Tales of the Punjab

[Illustrated]

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PREFACE



MANY of the tales in this collection appeared either in the *Indian Antiquary*, the *Calcutta Review*, or the *Legends of the Punjab*. They were then in the form of literal translations, in many cases uncouth or even unpresentable to ears polite, in all scarcely intelligible to the untravelled English reader; for it must be remembered that, with the exception of the Adventures of Raja Rasâlu, all these stories are strictly folk-tales passing current among a people who can neither read nor write, and whose diction is full of colloquialisms, and, if we choose to call them so, vulgarisms. It would be manifestly unfair, for instance, to compare the literary standard of such tales with that of the *Arabian Nights*, the *Tales of a Parrot*, or similar works. The manner in which these stories were collected is in itself sufficient to show how misleading it would be, if, with the intention of giving the conventional Eastern flavour to the text, it were to be manipulated into a flowery dignity; and as a description of the procedure will serve the double purpose of credential and excuse, the authors give it,—premising that all the stories but three have been collected by Mrs. F. A. Steel during winter tours through the various districts of which her husband has been Chief Magistrate.

A carpet is spread under a tree in the vicinity of the spot which the Magistrate has chosen for his *darbâr*, but far enough away from bureaucracy to let the village idlers approach it should they feel so inclined. In a very few minutes, as a rule, some of them begin to edge up to it, and as they are generally small boys, they commence nudging each other, whispering, and sniggering. The fancied approach of a*chuprâsî*, the "corrupt lictor" of India, who attends at every *darbâr*, will however cause a sudden stampede; but after a time these become less and less frequent, the wild beasts, as it were, becoming tamer. By and by a group of women stop to gaze, and then the question "What do you want?" invariably brings the answer "To see your honour" *(âp ke darshan âe)*. Once the ice is broken, the only difficulties are, first, to understand your visitors, and secondly, to get them to go away. When the general conversation is fairly started, inquiries are made by degrees as to how many witches there are in the village, or what cures they know for fever and the evil eye, *etc*. At first these are met by denials expressed in set terms, but a little patient talk will generally lead to some remarks which point the villagers' minds in the direction required, till at last, after many persuasions, some child begins a story,

others correct the details, emulation conquers shyness, and finally the story-teller is brought to the front with acclamations: for there is always a story-teller *par excellence* in every village—generally a boy.

Then comes the need for patience, since in all probability the first story is one you have heard a hundred times, or else some pointless and disconnected jumble. At the conclusion of either, however, the teller must be profusely complimented, in the hopes of eliciting something more valuable. But it is possible to waste many hours, and in the end find yourself possessed of nothing save some feeble variant of a well-known legend, or, what is worse, a compilation of oddments which have lingered in a faulty memory from half a dozen distinct stories. After a time, however, the attentive collector is rewarded by finding that a coherent whole is growing up in his or her mind out of the shreds and patches heard here and there, and it is delight indeed when your own dim suspicion that this part of the puzzle fits into that is confirmed by finding the two incidents preserved side by side in the mouth of some perfectly unconscious witness. Some of the tales in this volume have thus been a year or more on the

stocks before they had been heard sufficiently often to make their form conclusive.

And this accounts for what may be called the greater literary sequence of these tales over those to be found in many similar collections. They have been selected carefully with the object of securing a good story in what appears to be its best form; but they have not been doctored in any way, not even in the language. That is neither a transliteration—which would have needed a whole dictionary to be intelligible—nor a version orientalised to suit English tastes. It is an attempt to translate one colloquialism by another, and thus to preserve the aroma of rough ready wit existing side by side with that perfume of pure poesy which every now and again contrasts so strangely with the other. Nothing would have been easier than to alter the style; but to do so would, in the collector's opinion, have robbed the stories of all human value.

That such has been the deliberate choice may be seen at a glance through the only story which has a different origin. The Adventures of Raja Rasâlu was translated from the rough manuscript of a village accountant; and, being current in a more or less classical form, it approaches more nearly to the conventional standards of an Indian tale.

The work has been apportioned between the authors in this way. Mrs. F. A. Steel is responsible for the text, and Major R. C. Temple for the annotations.

