnt to use your eyes well," said the old woman. "Now you must go. This is the night before the king's birthday, and you must pass through the enchanted wood; here is a cake for you to eat by the way. Lose no time, for you have a long journey to take before the sun rises to-morrow."

Pax wished the old woman good bye, and ran down the path that led to the forest. The white and blue bird flew before him, and sang as she flew.

THE CAKE.

As Pax entered the wood he caught his foot in a long straggling branch of a tree, and a sharp thorn ran

into his leg. He stooped down to pick up the branch; "for it is a pity it should be trodden upon," he said.

Three fair white roses hung between the thorns. The leaves were soiled with touching the ground, and the cups were full of dew. Pax gathered the flowers, and placed them in his bosom. He went on a little farther, and came to the fountain where Max had eaten his supper. Here he stopped, and took his cake out of his pocket. "I can't eat by myself," he said; so, before he began, he broke a piece from the cake, and scattered it on the ground. The white and blue bird flew down, and began eagerly to pick up the crumbs. Pax watched her till she had finished them all and returned to the tree. "There are, perhaps, other creatures in the forest as famished as that poor bird," he said; and he broke a still larger piece from his cake, and threw it on the ground.

A little fawn came timidly from among the trees, took it in its mouth, and ran away.

"I am glad you will have such a good supper," said Pax; "but now I must make haste, and eat what little there is left for my own."

As he spoke, a famished-looking dog came up to him and licked his feet. "What am I to do now?" said Pax; "there is not enough for us both. I can, however, better go without my supper than eat while that hungry dog is looking at me. I will give it all to him."

Then Pax went to the fountain to drink some water. As he stooped down, a kind beautiful face smiled at him from the water. He looked all round to see where the reflection came from, but there was no one near except the white and blue bird, which stood on a branch of a tree over his head.

THE ROSES.

Then Pax walked on, and the sun set, and the moon looked down on the pathway from between the trees.

Horned snails and glow-worms crept out of their hiding-places, and Pax stepped lightly on the points of his toes for fear of hurting them. The horned snails and the glow-worms whispered about him to the fairies, and they ran up the winding underground ways, and poked their heads out of the earth-holes to look at him. Others peeped at him from the half-closed flower-cups,

or from between the green curtains of their moss beds. Pax saw them all. "It is worth while being very quiet to have such a pretty sight," said he.

As he walked along the roses he had gathered sent a sweet perfume up into his face, and when the wind touched them the leaves struck together, and it seemed as if a sweet voice sang a song.

Dying roses, wither'd, pale,
Roses broken by the gale,
Gifts more rare than jewels be,
Which we are depends on thee.
Roses broken by the wind,
Pearls in roughest shell you find,
Roses worthless in your eyes;
In the dark the diamond lies.

"I have a fairy gift," said Pax to himself. Presently he came to a stump of a tree, on which sat a stork, reading in an old book. "Good evening," said Pax, for he never passed any one without speaking civilly.

"Good evening," said the stork. "Can you spare me one of your roses for a book-mark?"

"Certainly, I have three," said Pax; and he held one out, wondering very much how the stork would take it.

He took it between the feathers at the top of his wing, which he used like a finger and thumb; then he held it before his eyes, and looked keenly at it through his spectacles. "How is this?" he said. "I asked you for a rose, and you have given me besides a pair of golden shoes."

"Nay, it is only a rose," said Pax.

But the stork poked his long beak into the very bottom of the flower-cup, and drew out, one by one, a pair of golden shoes.

"They will be too small for me," said Pax; but when he tried them on his feet they fitted him exactly.

"Good luck to you with your golden shoes," said the stork, as Pax walked away.

A little farther on he saw a peahen lying on her back and clapping her feet together. "What's the matter?" he said, when he came up to her.

"Oh dear!" she answered; "I have been sent by the king of the peacocks to gather him a nosegay for his birthday, and I have been wandering about all day, and part of the night, without being able to find a single rose. What is to become of me if I go home without one I cannot say."

