



OLD IRISH FAIRY TALES.*

BY LADY GREGORY.

I. THE TALE OF THREE SONS.

THERE was a king long ago of Ireland, and he had three sons, and one of them was something silly. There came a sickness on the king, and he called his three sons, and he said to them that he had knowledge the only thing would cure him was the apples from Burnett's orchard, and he bade them to go look for them, for that orchard was in some far-away place, and no one could tell where it was.

The three sons went then, and they tackled their horses, and put on their bridles, and they set out, and went on till they came to three cross-roads. There they stopped, and they settled among themselves that each one of them would take one of the roads and go searching for the apples, and they would meet at the same place at the end of a year and a day.

The youngest son, that was a bit silly, took the crossest of the roads, and he went on till he came to a cottage by the roadside. He went in, and there was a withered old man in the house, and he said, "There is a great welcome before the King of Ireland's son!" The son was astonished at that, because he thought no one could know him. He got good treatment there, and in the course of the night he asked the old man did he know where was Burnett's garden. "I have a hundred years on me," said the

old man, "and I never heard of such a place. But I have a brother," he said, "that has a hundred years more than myself, and it may be he would know," he said.

So in the morning he gave a canoe to the king's son, and it went on of itself without him turning or guiding it, till it brought him to the old man's brother, and he got a welcome there and good treatment; and in the course of the night he asked that old man did he know where was Burnett's orchard. "I do not," said he; "though I have two hundred years upon me I never heard of it. But go on," he said, "to a brother I have that has a hundred years more than myself."

So in the morning he went into the canoe, and it went on of itself till it came to where the third old man was, that was older again than the other two, and the king's son asked did he know where was Burnett's garden. "I do not," he said, "although I have three hundred years upon me; but I will tell you how you will know it," he said. "Go on till you come to shore, where you will see a swan-gander standing by the water, and he is the one that can tell you and can bring you to it," he said. "And ask him to bring you to that garden in the name of the Almighty God."

So the king's son went on in the canoe till he came where the swan-gander was

* Taken down from the lips of Irish peasants.

standing on the shore. "Can you tell me," says he, "where can I get the apples that are in Burnett's orchard? And can you bring me there?" he said.

"Indeed," said the swan-gander, "I am no way obliged to your leader, or to whoever it was sent you to me and gave you that teaching. And those apples are well minded," he said, "by wolves, and the only time they ever sleep is for three hours once in every seven years. And it chances they are asleep for those three hours at this time, and so I will bring you there," he said.

With that he stretched out his wings, and he bade the king's son to get up on his back. And it was long before he could start flying with the weight that was on him; but he flew away at last, and he brought the king's son to Burnett's garden, and there was a high wall around it, but he flew over the wall, and put him down in the garden. The king's son filled his bag with the apples, and, when he had done that, he went looking around, and he came to a large cottage in the garden, and he went in, and there was no one in the house but a beautiful young girl, and she was asleep. So he went away; but he brought with him the gold rings and the gold garters that he saw there in the window.

He got up again on the back of the swan-gander, but it was hard for it to rise with the weight of the bag of apples. But it did rise at last, and it brought him to where the old man was that had three hundred years. And the king's son gave one of the apples to the old man, and no sooner did he eat it than his age was gone from him, and he was like a boy of fifteen years.

He went on then to the two other old men, and gave an apple to both of them, and, no sooner did they eat it than they were like young boys again.

Then the king's son went back to the cross-roads, for it was the end of the year and a day, and he was the first to come there, and he fell asleep. And the two brothers came, and they saw him there, and they stole the bag of apples from under his head, and they put in the place of it a bag of apples that were no use at all. Then they went on to their father's house, and they gave him the apples they had stolen, and he was cured on the moment; but they told him that what the youngest son was bringing to

him was poison apples, that would bring him to his death.

So the king was very angry when he heard that, and he went to his butler and he said, "Go out to the wood where my son is, and shoot him there, and cut him open and bring his heart here with you on the top of the gun, and throw it to the dogs at the door, for I will never have him, or anything belonging to him, brought into this house," he said.