It is therefore hoped that the form of the book may fulfil the double intention with which it was written; namely, that the text should interest children, and at the same time the notes should render it valuable to those who study Folklore on its scientific side.

F. A. STEEL & R. C. TEMPLE

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TO THE LITTLE READER

WOULD you like to know how these stories are told? Come with me, and you shall see. There! take my hand and do not be afraid, for Prince Hassan's carpet is beneath your feet. So now!—"Hey presto! Abracadabra!" Here we are in a Punjabi village.

It is sunset. Over the limitless plain, vast and unbroken as the heaven above, the hot cloudless sky cools slowly into shadow. The men leave their labour amid the fields, which, like an oasis in the desert, surround the mud-built village, and, plough on shoulder, drive their bullocks homewards. The women set aside their spinning-wheels, and prepare the simple evening meal. The little girls troop, basket on head, from the outskirts of the village, where all day long they have been at work, kneading, drying, and stacking the fuel-cakes so necessary in that woodless country. The boys, half hidden in clouds of dust, drive the herds of gaunt cattle and ponderous buffaloes to the thorn-hedged yards. The day is over, the day which has been so hard and

toilful even for the children,—and with the night comes rest and play. The village, so deserted before, is alive with voices; the elders cluster round the courtyard doors, the little ones whoop through the narrow alleys. But as the short-lived Indian twilight dies into darkness, the voices one by one are hushed, and as the stars come out the children disappear. But not to sleep: it is too hot, for the sun which has beaten so fiercely all day on the mud walls, and floors, and roofs, has left a legacy of warmth behind it, and not till midnight will the cool breeze spring up, bringing with it refreshment and repose. How then are the long dark hours to be passed? In all the village not a lamp or candle is to be found; the only light—and that too used but sparingly and of necessity—being the dim smoky flame of an oil-fed wick. Yet, in spite of this, the hours, though dark, are not dreary, for this, in an Indian village, is *story-telling time*; not only from choice, but from obedience to the well-known precept which forbids such idle amusement between sunrise and sunset. Ask little Kaniyâ, yonder, why it is that he, the best story-teller in the village, never opens his lips till after sunset, and he will grin from ear to ear, and with a flash of dark eyes and white teeth, answer that travellers lose their way when idle boys and girls tell tales by

daylight. And Naraini, the herd-girl, will hang her head and cover her dusky face with her rag of a veil, if you put the question to her; or little Ram Jas shake his bald shaven poll in denial; but not one of the dark-skinned, bare-limbed village children will yield to your request for a story.

No, no!—from sunrise to sunset, when even the little ones must labour, not a word; but from sunset to sunrise, when no man can work, the tongues chatter glibly enough, for that is story-telling time. Then, after the scanty meal is over, the bairns drag their wooden-legged, string-woven bedsteads into the open, and settle themselves down like young birds in a nest, three or four to a bed, while others coil up on mats upon the ground, and some, stealing in for an hour from distant alleys, beg a place here or there.

The stars twinkle overhead, the mosquito sings through the hot air, the village dogs bark at imaginary foes, and from one crowded nest after another rises a childish voice telling some tale, old yet ever new,—tales that were told in the sunrise of the world, and will be told in its sunset. The little audience listens, dozes, dreams, and still the wily Jackal meets his match, or Bopolûchî brave and bold returns rich and victorious from the robber's den.

Hark!—that is Kaniyâ's voice, and there is an expectant stir amongst the drowsy listeners as he begins the old old formula—

"Once upon a time—"

SIR BUZZ

ONCE upon a time a soldier died, leaving a widow and one son. They were dreadfully poor, and at last matters became so bad that they had nothing left in the house to eat.

"Mother," said the son, "give me four shillings, and I will go seek my fortune in the wide world."

"Alas!" answered the mother, "and where am I, who haven't a farthing wherewith to buy bread, to find four shillings?"

"There is that old coat of my father's," returned the lad; "look in the pocket—perchance there is something there."

So she looked, and behold! there were six shillings hidden away at the very bottom of the pocket!