"Be comforted," said Pax; "I will give you one of mine. I shall have one left."

The peahen thanked him very warmly, and, standing on one leg, took Pax's second rose in her claw. "A beautiful flower," she said; "but why do you cover up the best leaves with this heavy fringed cloak?"

"There's no cloak that I can see," said Pax; but while he was speaking the peahen gave the rose a gentle shake, and down tumbled a purple cloak to the ground.

The cloak slowly unfolded itself, stood upon its gold fringe, and, walking up to Pax, threw itself over his shoulders, and fastened the clasp with a loud snap.

"One may well call this an enchanted wood," said Pax.

The peahen said nothing: she had walked away with her rose, and did not hear him.

Pax went on a little farther, and he saw a dormouse sleeping by the roadside. He went up to it, and touched it with his finger to waken it. "What are you doing?" he said. "Don't you know that if you sleep under the moon's rays you will become mad?"

"That I know well," said the dormouse; "and if my brains were to be turned it would indeed be a great mis-

fortune to my family; but I have been benighted in the wood. I can't find my way home, and I am so tired that I cannot possibly keep awake. If I had but a rose now to hold over my head, that would keep off the danger."

"Pray take mine, then," said Pax. "It is the last I have, to be sure; but you seem to want it more than I do."

"You are very kind," said the dormouse. "Your rose is just the thing I want, if you will only be so good as to take that crystal cup from the middle of it, which makes it too heavy for me to hold."

"I see no crystal cup," said Pax, stooping down.

Then the dormouse put her little paw among the leaves, and drew out a beautifully cut crystal cup, which she handed to Pax. "Good night," she said; and before Pax could speak a word she was fast asleep again, with her head under the rose.

"How is it that every one gives me beautiful things?" asked Pax of himself, as he passed on.

THE BRIDGE.

In the morning Pax reached the cedar bridge. The road had been very stony for the last half-mile, but Pax's feet were protected by his golden shoes. As he stepped on the bridge he met a little boy with bare bleeding feet.

"Where are you going?" said Pax.

"Across the stones," answered the boy.

"Oh, dear, what a pity!" said Pax; "for you cannot possibly cross them without my golden shoes. Take them; they will fit you exactly. I am afraid the king will think it rather strange if I come to the castle without shoes; but you certainly want them more than I do. After all," Pax said to himself, as he walked on, "it is more comfortable to be without shoes in the day-time, when the sun is hot, and the gold fringe of my cloak hangs down so low that it quite hides my bare feet."

In the middle of the bridge he saw a little girl stooping towards the water, and trying to catch it in her hand.

"Let me get you some in my crystal cup," said Pax; and he knelt on the bridge, and stretched out his hand with the cup in it towards the water. A sudden gust of

wind came, and blew the cup away. He tried all he could to catch it again, but it floated quickly down the stream.

"There is a little woman in it, and she nods to us," said the child. Then a white water-lily lifted its head from the river and touched Pax's hand. He gathered it, and gave the child water to drink out of the cup of the flower.

"The fringed cloak is all I have left; I must take care of it," said Pax to himself, as he passed on, with the lily in his hand. When he reached the end of the bridge he saw an old man sitting on the ground with a tattered cloak on. His white hair fell over his shoulders, and the tears were trickling down his cheeks.

"Don't speak to him," said a raven, who was looking at Pax from a branch of a wytch elm.

"Mind your own business, and pass on," chattered a magpie, who was hopping before him on the path.

"You have no time to lose," shouted a heron, who was fishing in the river.

But Pax did stop, and looked at the old man. "What is the matter with you?" he said.

"I am very cold, and the chill morning breeze blows through the holes in my cloak," said the old man.

Pax looked at his beautiful purple cloak, and tried to pass on, but he could not: he turned again to the old man.

"Change cloaks with me," he said, "for I am young, and I don't mind the chill morning breeze."

Then the old man gave Pax his old, tattered cloak, and threw the handsome fringed one over his own shoulders, and Pax left the enchanted wood, and came out on the road that led up to the castle.

