

GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN---By Walt McDougall

The Enchanted Forest Where Everything Was Opposite to What it Should be, and How its Magic Spell Was Broken

BESIDE a vast dark forest ran a broad highway, along which passed armies, wagons, gay parties of travelers, merchants and peddlers, but never a man strayed from the dusty roadway to rest in the shade of the trees nor lie in the cool, green grass. In fact, all hastened their steps when passing by the woods.

Once in a very long while some very bold man, young and rash, would venture a space within the shades of the trees, but he would soon be seen returning much quicker than he went, and with terror in his eyes.

The forest was known far and wide as the Wizard's Woods, but nobody could give a sensible explanation of this weird name.

Tradition, handed down from father to son for hundreds of years, stories told with bated breath and many a backward glance into the gloom, said that, once upon a time, the forest was the abode of a great king and a wizard who quarreled bitterly, and then the woods became a terror to all the people of neighboring lands.

This happened so long ago that no person could tell the name of either king or wizard, and many professed to disbelieve the whole story, especially people living far away from the woods, who had seen none of its marvels and knew nothing of its perils.

Persons who dwelt near to its awful shades fully realized what dangers it held in its depths, and they were the ones who kept alive the tale of its past.

In this forest everything was unreal and false in appearance; nothing was what it appeared to be.

All the flowers, although apparently like the flowers everywhere, were savage biting or stinging things, reaching out on plant writhing stems to stab and gash and poison the careless passer-by. Instead of being beautiful blossoms filled with delicious fragrance, they breathed a deadly gas that overcame those who ventured near.

All the tempting fruits that hung from the branches, low and easy to reach, were bitter as gall and filled with a stinging powdery dust that blinded those who tasted them.

Lions and tigers haunted the dark glades, but instead of being carnivorous beasts they were as timid as mice; yet the sheep, rabbits and other usually timid creatures were terribly bloodthirsty, and as for the squirrels, they were simply terrible!

Sometimes scientific men, botanists and the like, went into the woods to study these strange wonders, but as there was no possible way to distinguish between the good and the bad things there, and they had no clue to the real way of avoiding the evils, they were immediately overcome by one thing or another and retired very soon, never to return.

Now not far from the highway that bordered the Wizard's Forest and on the other side of a broad marsh lived a boy named Valentine.

He was a lad who had grown up within sight of the perilous woods and had heard from his infancy all the weird tales about its mysteries, so that he was full of its lore.

When the scientific men came to the forest they often stayed at his mother's house, and thus he discovered that there were many things that he knew nothing about in the great world beyond the mountains and the woodlands.

After he had done his day's work, for his mother was a widow and he was her sole support, tilling the small field, hunting for snipe and duck in the marshes, sailing boats or guiding the scientists across the swamps, Valentine would read the books that he could borrow from the few neighbors and he thus became possessed of a furious thirst for knowledge.

That he never could go to college he knew, for he had no money to pay even the annual dues of the secret societies, such as the "Hi-Pie-Ea" or the "Socikit-Tum-Eli," yet he yearned to go there.

At last one day one of the professors of entomology, who was after some of the strange insects in the Wizard's Forest, told him that nowadays success came to the man who steadily pursued one object and that there was so much to learn that it was really quite impossible for a man to know it all, except, perhaps, a cartoonist, so that if he made himself master of one kind of learning he might be a great and famous man after all.

Valentine at first rather inclined to be a student of wild birds and such things, for he had read about them, as well as watched them carefully all his short life. But one day he happened to come upon a man who decided matters for him. This was old Shamus O'Shaughnessy, an ancient and feeble fellow who toiled at any job he could get, but who was descended from the kings of Ireland.