"More than I bargained for," quoth the lad, laughing." See, mother, these two shillings are for you; you can live on that till I return, the rest will pay my way until I find my fortune."

So he set off to find his fortune, and on the way he saw a tigress, licking her paw, and moaning mournfully. He was just about to run away from the terrible creature, when she called to him faintly, saying, "Good lad, if you will take out this thorn for me, I shall be for ever grateful."

"Not I!" answered the lad. "Why, if I begin to pull it out, and it pains you, you will kill me with a pat of your paw."



"No, no!" cried the tigress, "I will turn my face to this tree, and when the pain comes I will pat *it*."

To this the soldier's son agreed; so he pulled out the thorn, and when the pain came the tigress gave the tree such a blow that the trunk split all to pieces. Then she turned towards the soldier's son, and said gratefully, "Take this box as a reward, my son, but do not open it until you have travelled nine miles."

So the soldier's son thanked the tigress, and set off with the box to find his fortune. Now when he had gone five miles, he felt certain that the box weighed more than it had at first, and every step he took it seemed to grow heavier and heavier. He tried to struggle on— though it was all he could do to carry the box—until he had gone about eight miles and a quarter, when his patience gave way. "I believe that tigress was a witch, and is playing off her tricks upon me," he cried, "but I will stand this nonsense no longer. Lie there, you wretched old box!—heaven knows what is in you, and I don't care."

So saying, he flung the box down on the ground: it burst open with the shock, and out stepped a little old man. He was only one span high, but his beard was a span and a quarter long, and trailed upon the ground.

The little mannikin immediately began to stamp about and scold the lad roundly for letting the box down so violently.

"Upon my word!" quoth the soldier's son, scarcely able to restrain a smile at the ridiculous little figure, "but you are weighty for your size, old gentleman! And what may your name be?"

"Sir Buzz!" snapped the one-span mannikin, still stamping about in a great rage.

"Upon my word!" quoth the soldier's son once more, "if *you* are all the box contained, I am glad I didn't trouble to carry it farther."

"That's not polite," snarled the mannikin; "perhaps if you had carried it the full nine miles you might have found something better; but that's neither here nor there. I'm good enough for you, at any rate, and will serve you faithfully according to my mistress's orders."

"Serve me!—then I wish to goodness you'd serve me with some dinner, for I am mighty hungry! Here are four shillings to pay for it."

No sooner had the soldier's son said this and given the money, than with a *whiz! boom! bing!* like a big bee, Sir Buzz flew through the air to a confectioner's shop in the nearest town. There he stood, the

one-span mannikin, with the span and a quarter beard trailing on the ground, just by the big preserving pan, and cried in ever so loud a voice, "Ho! ho! Sir Confectioner, bring me sweets!"

The confectioner looked round the shop, and out of the door, and down the street, but could see no one, for tiny Sir Buzz was quite hidden by the preserving pan. Then the mannikin called out louder still, "Ho! ho! Sir Confectioner, bring me sweets!" And when the confectioner looked in vain for his customer, Sir Buzz grew angry, and ran and pinched him on the legs, and kicked him on the foot, saying, "Impudent knave! do you mean to say you can't see *me?* Why, I was standing by the preserving pan all the time!"

The confectioner apologised humbly, and hurried away to bring out his best sweets for his irritable little customer. Then Sir Buzz chose about a hundredweight of them, and said, "Quick, tie them up in something and give them into my hand; I'll carry them home."

"They will be a good weight, sir," smiled the confectioner.

"What business is that of yours, I should like to know?" snapped Sir Buzz. "Just you do as you're

told, and here is your money." So saying he jingled the four shillings in his pocket.

"As you please, sir," replied the man cheerfully, as he tied up the sweets into a huge bundle and placed it on the little mannikin's outstretched hand, fully expecting him to sink under the weight; when lo! with a *boom! bing!* he whizzed off with the money still in his pocket.

He alighted at a corn-chandler's shop, and, standing behind a basket of flour, called out at the top of his voice, "Ho! ho! Sir Chandler, bring me flour!"