THE KING'S CHILDREN.

"The champion is coming!" shouted all the people, when they saw Pax's long shadow, which the rising sun threw before him on the ground; but when he himself came from the shade of the trees, and they saw his tattered cloak and his bare feet, they set up a great laugh, and pointed their fingers, and hissed at him.

"A pretty champion you are!" they all cried out. "It is a fine thing for you to pretend to cure the king's children."

"I can at least try, for I am not at all afraid," said Pax; but they only laughed the more at him, and even the king turned his back upon him, and ordered the castle-door to be shut in his face. So Pax sat down on a stone outside the gate, and leaned his head on his hand. He had given away his roses and his gifts, and he had left nothing for himself.

"Are you sorry?" asked a soft voice in the air.

"No," said Pax, "I am not sorry."

Then the little blue bird flew down and stood on his shoulder, and laid her beak on his lips, and the dog and the fawn he had fed in the wood crouched down and licked his feet.

"Follow me," sang the bird; and she flew straight over the castle-gate.

"How shall I follow through the shut gate?" said Pax; but the gate stood open and he passed on.

The bird flew before him across the court and the flower-garden, till she came to that part of the pleasure-grounds where the red fountain stood.

The king was standing at a little distance, surrounded by his courtiers. "We will let the beggar boy go to the

fountain if he likes," they said; "it will be fun to see into what loathsome animal he will be enchanted."

"Follow me," sang the bird; and though Pax did not wish to tread on the slimy, crawling creatures, he stepped on to the barren space that surrounded the fountain.

He trod, and a worm that touched his foot turned into a lark, and flew singing into the air; he put his foot on a serpent, and a young knight in armour sprang up. At every step he took, one after the other of the creatures who had been transformed by the water were restored to their former shape.

At last he reached the fountain. He dipped the water-lily in once, a fierce lion's head glared at him from the water; he dipped it in again, and a monkey laughed and chattered at him; he dipped it in a third time, the red fountain sank down, and changed into a clear rippling stream. Three crystal drops of water rested on the leaves of the lily. Pax sprinkled them over the dog, the fawn, and the bird.

The dog and the fawn were changed into two princes, so handsome that it quite dazzled Pax's eyes to look at

them. The bird was a princess; but though her face was the most beautiful of all, it did not surprise Pax. "I have seen you before," he said; "it was you who looked at me from the fountain in the wood."

"The champion! the champion! the champion!" shouted all the people; and now they would have kissed Pax's bare feet, and the border of his torn cloak, if he would have let them.

That evening there was a grand feast at the castle. The queen of the good fairies, who had stayed away for a long time, returned to the court. All the guests and the courtiers were introduced to her, and she looked at them through her opera-glass, and told the king what situation each was fit to hold.

Pax was found worthy to be the chief minister, and the husband to the beautiful princess; but Max could only stand in the kitchen and turn the meat on the spit, and wipe the dirt from the king's shoes.

"How nicely it ends," said Charlotte; "that's the best of fairy tales, they always end so happily. The giants

are always killed; the dragons fall into pits; the toads turn to princes; and, just at the right time, everything becomes so good and beautiful."

"The worst, I think," said Amy; "for it is not true in reality, and it makes one discontented."

"I don't quite agree with you," said Sidney; "I think it is true, only, in reality, we are such a long way from *the end*, where everything is good and beautiful, and we forget to believe that it must come."

"Oh!" said Amy; "but by *the end* I don't mean the same as you do."

"Well," said Sidney, "but then you must not blame the fairy tales for making you discontented. Even in fairy tales people don't conquer, the king's son does not reign in the middle of the story."

"For my part," said Charlotte, who thought the conversation was taking rather a grave turn, "I never read a fairy tale without wishing it were true. There is nothing in the world I should like so much as to be one of those little, ugly, wrinkled old women, like Aunt Ellice, you know. Oh! I beg your pardon, Aunt Ellice; I did not exactly mean——"