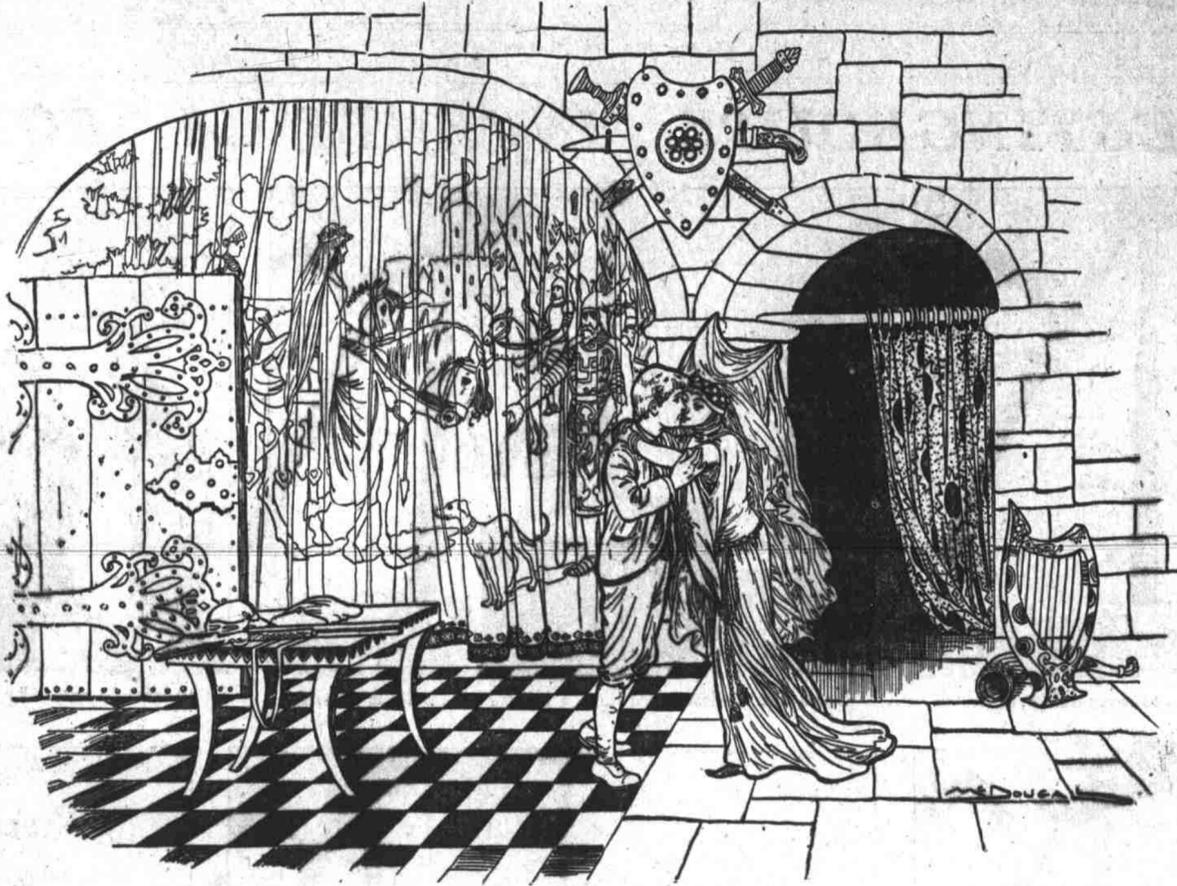
He was the only man in that region who could speak the ancient Gaelic language, which was the tongue of the Irish and Scotch, as well as the inhabitants of France, in remote times, and he offered to teach this rare and forgotten language to Valentine.

Gaelic sounds just like throwing hickory nuts against a tin roof, and is very difficult to learn, as it is very hard on the tongue and the throat, but it can be learned if one be patient and very smart indeed. Valentine was both, and Shamus was so delighted with the progress he made that he gave up working and came to live with the boy, so he could be near him and speak the language of the long-lost Celts to him constantly.