And when the corn-chandler looked round the shop, and out of the window, and down the street, without seeing anybody, the one-span mannikin, with his beard trailing on the ground, cried again louder than before, "Ho! ho! Sir Chandler, bring me flour!"

Then on receiving no answer, he flew into a violent rage, and ran and bit the unfortunate corn-chandler on the leg, pinched him, and kicked him, saying, "Impudent varlet! don't pretend you couldn't see *me!* Why, I was standing close beside you behind that basket!"

So the corn-chandler apologised humbly for his mistake, and asked Sir Buzz how much flour he wanted.

"Two hundredweight," replied the mannikin, "two hundredweight, neither more nor less. Tie it up in a bundle, and I'll take it with me."

"Your honour has a cart or beast of burden with you, doubtless?" said the chandler, "for two hundredweight is a heavy load."

"What's that to you?" shrieked Sir Buzz, stamping his foot, "isn't it enough if I pay for it?" And then he jingled the money in his pocket again.

So the corn-chandler tied up the flour in a bundle, and placed it in the mannikin's outstretched hand, fully expecting it would crush him, when, with a whiz! Sir Buzz flew off, with the shillings still in his pocket. *Boom! bing! boom!*

The soldier's son was just wondering what had become of his one-span servant, when, with a whir! the little fellow alighted beside him, and wiping his face with his handkerchief, as if he were dreadfully hot and tired, said thoughtfully, "Now I do hope I've brought enough, but you men have such terrible appetites!"

"More than enough, I should say," laughed the lad, looking at the huge bundles.

Then Sir Buzz cooked the girdle-cakes, and the soldier's son ate three of them and a handful of sweets; but the one-span mannikin gobbled up all the rest, saying at each mouthful, "You men have such terrible appetites—such terrible appetites!"

After that, the soldier's son and his servant Sir Buzz travelled ever so far, until they came to the King's city. Now the King had a daughter called Princess Blossom, who was so lovely, and tender, and slim, and fair, that she only weighed five flowers. Every morning she was weighed in golden scales, and the scale always turned when the fifth flower was put in, neither less nor more.

Now it so happened that the soldier's son by chance caught a glimpse of the lovely, tender, slim, and fair Princess Blossom, and, of course, he fell desperately in love with her. He would neither sleep nor eat his dinner, and did nothing all day long but say to his faithful mannikin, "Oh, dearest Sir Buzz! oh, kind Sir Buzz!—carry me to the Princess Blossom, that I may see and speak to her."

"Carry you!" snapped the little fellow scornfully, "that's a likely story! Why, you're ten times as big as I am. You should carry *me!*"

Nevertheless, when the soldier's son begged and prayed, growing pale and pining away with thinking of the Princess Blossom, Sir Buzz, who had a kind heart, was moved, and bade the lad sit on his hand. Then with a tremendous *boom! bing! boom!* they whizzed away and were in the palace in a second. Being night-time, the Princess was asleep; nevertheless the booming wakened her and she was quite frightened to see a handsome young man kneeling beside her. She began of course to scream, but stopped at once when the soldier's son with the greatest politeness, and in the most elegant of language, begged her not to be alarmed. And after that they talked together about everything delightful, while Sir Buzz stood at the door and did sentry; but he stood a brick up on end first, so that he might not seem to pry upon the young people.

Now when the dawn was just breaking, the soldier's son and Princess Blossom, wearied of talking, fell asleep; whereupon Sir Buzz, being a faithful servant, said to himself, "Now what is to be done? If my master remains here asleep, some one will discover him, and he will be killed as sure as my name

is Buzz; but if I wake him, ten to one he will refuse to go."

THE RAT'S WEDDING

ONCE upon a time a fat sleek Rat was caught in a shower of rain, and being far from shelter he set to work and soon dug a nice hole in the ground, in which he sat as dry as a bone while the raindrops splashed outside, making little puddles on the road.

Now in the course of his digging he came upon a fine bit of root, quite dry and fit for fuel, which he set aside carefully—for the Rat is an economical creature—in order to take it home with him. So when the shower was over, he set off with the dry root in his mouth. As he went along, daintily picking his way through the puddles, he saw a poor man vainly trying to light a fire, while a little circle of children stood by, and cried piteously.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed the Rat, who was both soft-hearted and curious, "what a dreadful noise to make! What *is* the matter?"

