

How Piccola Became a Queen.

BY F. B. STANTFORD.

A small, slender little girl who looked like a gypsy! Such was Piccola! And her black eyes were full of laughter; her cheeks fresh and red; her teeth very white; and her hair dark and glossy. Away off on Sky Island where she lived, some of the people fancied she was a gypsy in earnest; others believed that she had been born in Italy or Spain; and three or four said she was nothing more or less than a little witch. The way of it was, she had been washed ashore from a shipwreck when a mere baby; and the kind old sailor, Captain Jebson, who found her down among the rocks and sea-weed, knew nothing more about her than her single name, which was worked in colored silk on her long dress. Taking her tenderly in his arms, he had brought her home to his wife, and she had lived with them ever since. The great broad ocean, the white sails floating away in the distance, the wash of the waves on the shore, and at night the bright light in the lighthouse, were what Piccola had always seen.

She ought to have been a happy little girl, perhaps; but she was not always. Sometimes she pouted, and everything went wrong. She wished she was anywhere except right there on that quiet island. "It was such a horrid, lonesome place!" she said. One summer morning, however, after awaking from a pleasant dream, she leaned out amid the honeysuckle at her bed-room window and watched a long while the clear, beautiful sky, and the sunbeams dancing across the waves. She had dreamed that a poor old woman called granny Jones, who lived in a hut on the shore, stood at the door crying because she was cold and hungry. Then she, Piccola, had led her into the warm room and given her food, and some of the money out of her savings-bank on the mantel-piece to buy her a new gown. It had made old granny so happy, that her wrinkled face lighted up with pleasure; and somehow or other, Piccola herself was so pleased with it all, that when she awoke, she could not forget it at once. While she looked out at a peaceful, cheerful morning, she thought she should be very sorry to leave her home for any other in all the world. If she tried never to be cross or ill-tempered, she knew everything would be ever so much better, and she meant to be kind once at least every day to somebody, as she had dreamed she had been to granny Jones. It would make her happy too; she knew it would.

Pretty soon she was called down to breakfast, and then shortly afterwards she put on her jolly little straw hat and tripped away to school. How the butterflies flew before her and the birds sang that morning! Piccola felt as though she would like to run, and shout, and play all day long in the green fields and woods, rather than sit in the school house. She was just bubbling over with fun. But the teacher shook her head, and frowned once or twice in a way that meant Piccola must take care what she was about. After recess, Piccola noticed, also, that the teacher looked tired and vexed, and that she frequently put her hand up to her head as though she had a headache. It was unkind perhaps, to annoy her. She would begin right there, Piccola said to herself, to do what she had thought of after dreaming about granny Jones.

Taking out her slate, she printed on it in large letters: "The teacher's head aches. I am going to be good. Will you?" Then she passed it to the little girl sitting at her right, who nodded, and handed the slate to another. In a few minutes, in fact, nearly every scholar in the room had seen it, and agreed to be quiet. The teacher, also, looking out stealthily

from under her hand, saw the slate by and by, and stepping down from her desk, intercepted it. But her manner softened very quickly when she had read Piccola's sentences. Going up the aisle, she passed the slate back to her, and then patted her head and smoothed her hair fondly a moment or two, while Piccola blushed.

"You can be a very gentle little girl sometimes; can't you dear?" the teacher whispered. "Everybody would love you a great deal if you were always as thoughtful."

Piccola kept her eyes on her geography. She wished everybody did love her—everybody in the world. As soon as school was over, she meant to hurry home and do another kindness. It would please her mother (she had always called the captain's wife her mother) if she helped her pull up the weeds in the garden. She wondered, that she had not done it before.

So it turned out that Piccola was kind twice that day instead of once as she had intended in the morning. And the next day she was up bright and early to assist her mother with the breakfast; then she remembered that one of her schoolmates was sick, and she carried her a pretty little bouquet before going to school. Finally in the afternoon, she went down to granny Jones's, and helped her gather drift-wood for her fire. The day following and the day after that she tended a little baby while its sick mother rested, went two or three errands cheerfully for the captain, and was kind more times than she took the trouble to remember. To do these trifling services for others soon began to give her so much pleasure that before the week was ended she did them one after another without stopping to think of herself, or that she was really being kind. And I suppose that is the reason it all came about just as it did during the next two years, and why there happens to be any story whatever to tell. Because she took pains to be kind to her mother and father, her schoolmates and the teacher, and every one else she knew, each and all were more careful to be kind to her. She soon grew to be the happiest little girl on the island. Weeks and months, and even years went by filled with pleasant memories.

But it was when Piccola was two years older that there took place what I wish particularly to relate. It began one cloudy day in early spring. Piccola had spent most of the morning and afternoon down on the shore, collecting shells and watching for the captain's fishing schooner to come in sight. He and all the other fishermen of Sky Island had been absent a long while at the banks of Newfoundland, and they were now expected back. As night came on, and the sky grew wilder and wilder with its tumbled masses of clouds, Piccola wished a great deal that he would hurry; for she understood very well that a storm was coming up.