It made Valentine's mother quite dizzy to hear them talking this strange tongue day and night, but she was pleased with all that her good boy did, and she made no objection to the acts of Shamus, although his old clay pipe almost drove her out of the house at times with its dreadful fumes.

After a year or so Valentine had learned all that Shamus knew. Then, as he sought for somebody who could further instruct him, he became acquainted with another college professor, who was so pleased with him that he borrowed Gaelic books for him, from the Museum of Ancient Literature, books all written by hand by old-time monks in their lonely monasteries, illuminated with beautiful colored pictures and almost falling to pieces with age, although the pages were made of parchment.

When he had read all of these it became noised about all over the world that a remarkably clever boy was taking up the study of Gaelic, and soon



THEY HAD PROMISED TO WED

many another rare book was sent to Valentine by those interested in that language.

Presidents of colleges wrote to him and from all lands came the best wishes of Irish hearts that showed how deep is the love of Gaelic, although so few have the courage to wrestle with it.

Finally even the poor ignorant people among whom he lived came to know what he had accomplished and to be proud of knowing him, looking upon him as a marvel of learning; but proudest of all was Shamus O'Shaughnessy.

Well, the result of all this was that one day an old woman came to Valentine and said:

"My lad, I have heard of your great love of old books and I have come to tell you something. In the garret of my neighbor there lies a very old book, indeed, for I saw it only yesterday. When I asked my neighbor what the book was she told me that nobody knew because it was printed in a foreign language. I think she would sell it to you very cheap."

That was all Valentine waited to hear. The next moment he was on his way to her neighbor's house, where he soon made a bargain with the woman for the big old book, which had great brass clasps and a sort of lock with a key, as if its contents were too precious for every eye to look upon.

He did not even examine his prize before he bought it, but when he had it safe at home his eyes almost popped out of his head as he opened its great leather covers and saw that it was written in the very oldest Gaelic he had ever seen. That showed that the book must be hundreds, yes, thousands, of years old.

Still, what he knew of the language made it pretty easy to understand this old style, but he was then surprised even more.

The first page contained these words in great black letters:

"THE HISTORY OF THE ENCHANTED FOREST.

"Written by Ingulphus, son of Halfdan Bifrost the Viking.

"Being a truthful tale, and sorrowful, of the King of Loeris and his lovely daughter Lorimaire and of the bitter vengeance of the Wizard Ben Hafiz; also of the end of his son Ijit, carried away by the fiery Cormorant."

It was very natural that Valentine should assume that the Enchanted Forest must be that one near which he lived, and he began to read with eager interest a most interesting tale, which I will tell you very much as it was written:

KING GALDER OF LOERIS was the richest monarch that ever ruled over any land. His chests of oak were filled with golden rings that are money in many countries beside this, bars of silver, coins of Carthage, Rome, Constantinople and far Cathay, jewel-studded crowns and weapons of tempered steel, swords of famed Damascus and carved gems from ruined Babylon and Nineveh, ivory from Egypt and gold-dust from Phoenicia, glass cups from ancient Greece and long-forgotten Chaldea, carpets from Persia worth each a kingdom, robes from Arabia and skins of value, bear, beaver and otter, priceless and rare.

But of all his treasures the most prized and most perfect was his beautiful daughter, the Princess Lorimaire.

She was a jewel that was beyond compare, gold her bright hair, pearls her teeth, ivory her fair skin, sapphires her dazzling eyes, coral her sweet lips, she was a chest of treasure, her raiment shining and rich, her movements all the grace of swans, deer and eagles!

Where fell her bright eyes there men sank in worship; swords flashed in dazzling splendor in the battles men fought over her beauty in wild jealousy, yet to never a one gave she a tender glance.

Many were the suitors, kings' sons, jarls and great sea-kings, who came to Loeris, fell at her father's feet and begged for her hand, but she turned a deaf ear to them all.