"The bairns are hungry," answered the man; "they are crying for their breakfast, but the sticks are damp, the fire won't burn, and so I can't bake the cakes."

"If that is all your trouble, perhaps I can help you," said the good-natured Rat; "you are welcome to this dry root, and I'll warrant it will soon make a fine blaze."

The poor man, with a thousand thanks, took the dry root, and in his turn presented the Rat with a morsel of dough, as a reward for his kindness and generosity.

"What a remarkably lucky fellow I am!" thought the Rat, as he trotted off gaily with his prize, "and clever too! Fancy making a bargain like that—food enough to last me five days in return for a rotten old stick! *Wah! wah! wah!* what it is to have brains!"

Going along, hugging his good fortune in this way, he came presently to a potter's yard, where the potter, leaving his wheel to spin round by itself, was trying to pacify his three little children, who were screaming and crying as if they would burst.

"My gracious!" cried the Rat, stopping his ears, "what a noise!—do tell me what it is all about."

"I suppose they are hungry," replied the potter ruefully; "their mother has gone to get flour in the bazaar, for there is none in the house. In the meantime I can neither work nor rest because of them."

"Is that all!" answered the officious Rat; "then I can help you. Take this dough, cook it quickly, and stop their mouths with food."

The potter overwhelmed the Rat with thanks for his obliging kindness, and choosing out a nice well-burnt pipkin, insisted on his accepting it as a remembrance.

The Rat was delighted at the exchange, and though the pipkin was just a trifle awkward for him to manage, he succeeded after infinite trouble in balancing it on his head, and went away gingerly, *tink-a-tink*, *tink-a-tink,* down the road, with his tail over his arm for fear he should trip on it. And all the time he kept saying to himself, "What a lucky fellow I am! and clever too! Such a hand at a bargain!"

By and by he came to where some neatherds were herding their cattle. One of them was milking a buffalo, and having no pail he used his shoes instead.

"Oh fie! oh fie!" cried the cleanly Rat, quite shocked at the sight. "What a nasty dirty trick!—why don't you use a pail?"

"For the best of all reasons—we haven't got one!" growled the neatherd, who did not see why the Rat should put his finger in the pie.

"If that is all," replied the dainty Rat, "oblige me by using this pipkin, for I cannot bear dirt!"

The neatherd, nothing loath, took the pipkin, and milked away until it was brimming over; then turning to the Rat, who stood looking on, said, "Here, little fellow, you may have a drink, in payment."

But if the Rat was good-natured he was also shrewd. "No, no, my friend," said he, "that will not do! As if I could drink the worth of my pipkin at a draught! My dear sir, *I couldn't hold it!* Besides, I never make a bad bargain, so I expect you at least to give me the buffalo that gave the milk."

"Nonsense!" cried the neatherd; "a buffalo for a pipkin! Who ever heard of such a price? And what on earth could *you* do with a buffalo when you got it? Why, the pipkin was about as much as you could manage."

At this the Rat drew himself up with dignity, for he did not like allusions to his size.

"That is my affair, not yours," he retorted; "your business is to hand over the buffalo."

So just for the fun of the thing, and to amuse themselves at the Rat's expense, the neatherds loosed the buffalo's halter and began to tie it to the little animal's tail.

"No! no!" he called, in a great hurry; "if the beast pulled, the skin of my tail would come off, and then where should I be? Tie it round my neck, if you please."

So with much laughter the neatherds tied the halter round the Rat's neck, and he, after a polite leave-taking, set off gaily towards home with his prize; that is to say, he set off with the *rope*, for no sooner did he come to the end of the tether than he was brought up with a round turn; the buffalo, nose down grazing away, would not budge until it had finished its tuft of grass, and then seeing another in a different direction marched off towards it, while the Rat, to avoid being dragged, had to trot humbly behind, willy-nilly.