"Ay, it's a going to blow little girl," said old granny Jones, standing in the door of the hut, and shading her eyes with her hand while she looked out at sea. "It's a-going to blow great guns, I'm thinking."

"O granny! what will they, will they say?" Piccola asked.

"Never fear, child; they'll weather it out one way or another, in those boats o' theirs. Many and many's the gale the captain and his mates have faced afore you were born. Come in and warm yourself, and don't worry your little head any more."

A bright drift-wood fire was burning on granny's hearth, and Piccola thought she would stay in just a minute or two, though she knew it was time for her to go home. Granny always had some stories to tell about when she was a little girl, or a fairy-tale that Piccola liked to hear. Perhaps she would think of one now, while they sat there before the fire and watched the sea.

And she did. Sitting bent over on

a small stool, and resting her elbows on her knees, and her chin in her hands, she told Piccola all she could recollect about that dreadful night when the shipwreck happened from which she, Piccola herself, was washed ashore.

"It had been growing dark all day, you see, child; 'bout the same 's it's been to-day, maybe," she said, looking far away into the fire before her, as though she found her memory there. "Most of the men folks thought it would be hard on the ships a-coming this way, from foreign lands, and it was. All the hawks were flying for the land the whole of the afternoon; and the wind it kept moaning round the corners and in the chimneys. Then 'bout dark it began to set in to blow so that the house would rock like a cradle."

Out-door black, heavy shadows were creeping across the ocean. Granny paused to look at them a moment, and Piccola thought she appeared troubled. There was the wind, too, beginning to moan in the chimney. It made Piccola nervous.

"You see, child," granny continued shortly, "I never see a storm rising but what I think of that night, somehow. I get to recollecting just how I was woke up in the middle of the middle of the night by the noise of the waves on the rock, and the booming of the cannon away off on the sea,—the cannon, you know, that the people aboard the ship were firing, to let us find out their distress. It made a great flash of flames, every time it was fired, that lit up the sky. But nobody could help them much, and before morning the ship broke in two across a great rock, and the people all went down with it."

"All but me, granny," Piccola said, when she had waited a minute for her to go on.

"Yes, all but you. The Lord brought you safe to land without even a scratch. And such a plump little thing as you were! I never have seen."

Granny told Piccola also, how all the neighbors came into the captain's to see her that morning, and how each took her up and looked at her little red cheeks and black eyes.

Piccola saw now, however, that it was beginning to rain, and she said that she must run home. The great black clouds, which had been casting their long shadows before them, were settling over the island, and it suddenly grew very dark. She bade granny a hasty good bye, drew her bit of a shawl round her, and hurried down the shore.

When she stopped to take breath after running some distance along the hard sand she happened to glance out on the point to the lighthouse, and then it occurred to her to wonder why the lamp in its tower was not lighted. Perhaps Mr. Clinch and his wife, who lived there, hadn't come back yet from the mainland. She remembered watching them in the morning go away in their sail-boat. Maybe they had been driven somewhere by the wind, and couldn't return. What if her father's vessel should be off there in the dark, and the sailors were looking for the light? she asked herself, frightened by the thought. Then she darted ahead toward home as fast as she could run. She would tell her mother.

But before Piccola had gone very far she took a desperate resolve for a little girl. Instead of wasting time to go up the hill to where she lived, she determined to run out to the light house and light the lamp herself the way she had seen Mr. Clinch do it many times. It was to be sure, raining harder and harder, and becoming darker every moment; but she kept in mind what might happen if the light was not there to warn the sailors where the rocks were. So on over the stone walk that led to the tower she hurried at full speed, with her hair streaming back in the wind.

Then, after reaching it, she swung open the door, and groped her way up the winding iron stairs to the room where the lamp rested in front of the large reflector. The gale was making a very a loud noise up there, and for a few moments Piccola was frightened and confused. She recollected, though, where the matches were kept, and succeeded soon in lighting a taper, with which she next set the big wick of the lamp ablaze, and sent a dazzling brilliant light through the darkness.

It flashed across angry, foaming waves a mile away. It lit up sails and rigging of the very vessel Piccola had been watching for all the afternoon; and the old captain, blinking his eyes in the face of it, quickly whirled his craft away from the threatening danger. On the island granny Jones watched it a moment or two, and then dropped her green paper curtains. Mrs. Jebson, Piccola's mother, also saw it the instant it appeared. And as for Piccola, her heart beat quick with excitement and pleasure when she saw what she had done. Jumping down the stairs two at a time, she rushed into the storm again towards home. The rain, the wind, and the darkness were now, however, if more than the little girl was able to contend against. She had scarcely gone a rod before a stout blast lifted her quite off her feet and threw her down bewildered. After that she only remembered being dreadfully frightened, and feeling wet and chilly. The dashing, deafening breakers she did not notice; nor did she hear the many voices calling her name, or see the lanterns moving hither and thither along the shore. When her mother, together with four or five others who had been searching for her everywhere, found her, she was lying unconscious on the ground, and her clothes were drenched by the rain and flying spray.