So the butler got the gun, and went out to the wood, and when he saw the young man he was going to shoot him. "Why would you do that?" said he. So the butler told him all the father ordered him; and the young man said then, "Do not shoot me, but save me. And it is what you will do," he said. "Go into the wood till you meet with a woodcock, and shoot it, and take the heart out of it, for that is most like the heart of a man. And bring the woodcock's heart to my father's house," he said, "and throw it there to the dogs at the door."

So the butler did that and spared him, and took its heart and threw it to the dogs at the door.

It was a good while after that, the beautiful young lady came to the king's doorway in a coach and four, and she stopped at the door. "Send out my husband to me here," she said. So the eldest son came out to her. "Was it you came to the garden for the apples?" said she. "It was," says he. "What things did you take notice of in the cottage where I was?" says she.

So he began telling of this thing and that thing that never was in it at all. And when she heard that she gave him a clout that knocked his head as solid as any stone in the wall.

Then the second son came out, and she asked him the same question, and he told the same lies, and she gave him another clout that left his head as solid as any stone in the wall.

When the king heard all that, he knew they had deceived him, and that it was the youngest son had got the apples for his cure, and he began to cry after him and to lament that he was not living to come back again. "Would you like to know he is living yet?" said the butler. "I would sooner hear it than any word that ever I heard," said the king. "Well, he is living yet, and is in the wood," said the butler.

When the young lady heard that, she bade the butler to bring her where he was, and they went together to the wood, and there they found him where he had been living on the fruits of the trees through the most of the year. So when the young lady saw him, she said, "Was it you came to the house where I was in the garden?" "It was," says he. "What things did you take notice of in it?"

"Here they are," says he. And he put his hand in his pocket, and brought out the gold rings and the golden garters and the other signs he had brought away.

So she knew then he was the right one that was there, and she married him, and they lived happy ever after, and there was great rejoicing in the King of Ireland's house.

II. THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON.

I'll tell you a story now, and I never saw a man that could read an open book was able to tell a story out of the mouth.

King Solomon made a great house for himself, the best that was ever seen. And there was a man passing one day, and he stopped to give a look at it—the way I might give a look at that house there. "Tell me what there is stronger and finer than that house," said King Solomon. "I don't know anything that is stronger and finer than it is," said the man. "Well," said King Solomon, "unless you can give me an answer to that by to-morrow I'll have the head struck off of you," he said.

So the man went home, and he told all that to the daughter he had, and he said he could find no answer. "I will give you an answer," says she. "Is not God stronger than that house, and isn't heaven finer than what it is?" So he went the next day and he gave that answer. "I'll give you another question," he said then. "Tell me," says he, "what is the number of the stars of the sky? And tell me that by to-morrow," says he, "or I will strike the head off you."

So the man went home, and he could think of no answer, and he told the daughter what happened, and how King Solomon asked him to give him an account of the stars in the sky. "I will give you an answer," says the daughter. "If you were to put twelve candles lighting on the top of the highest mountain," says she, "and to be looking at them, and your sight to spread on you, you wouldn't know how many you were looking at, but you might think it was hundreds. And there is no one can tell the number of the stars," says she, "or give an account of them but God that made them."

So the man went back next day, and he gave that answer to King Solomon. "Where did you get that answer," says the king, "or who made it?" says he. "It was my daughter made it," says the man. "Bring her here till I'll have a look at her," says the king.

So the daughter was brought before him, and she was a fine, comely girl, and when King Solomon saw her he took a liking to her. "Will you marry me?" says he. "I will not," says she; "for if you marry me to-day, you might throw me off again to-morrow." I suppose she said that because she knew of him having seven hundred wives. "I will not do that," says he. "Well," says she, "I'll make a bargain with you that I'll marry you if you give me your word that the day you turn me out you'll let me carry away with me the three things I'll ask for, and to have them for my own."

So King Solomon agreed to that, and she married him, and she had a child. And after a while he tired of her, and said she might go home. "I will go," says she, "but I'll bring away the three things you offered to give me." So the first thing she brought away was the child, and the second thing was a bag of gold. She came then to King Solomon. "Now," says she, "since you said I could bring away three things, it is you yourself are the third. And come with me now," she says. So when King Solomon heard that he was afraid she would bring him with her, and that she would have power over him. So he asked her to stop with him, and so she did.

He began well and he ended badly, and Samson did the same, killing a lion that was going to eat him in the beginning, and killing himself in the end. It was through a woman that he lost his eyesight.