Some made sheep's eyes at her, others threatened Galder with war and waste, others pined and went mad, but none touched her heart either by sighings, threats or pleadings; her heart was like a crystal mirror, clear and shining, having no image therein. One there was in Loeris who loved her beyond all

speaking, one who yet kept the secret of his love concealed until what time the maid grew to be a fair and noble woman, but he was an old man and knew that she would never cast an eye upon him.

This was the Wizard Ben Hafiz, who was a Turk, that is, he came from that distant land of Araby whence men bring perfumes, spices, great learning in the magic arts and gold-dust.

A Saracen was he, a man who knew other men's thoughts, who could read the stars, who knew the language of birds and animals, who rode through the air, walked in fire or on water, and practiced mystic arts beyond the thoughts of other men, be they kings or peasants.

He so loved Lorimaire that he wrought most evil spells to turn his old body into that of a youth of pleasant mien, having in this quest to do with dreadful demons and black, wicked spirits, much foul-smelling potions and marvelous high-sounding incantations, yet in all he failed either to become young or to please the princess.

Then when she had grown to be a tall and stately woman and he found that she did not look at him but with a sort of wonder at his age, his shining bald head and his long white beard, he bethought himself that his powers might cause her to love his son, although it helped not his own cause, and so he had the young man brought from Araby in a train of camels and elephants which were the wonder of all Loeris.

This son was called Ijit, and he was little better than the simple persons in Loeris, yet he, having a vast conceit in himself was forever looking upon his face in a silver mirror, which he carried as other men carry swords.

In the tournaments and jousts which warriors every day held among themselves to show their warlike and to distinguish themselves for bravery and skill, Ijit took no part, for he was afraid of scars and wounds. But he often played the guitar beneath Lorimaire's window casement or strolled in front of her bower clad in silken garments from the East, so richly clad that he resembled the peacocks on the garden wall!

Lorimaire laughed at him for his pains, yet Ijit cared nothing. Not so the wizard; he was angered deeply to see his spells turned to naught by a girl, and when he saw the princess smile and then laugh aloud at his son's foolish antics he resolved that she should never smile more.

He had spells that would surely work evil, although he could not compel a love for himself to be born; spells that would ruin even a whole kingdom, but he determined first to try what persuasion would do.

He went to King Galder and asked him to give the princess to his son.

The King laughed, and said: "Did I think you serious, my dear Hafiz, I would be painfully shocked, but I know 'tis but a jest; that your silly son has asked you to beg this boon of me and you ask to please that popinjay, not yourself. Lorimaire has refused kings and kings' sons, and 'twould be a sorry tale to send abroad that she had married a foolish Arabic dude."

"He is no dude, but a sorcerer's son!" cried old Hafiz.

"Even were he the sorcerer himself it wouldn't do!" replied King Galder, laughing, as he looked out of the window and saw Ijit on the grass. "He smokes cubeb cigarettes, and that alone would settle the matter, but the fact is that if he married her I would have not one but twenty wars on my hands, for all men would be against me did I do such a deed!"

The wizard offered treasures beyond all compare, but at last the jocular king told him to ask the princess herself.

The wizard well knew what would come of that, and so he threatened the king with dire vengeance, but that made Galder angry and he threw the sorcerer out of the window.

He was not hurt, as it was the first-story window, but his dignity was jolted so that he rose and without taking thought he pronounced a dreadful spell. So potent was it that it almost takes the breath away to tell of its effects. It had been all thought out, time and again, by the nasty old wizard, yet even he was astonished at its completeness.

It turned the castle into a pile of earth, the king, and all of his people into animals, insects, fish and birds, but the worst part of it was the fact that the very nature of each and every animal was alter-

ed and turned upside down, so that each was the very opposite in character of his appearance.

The plants, trees and flowers were as unlike what they seemed to be as it is possible to imagine, creatures known to men as mild and peaceful were ferocious, while the savage animals were timidous as lambs! Poison flowed in the crystal streams, unseen dangers lurked in the shady copse, and there was no way to know the true from the false, the good from the bad.

