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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Minstrel's Song

Once, long, long ago, there lived in a country over the sea a king called René, who married a lovely princess whose name was Imogen.

Imogen came across the seas to the king's beautiful country, and all his people welcomed her with great joy because the king loved her.

"What can I do to please you today?" the king asked her every morning; and one day the queen answered that she would like to hear all the minstrels in the king's country, for they were said to be the finest in the world.

As soon as the king heard this, he called his heralds and sent them everywhere through his land to sound their trumpets and call aloud:—

"Hear, you minstrels! King René, our gracious king, bids you come to play at his court on May-day, for love of the Queen Imogen."

The minstrels were men who sang beautiful songs and played on harps; and long ago they went about from place to place, from castle to castle, from palace to cot, and were always sure of a welcome wherever they roamed.

They could sing of the brave deeds that the knights had done, and of wars and battles, and could tell of the mighty hunters who hunted in the great forests, and of fairies and goblins, better than a story book; and

because there were no story books in those days, everybody, from little children to the king, was glad to see them come.

So when the minstrels heard the king's message, they made haste to the palace on May-day; and it so happened that some of them met on the way and decided to travel together.

One of these minstrels was a young man named Harmonius; and while the others talked of the songs that they would sing, he gathered the wild flowers that grew by the roadside.

"I can sing of the drums and battles," said the oldest minstrel, whose hair was white and whose step was slow.

"I can sing of ladies and their fair faces," said the youngest minstrel; but Harmonius whispered: "Listen! listen!"

"Oh! we hear nothing but the wind in the tree-tops," said the others. "We have no time to stop and listen." Then they hurried on and left Harmonius; and he stood under the trees and listened, for he heard something very sweet. At last he knew that it was the wind singing of its travels through the wide world; telling how it raced over the blue sea, tossing the waves and rocking the white ships, and hurried on to the hills, where the trees made harps of their branches, and then how it blew down into the valleys, where all the flowers danced gayly in time to the tune.

Harmonius could understand every word:—

"Nobody follows me where I go,
Over the mountains or valleys below;
Nobody sees where the wild winds blow,
Only the Father in Heaven can know."

That was the chorus of the wind's song. Harmonius listened until he knew the whole song from beginning to end; and then he ran on and soon reached his friends, who were still talking of the grand sights that they were to see.

"We shall see the king and speak to him," said the oldest minstrel.

"And his golden crown and the queen's jewels," added the youngest; and Harmonius had no chance to tell of the wind's song, although he thought about it time and again.

Now their path led them through the wood; and as they talked, Harmonius said:—

"Hush! listen!" But the others answered:—

"Oh! that is only the sound of the brook trickling over the stones. Let us make haste to the king's court."

But Harmonius stayed to hear the song that the brook was singing, of journeying through mosses and ferns and shady ways, and of tumbling over the rocks in shining waterfalls on its way to the sea.

"Rippling and bubbling through shade and sun,

On to the beautiful sea I run;

Singing forever, though none be near,

For God in Heaven can always hear," sang the little brook. Harmonius listened until he knew every word of the song, and then he hurried on.

When he reached the others, he found them still talking of the king and queen, so he could not tell them of the brook. As they talked, he heard something again that was wonderfully sweet, and he cried: "Listen! listen!"

"Oh! that is only a bird!" the others replied. "Let us make haste to the king's court!" But Harmonius would not go, for the bird sang so joyfully that Harmonius laughed aloud when he heard the song.

It was singing a song of green trees, and in every tree a nest, and in every nest eggs! Oh! the bird was so gay as it sang:—

"Merrily, merrily, listen to me,
Flitting and flying from tree to tree.
Nothing fear I, by land or sea,
For God in Heaven is watching me"

"Thank you, little bird," said Harmonius; "you have taught me a song." And he made haste to join his comrades, for by this time they were near the palace. When they had gone in, they received a hearty welcome, and were feasted in the great hall before they came before the king.

The king and queen sat on their throne together. The king thought of the queen and the minstrels; but the



queen thought of her old home, and of the butterflies she had chased when she was a little child.

One by one the minstrels played before them.

The oldest minstrel sang of battles and drums, just as he had said he would; and the youngest minstrel sang of ladies and their fair faces, which pleased the court ladies very much. Then came Harmonius. And when he touched his harp and sang, the song sounded like the wind blowing, the sea roaring, and the trees creaking; then it grew very soft, and sounded like a trickling brook dripping on stones and running over little pebbles; and while the king and queen and all the court listened in surprise, Harmonius' song grew sweeter, sweeter, sweeter. It was as if you heard all the birds in Spring. And then the song was ended.

The queen clapped her hands, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the king came down from his throne to ask Harmonius if he came from fairyland with such a wonderful song. But Harmonius answered:—
"Three singers sang along our way, And I learned the song from them today."

Now, all the other minstrels looked up in surprise when Harmonius said this; and the oldest minstrel said to the king: "Harmonius is dreaming! We heard no music on our way today."

And the youngest minstrel said: "Harmonius is surely mad! We met nobody on our way today."

But the queen said: "That is an old, old song. I heard it when I was a little child; and I can name the singers three." And so she did. Can you?