He was too proud to confess the truth, of course, and, nodding his head knowingly to the neatherds, said, "Ta-ta, good people! I am going home this way. It may be a little longer, but it's much shadier."

And when the neatherds roared with laughter he took no notice, but trotted on, looking as dignified as possible.

"After all," he reasoned to himself, "when one keeps a buffalo one has to look after its grazing. A beast must get a good bellyful of grass if it is to give any milk, and I have plenty of time at my disposal."

So all day long he trotted about after the buffalo, making believe; but by evening he was dead tired, and felt truly thankful when the great big beast, having eaten enough, lay down under a tree to chew the cud.

Just then a bridal party came by. The bridegroom and his friends had evidently gone on to the next village, leaving the bride's palanquin to follow; so the palanquin bearers, being lazy fellows and seeing a nice shady tree, put down their burden, and began to cook some food.

"What detestable meanness!" grumbled one;" a grand wedding, and nothing but plain rice pottage to eat! Not a scrap of meat in it, neither sweet nor salt! It would serve the skinflints right if we upset the bride into a ditch!"

"Dear me!" cried the Rat at once, seeing a way out of his difficulty, "that *is* a shame! I sympathise with your feelings so entirely that if you will allow me I'll give you my buffalo. You can kill it, and cook it."

"*Your* buffalo!" returned the discontented bearers, "what rubbish! Whoever heard of a rat owning a buffalo?"

"Not often, I admit," replied the Rat with conscious pride; "but look for yourselves. Can you not see that I am leading the beast by a string?"

"Oh, never mind the string!" cried a great big hungry bearer; "master or no master, I mean to have meat to my dinner!"

Whereupon they killed the buffalo, and, cooking its flesh, ate their dinner with relish; then, offering the remains to the Rat, said carelessly, "Here, little Rat-skin, that is for you!"

"Now look here!" cried the Rat hotly; "I'll have none of your pottage, nor your sauce either. You don't suppose I am going to give my best buffalo, that gave quarts and quarts of milk—the buffalo I have been feeding all day—for a wee bit of rice? No!—I got a loaf for a bit of stick; I got a pipkin for a little loaf; I got a buffalo for a pipkin; and now I'll have the bride for my buffalo—the bride, and nothing else!"

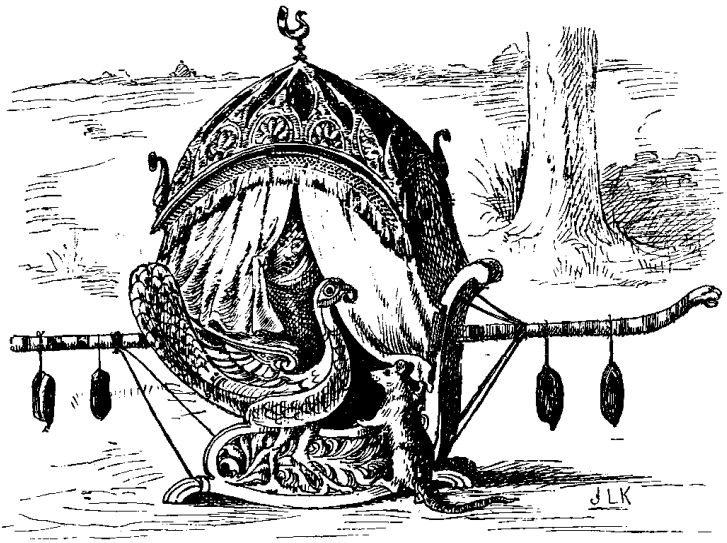
By this time the servants, having satisfied their hunger, began to reflect on what they had done, and becoming alarmed at the consequences, arrived at

the conclusion it would be wisest to make their escape whilst they could. So, leaving the bride in her palanquin, they took to their heels in various directions.

The Rat, being as it were left in possession, advanced to the palanquin, and drawing aside the curtain, with the sweetest of voices and best of bows begged the bride to descend. She hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry, but as any company, even a Rat's, was better than being quite alone in the wilderness, she did as she was bidden, and followed the lead of her guide, who set off as fast as he could for his hole.