All that happened afterwards it would take some time to tell perhaps; for the doctor who came in the morning found that Piccola was going to have a fever, and it was nearly a month before she went out again. The school teacher, Piccola's school-mates, old granny Jones, the lighthouse keeper and his wife, the old fishermen everybody from far and near came to see her. Many of them watched and tended her, too, during the long nights when she lay sick; and the kindness she had been willing to show for all was now abundantly returned. "I'd work my hands off for her," said granny.

"She is a dear little girl," the school-teacher answered. "We all love her very much."

As soon as she was able to sit up and look out on the fields and orchard, now bursting into new life again under the warm sunshine, these many friends came to bring her little delicacies: and two or three stout old sailors who had been in the captain's vessel that stormy night carried her about out-door in a chair, so that she might breathe the fresh air. Just who it was, though that first thought of making her May queen on the first of day of May I do not know. Probably it was the school teacher, for it was she who had the May-pole erected on the greensward in front of the school house, and who trimmed the beautiful bower.

At an early hour all the children in the village school dressed in their prettiest clothes gathered before Piccola's home with a small triumphal carriage that had been made for her by the kind fishermen. In it Piccola was placed amid wild flowers and early foliage from the woods, and they went drawing her away up the road to the green, singing. A prettier sight had not been seen on the island for many a day, the grown-up people said, as they loitered here and there to watch them. And one may well believe it; for the morning was flooded with sunshine, and the freshness of the dew

was still in the air, birds were singing, everything seemed pure and calm and complete with joy, while the happy little people trooped along, and their young voices awoke the stillness.

When they arrived at the green, Piccola was handed from the carriage and led up into the bower of tangled shrubs, mosses and flowers, where she was duly crowned and seated on her throne. Such a glad merry time as they had after that all the day long! They shouted and danced and sang; they feasted from a long table spread under a great tree; and they played games and told stories till the round, red sun threw his parting rays across the sea.

"Now," said the teacher, drawing them all around her, "let me give the queen's loyal subjects a riddle to guess. What is it which we all possess that would change us for worse if we should lose—that has made Piccola royal among us,—that should make each and all of us royal too?"

"Kindness," answered two or three.

"Love," said some of the others.

"Both," replied a bright little girl. "It's love and kindness together that made Piccola our queen."

Next they joined hands, and danced about the May-pole while it grew dark, singing:

"Dance and trip and sing with glee
While the daylight's given thee."
—S. S. Times.

Out of Style.

And old and respectable Ostrich
Was signed with a wish to work cross-stitch—

"I could cover my eggs
And ridiculous legs
With rugs and with mats," said the Ostrich.

So she went to a friendly red Heifer,
And purchased some needles and zephyr,
Some canvas and crash,
And some burlap for cash.
"For I don't sell on trust," said Miss Heifer.

But when, casually, the old Ostrich,
Remarked that she meant to work cross-stitch,

Miss Red Heifer's smile
Made her feel that her style
Was obsolete,—'e'en for an Ostrich.

Said Miss Heifer, "My dear Mrs. Ostrich,
Art embroidery now is the 'boss' stitch—
If you'll pardon the slang,—
And it gives me a pang
To hear that you mean to work cross-stitch."

"My customers all follow fashion,
Why," here she flew into a passion,
"My position is gone,
Yes, for good, with the ton,
If they hear you've worked cross-stitch
My crash on!"

Do you fancy this settled the Ostrich?
No! she'd made up her mind to work cross-stitch;

So she picked up her naphyr,
And said "Madame Heifer,
I may be an old-fashioned Ostrich.

"And I may not know how to work banners.

But I have been instructed in manners;
I will wish you good day,
But first let me say—
(You might work it on some of your banners)—

"There is something still older than cross-stitch,"

And you just should have seen the fine
frost which
She put in her manner—

"'Tis worthy a banner;
It is courtesy, ma'am," said the Ostrich.
—St. Nicholas.

On Such an Eve.

Moethinks it were no pain to die
On such an eve, when such a sky
O'er-canopies the West.
To gaze my fill on you calm deep,
And like an infant, fall to sleep
On earth, my mother's breast.

There is peace and welcome in you sea
Of endless blue tranquillity.
The clouds are living things:
I trace their veins of liquid gold,
I see them solemnly unfold
Their soft and fleecy wings.

These be the angels that convey
Us weary children of a day,—
Life's tedious nothing o'er,—
Where neither passions e'ems, nor woes,
To vex the genius of repose
On Death's majestic throne.

—Sel.