Alone in the midst of the ruin he had wrought stood the wizard, when suddenly he missed his son, and then he realized that he also had fallen under the spell which in his anger he had uttered, although he had taken pains to save the princess from it.

There he stood on the mound of earth, amazed and confused, for she could not comprehend what had happened to everything and everybody.

The wizard paid no attention to her, for he was wild with fright. He knew that to exercise any spell to restore a changed person to his original shape it, of course, was necessary to say the spell over the very body, and how was he to find his son without restoring everybody to his own shape!

"Oh, what has happened, Ben Hafiz?" cried the princess, when she saw that he was there.

"The worst that could happen!" responded Hafiz. "I have lost my son Ijit!"

"But where is my father and the castle?" she asked in dismay.

"Don't bother me about trifles!" replied the sorcerer. "I have no time for such. I seek my son!"

Then, as he realized that there would be little use in searching, he uttered the restoring spell, intending when he again had his son beside him to change everything into chaos again. This was the spell he uttered:

"BUAIDH NO BAS CRIEG AN FHT-HICH DAILACHADH CUMHNICH AILPENE DA THEARNAIDH CO DH-AINDHIOIN THEIREADH E!"

He waited and waited, but no change occurred, and then the princess, who knew something about magic, laughed and said:

"'Tis but a weak spell and works slowly; even like a tortoise does it move!"

The wizard saw that something was wrong, and, maddened, he shouted:

"Turn thou into a tortoise and crawl forever here in the dirt!"

Then he uttered the potent incantation, and she was changed into a tortoise at once and began to move slowly away!

Again he spoke the magic words to restore his son, and then suddenly a great, dark figure rose up out of the mound and spoke:

"I am Eblis, thy Master, oh, Ben Hafiz, and thy time has come! Thy power is gone and thy spell is impotent and useless to thee! Three times five hundred years shall pass ere the incantation may act again, and before that where wilt thou be? Thou hast used thy skill in base ways and in vain attempts, and now thou must even come with me, as thy son has gone with Cormorant!"

Before Hafiz could speak the demon seized him and vanished as suddenly as he had come, leaving the Enchanted Forest silent and deserted save by the marvelous strange beasts that do inhabit it to this day.

No man has lived to search out its secrets, although men do say that sometimes, on the eve of the day of Saint Patricius, one might walk even to the ancient high mound that lies by a dark pool and there spy a great tortoise moving slowly round about the site of King Galder's castle.

Whether this be fable or a true tale I wot not, yet wise men do testify that the Enchanted Forest lies exactly within the bounds of the ancient great kingdom of Loeris, and this can no man deny.

Mayhap a thousand years hence some great wizard may repeat the spell and release all these poor people cut off so basely in their joyous lifetime, hence I, Ingulphus, the son of Halfdan Bifrost, do write down this tale in my own hand that it may endure through all time.

TO SAY that Valentine was charmed with this story would be a weak statement. He was simply enraptured, especially when he reflected that he, perhaps, was the one person in all the world into whose hands it could have fallen and have been understood, as well as read, for he knew all about

Mystery Solved by a Bright Boy Who Learned to Read an Ancient Language and Found a Book Written in the Tongue

the Enchanted Forest, as well as ancient Gaelic. He felt that there was some meaning in this piece of good luck, and he determined to take advantage of the information contained in it, for it was quite plain to him now that the way to get along in the forest was to avoid all that looked nice and tempting and touch only the forbidding looking things.

He need not be afraid of lions and tigers, he saw at once, and as for ferocious sheep, cows and rabbits, they could be easily managed, as their teeth are not formidable and none of them can climb trees. All other terrors he realized were just as easily avoided so long as one was not carried away by an unreasoning fright, as all had been before who ventured within the shades of the woods.