As he trotted along beside the lovely young bride, who, by her rich dress and glittering jewels, seemed to be some king's daughter, he kept saying to himself, "How clever I am! What bargains I do make, to be sure!"

When they arrived at his hole, the Rat stepped forward with the greatest politeness, and said, "Welcome, madam, to my humble abode! Pray step in, or if you will allow me, and as the passage is somewhat dark, I will show you the way."



Whereupon he ran in first, but after a time, finding the bride did not follow, he put his nose out again, saying testily, "Well, madam, why don't you follow? Don't you know it's rude to keep your husband waiting?"

"My good sir," laughed the handsome young bride, "I can't squeeze into that little hole!"

The Rat coughed; then after a moment's thought he replied, "There is some truth in your remark—you *are* overgrown, and I suppose I shall have to build you a thatch somewhere. For to-night you can rest under that wild plum-tree."

"But I am so hungry!" said the bride ruefully.

"Dear, dear! everybody seems hungry to-day!" returned the Rat pettishly; "however, that's easily settled—I'll fetch you some supper in a trice."

So he ran into his hole, returning immediately with an ear of millet and a dry pea.

"There!" said he, triumphantly, "isn't that a fine meal?"

"I can't eat that!" whimpered the bride; "it isn't a mouthful; and I want rice pottage, and cakes, and sweet eggs, and sugar-drops. I shall die if I don't get them!"

"Oh dear me!" cried the Rat in a rage, "what a nuisance a bride is, to be sure! Why don't you eat the wild plums?"

"I can't live on wild plums!" retorted the weeping bride; "nobody could; besides, they are only half ripe, and I can't reach them."

"Rubbish!" cried the Rat; "ripe or unripe, they must do you for to-night, and to-morrow you can gather a basketful, sell them in the city, and buy sugar-drops and sweet eggs to your heart's content!"

So the next morning the Rat climbed up into the plum-tree, and nibbled away at the stalks till the fruit fell down into the bride's veil. Then, unripe as they

were, she carried them into the city, calling out through the streets—

"Green Plums I Sell! Green Plums I Sell!

Princess am I, Rat's bride as well!"

As she passed by the palace, her mother the Queen heard her voice, and, running out, recognised her daughter. Great were the rejoicings, for every one thought the poor bride had been eaten by wild beasts. In the midst of the feasting and merriment, the Rat, who had followed the Princess at a distance, and had become alarmed at her long absence, arrived at the door, against which he beat with a big knobby stick, calling out fiercely, "Give me my wife! give me my wife! She is mine by fair bargain. I gave a stick and I got a loaf; I gave a loaf and I got a pipkin; I gave a pipkin and I got a buffalo; I gave a buffalo and I got a bride. Give me my wife! give me my wife!"

"La! son-in-law! what a fuss you do make!" said the wily old Queen, through the door, "and all about nothing! Who wants to run away with your wife? On the contrary, we are proud to see you, and I only keep you waiting at the door till we can spread the carpets, and receive you in style."

Hearing this, the Rat was mollified, and waited patiently outside whilst the cunning old Queen prepared for his reception, which she did by cutting a hole in the very middle of a stool, putting a red-hot stone underneath, covering it over with a stew-pan-lid, and then spreading a beautiful embroidered cloth over all.

Then she went to the door, and receiving the Rat with the greatest respect, led him to the stool, praying him to be seated.

"Dear! dear! how clever I am! What bargains I do make, to be sure!" said he to himself as he climbed on to the stool. "Here I am, son-in-law to a real live Queen! What will the neighbours say?"

At first he sat down on the edge of the stool, but even there it was warm, and after a while he began to fidget, saying, "Dear me, mother-in-law! how hot your house is! Everything I touch seems burning!"

"You are out of the wind there, my son," replied the cunning old Queen; "sit more in the middle of the stool, and then you will feel the breeze and get cooler."

But he didn't! for the stewpan-lid by this time had become so hot, that the Rat fairly frizzled when he sat down on it; and it was not until he had left all his

tail, half his hair, and a large piece of his skin behind him, that he managed to escape, howling with pain, and vowing that never, never, never again would he make a bargain!



