

A SONG OF A BEGGAR AND A KING.

I READ that once, in Affrica,
A prince that there did raine,
Who had to name Cophetua,
As poets they did faine,
From natures workes he did incline,
For sure he was not of my minde,
He cared not for women-kind,
But did them all disdain.
But marke what happen'd by the way,
As he out of his window lay,
He saw a beggar all in grey,
Which did increase his paine.

The blinded boy, that shootes so trim,
From heaven downe so high,
He drew a dart, and shot at him,
In place where he did lye :
Which soone did pierce him to the quick,
For when he felt the arrow prick,
Which in his tender heart did stick,
He looketh as he would dye.
“ What sudden change is this,” quoth he,
“ That I to love must subject be,
Which never thereto would agree,
But still did it defie ?”

Then from his window he did come,
And laid him on his bed,
A thousand heapes of care did runne
Within his troubled head.
For now he means to crave her love,
And now he seeks which way to proove
How he his fancie might remove,
And not this beggar wed.
But Cupid had him so in snare,
That this poore beggar must prepare
A salve to cure him of his care,
Or els he would be dead.

And, as he musing thus did lie,
He thought for to devise
How he might have her company,
That so did maze his eyes.
“In thee,” quoth he, “doth rest my life ;
For surely thou shalt be my wife,
Or else this hand with bloody knife
The Gods shall sure suffice.”
Then from his bed he ‘soon’ arose,
And to his pallace gate he goes ;
Full little then this beggar knowes
When she the king espied.

“The Gods preserve your Majesty !”
The beggars all gan cry,
“Vouchsave to give your charity
Our childrens food to buy.”

The king to them his purse did cast,
And they to part it made great haste ;
The silly woman was the last

That after them did hie.

The king he cal'd her back again,
And unto her he gave his chaine ;
And said, " With us you shall remain

Till such time as we dye :

" For thou," quoth he, " shalt be my wife,

And honoured like the queene ;

With thee I meane to lead my life,

As shortly shall be seene :

Our wedding day shall appointed be,

And every thing in their degree :

Come on," quoth he, " and follow me,

Thou shalt go shift thee cleane.

What is thy name?—go on," quoth he.

" Penelophon, O king !" quoth she :

With that she made a lowe courtsey ;

A trim one as I weene.

Thus, hand in hand, along they walke

Unto the king's palace :

The king with courteous, comly talke,

This beggar doth embrace.

The beggar blusheth scarlet red,

And straight againe as pale as lead,

But not a word at all she said,

She was in such amaze.

At last she spake with trembling voyce,
 And said, "O king; I do rejoyce
 That you will take me for your choice,
 And my degree so base."

And when the wedding day was come,
 The king commanded straight
 The noblemen, both all and some,
 Upon the queene to waight.
 And she behav'd herself that day,
 As if she had never walk't the way;
 She had forgot her gowne of gray,
 Which she did wear of late.
 The proverb old is come to passe,
 The priest when he begins the masse,
 Forgets that ever clarke he was;
 He know'th not his estate.

Hear may you read, Cophetua,
 Through fancie long time fed,
 Compelled by the blinded boy
 The beggar for to wed:
 He that did lovers' lookes disdain,
 To do the same was glad and fain,
 Or else he would himself have slaine,
 In stories as we read.
 Disdain no whit, O lady deere!
 But pittie now thy servant heere,
 Lest that it hap to thee, this yeare
 As to the king it did.

And thus they lead a quiet life
During their princely raigne,
And in a tomb were buried both ;
As writers shew us plaine.
The lords they tooke it grievously,
The ladies tooke it heavily,
The commons cryed pittiously,
Their death to them was pain.
Their fame did sound so passingly,
That it did pierce the starry sky,
And throughout all the earth did flye,
To every prince's realme.