At once he prepared to make the attempt, and while he was getting ready he happened to make a rough calculation of the time when the old book was written, and he figured out that it must certainly have been far more than a thousand years ago. So he took pains to learn the words of the Gaelic spell, difficult as that may seem to you or me, who know not how to pronounce even the simple word "CUMHNICH," and in a few minutes he had committed it to memory, marvelous as it may appear.

It was the eve of Saint Patricius' Day, although he didn't know it, and so he was not troubled by any animals at all as he went through the woods, and just at sunset came to a great mound in the middle of the forest.

It rose as high as a house and trees grew on its summit. There, in the golden rays of the setting sun, he saw an immense tortoise crawling slowly along the brown earth!

It stopped its slow motion to gaze at him with dark brown eyes, and it seemed to the boy to ask him a question by its glance. He went to it and said:

"Are you the Princess Lorimaire?" The tortoise looked up at him pleadingly, and then he remembered that he had spoken modern English, so he repeated the question in Gaelic.

The creature raised its head and showed evident pleasure, and he was sure it understood; but even yet he could scarcely believe that it could possibly be the princess alive after all these years.

Then suddenly he thought of the spell, and without hesitating he repeated it:

"BUAIDH NO BAS CRIEG AN FHT-HICH DAILACHADH CUMHNICH AILPENE DA THEARNAIDH CO DH-AINDHIOIN THEIREADH E!"

Hardly had the echo of his voice ceased ringing through the forest aisles when a lovely maiden, clad in shining silks, stood before him, smiling through her tears, and behind her rose a tall and stately castle! Before he could even look about him she spoke in ancient Gaelic, and said:

"Kind and good Prince, for such you surely must be to be able to free me from the spell that has held me these many ages, I thank you. My father will reward you, but I will forever bless you!"

Now Valentine was very much bewildered, and yet he saw on looking about that none of the other people had been restored to human forms, which he concluded was because they all had long since died a natural death, but the long-lived tortoise had, by remaining alive all these ages, been able to be again a girl.

He explained this to Lorimaire, and she, being a wise and sensible girl, readily agreed with him. They entered the castle, and she showed him all its wonders, but when he told her how much finer it would look if illuminated with electric lights she could not understand.

Of course, before very long they had fallen in love with each other, and when she retired to her chamber, with its stone walls hung with tapestry and its floor strewn with rushes, she kissed him "good-night," for she had promised to wed him.

She had learned much, but next day after he had shot some quail, for now all of the animals, birds, insects and all plants and other forest things were restored to their natural conditions, they ate breakfast and he told her everything he could remember about what had happened in the great world while she had been slowly circling about the earth mound.

Then she decided that, after they had married, they must both go to college together and she would learn all that modern culture required, after which they would come and live in the great castle, which Valentine assured her would be very comfortable when fitted with a good furnace in the basement, gas and electricity, as well as hot and cold water.

That afternoon they wended their way through the woods, seeing nothing more than a few timid squirrels and rabbits in the shade, but they took with them all of the finest jewels and much gold to pay for their college tuition, as well as for the new and up-to-date clothes which Valentine knew Lorimaire would need.

They were perfectly sure nobody would venture into the Enchanted Forest while they were gone.

If I should keep right on, and tell you all about the perplexities of Lorimaire when she got out of the woods and faced the new world it would really need a whole book!

After a time she had made such enormous progress in learning English that she could talk to people, and then they went to college together, but that was after they had been married, and, of course, a story is of no interest when it's about married people.

The only interesting thing about it is that the college authorities, when Lorimaire presented the college with a lot of ancient gold-inlaid armor, weapons and very rare, antique coins and vases that must have been thousands of years old even in Roman days, were so delighted that they let them study just when and how they pleased and allowed them to recite when they were ready, so in their little house they live there as happy as bees in a clover field.

When they return to the castle in the Enchanted Forest I am going to visit them, and it will certainly be a wonder if I don't dig up some good stories from what I find there in the dusty old volumes of parchment, thousands of years old.

WALTER McDUGALL