So without more ado he put his hand under the bed, and *bing! boom!* carried it into a large garden outside the town. There he set it down in the shade of the biggest tree, and pulling up the next biggest one by the roots, threw it over his shoulder, and marched up and down keeping guard.

Before long the whole town was in a commotion, because the Princess Blossom had been carried off, and all the world and his wife turned out to look for her. By and by the one-eyed Chief Constable came to the garden gate.

"What do you want here?" cried valiant Sir Buzz, making passes at him with the tree.

The Chief Constable with his one eye could see nothing save the branches, but he replied sturdily, "I want the Princess Blossom!"

"I'll blossom you! Get out of *my* garden, will you?" shrieked the one-span mannikin, with his one and quarter span beard trailing on the ground; and with that he belaboured the Constable's pony so hard with the tree that it bolted away, nearly throwing its rider.

The poor man went straight to the King, saying, "Your Majesty! I am convinced your Majesty's daughter, the Princess Blossom, is in your Majesty's

garden, just outside the town, as there is a tree there which fights terribly."

Upon this the King summoned all his horses and men, and going to the garden tried to get in; but Sir Buzz behind the tree routed them all, for half were killed, and the rest ran away. The noise of the battle, however, awoke the young couple, and as they were now convinced they could no longer exist apart, they determined to fly together. So when the fight was over, the soldier's son, the Princess Blossom, and Sir Buzz set out to see the world.

Now the soldier's son was so enchanted with his good luck in winning the Princess, that he said to Sir Buzz, "My fortune is made already; so I shan't want you any more, and you can go back to your mistress."

"Pooh!" said Sir Buzz. "Young people always think so; however, have it your own way, only take this hair out of my beard, and if you *should* get into trouble, just burn it in the fire. I'll come to your aid."

So Sir Buzz boomed off, and the soldier's son and the Princess Blossom lived and travelled together very happily, until at last they lost their way in a forest, and wandered about for some time without any food. When they were nearly starving, a Brahman

found them, and hearing their story said, "Alas! you poor children!—come home with me, and I will give you something to eat."

Now had he said "I will eat you," it would have been much nearer the mark, for he was no Brahman, but a dreadful vampire, who loved to devour handsome young men and slender girls. But, knowing nothing of all this, the couple went home with him quite cheerfully. He was most polite, and when they arrived at his house, said, "Please get ready whatever you want to eat, for I have no cook. Here are my keys; open all my cupboards save the one with the golden key. Meanwhile I will go and gather firewood."

Then the Princess Blossom began to prepare the food, while the soldier's son opened all the cupboards. In them he saw lovely jewels, and dresses, and cups and platters, such bags of gold and silver, that his curiosity got the better of his discretion, and, regardless of the Brahman's warning, he said, "I *will* see what wonderful thing is hidden in the cupboard with the golden key." So he opened it, and lo! it was full of human skulls, picked quite clean, and beautifully polished. At this dreadful sight the soldier's son flew back to the Princess Blossom, and said, "We are

lost! we are lost!—this is no Brahman, but a horrid vampire!"

At that moment they heard him at the door, and the Princess, who was very brave and kept her wits about her, had barely time to thrust the magic hair into the fire, before the vampire, with sharp teeth and fierce eyes, appeared. But at the selfsame moment a *boom! boom! binging* noise was heard in the air, coming nearer and nearer. Whereupon the vampire, who knew very well who his enemy was, changed into a heavy rain pouring down in torrents, hoping thus to drown Sir Buzz, but *he* changed into the storm wind beating back the rain. Then the vampire changed to a dove, but Sir Buzz, pursuing it as a hawk, pressed it so hard that it had barely time to change into a rose, and drop into King Indra's lap as he sat in his celestial court listening to the singing of some dancing girls. Then Sir Buzz, quick as thought, changed into an old musician, and standing beside the bard who was thrumming the guitar, said, "Brother, you are tired; let *me* play."

And he played so wonderfully, and sang with such piercing sweetness, that King Indra said, "What shall I give you as a reward? Name what you please, and it shall be yours."