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RIDDLES WISELY EXPOUNDED

- A. a.** 'A Noble Riddle Wisely Expounded; or, The Maid's Answer to the Knight's Three Questions,' 4to, Rawlinson, 566, fol. 193, Bodleian Library; Wood, E. 25, fol. 15, Bod. Lib. **b.** Pepys, III, 19, No 17, Magdalen College, Cambridge. **c.** Douce, II, fol. 168 b, Bod. Lib. **d.** 'A Riddle Wittily Expounded,' Pills to Purge Melancholy, IV, 129, ed. 1719. "II, 129, ed. 1712."
- B.** 'The Three Sisters.' Some Ancient Christmas Carols . . . together with two Ancient Ballads, etc. By Davies Gilbert, 2d ed., p. 65.
- C.** 'The Unco Knicht's Wowing,' Motherwell's MS., p. 647.
- D.** Motherwell's MS., p. 142.

THE four copies of **A** differ but very slightly: **a**, **b**, **c** are broadsides, and **d** is evidently of that derivation. **a** and **b** are of the 17th century. There is another broadside in the Euing collection, formerly Halliwell's, No 253. The version in The Borderer's Table Book, VII, 83, was compounded by Dixon from others previously printed.

Riddles, as is well known, play an important part in popular story, and that from very remote times. No one needs to be reminded of Samson, Œdipus, Apollonius of Tyre. Riddle-tales, which, if not so old as the oldest of these, may be carried in all likelihood some centuries beyond our era, still live in Asiatic and European tradition, and have their representatives in popular ballads. The largest class of these tales is that in which one party has to guess another's riddles, or two rivals compete in giving or guessing, under penalty in either instance of forfeiting life or some other heavy wager; an example of which is the English ballad, modern in form, of 'King John and the Abbot of Canterbury.' In a second class, a suitor can win a lady's hand only by guessing riddles, as in our 'Captain Wedderburn's Courtship' and 'Proud Lady Margaret.' There is sometimes a penalty of loss of life for the unsuccessful, but not in these ballads. Thirdly, there is the tale (perhaps an offshoot of an early form of the first)

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of The Clever Lass, who wins a husband, and sometimes a crown, by guessing riddles, solving difficult but practicable problems, or matching and evading impossibilities; and of this class versions **A** and **B** of the present ballad and **A-H** of the following are specimens.

Ballads like our 1, **A**, **B**, 2, **A-H**, are very common in German. Of the former variety are the following:

A. 'Räthsellied,' Büsching, Wöchentliche Nachrichten, I, 65, from the neighborhood of Stuttgart. The same, Erlach, III, 37; Wunderhorn, IV, 139; Liederhort, p. 338, No 153; Erk u. Irmer, H. 5, p. 32, No 29; Mittler, No 1307 (omits the last stanza); Zuccalmaglio, II, 574, No 317 [with change in st. 11]. A knight meets a maid on the road, dismounts, and says, "I will ask you a riddle; if you guess it, you shall be my wife." She answers, "Your riddle shall soon be guessed; I will do my best to be your wife;" guesses eight pairs of riddles, is taken up behind him, and they ride off. **B.** 'Räthsel um Räthsel,' Wunderhorn, II, 407 [429, 418] = Erlach, I, 439. Zuccalmaglio, II, 572, No 316, rearranges, but adds nothing. Mittler, No 1306, inserts three stanzas (7, 9, 10). This version begins: "Maid, I will give you some riddles, and if you guess them will marry you." There are seven pairs, and, these guessed, the man says, "I can't give you riddles; let's marry;" to

which she gives no coy assent: but this conclusion is said not to be genuine (Liederhort, p. 341, note). C. 'Räthsellied,' Erk, Neue Sammlung, Heft 3, p. 64, No 57, and Liederhort, 340, No 153^a, two Brandenburg versions, nearly agreeing, one with six, the other with five, pairs of riddles. A proper conclusion not having been obtained, the former was completed by the two last stanzas of B, which are suspicious. C begins like B. D. 'Räthselfragen,' Peter, Volksthümliches aus Österreichisch-Schlesien, I, 272, No 83. A knight rides by where two maids are sitting, one of whom salutes him, the other not. He says to the former, "I will put you three questions, and if you can answer them will marry you." He asks three, then six more, then three, and then two, and, all being answered, bids her, since she is so witty, build a house on a needle's point, and put in as many windows as there are stars in the sky; which she parries with, "When all streams flow together, and all trees shall fruit, and all thorns bear roses, then come for your answer." E. 'Räthsellied,' Tschischka u. Schottky, Oesterreichische Volkslieder, 2d ed., p. 28, begins like B, C, has only three pairs of riddles, and ends with the same task of building a house on a needle's point. F. 'Räthsellied,' Hocker, Volkslieder von der Mosel, in Wolf's Zeits. für deutsche Myth., I, 251, from Trier, begins with the usual promise, has five pairs of riddles, and no conclusion. G. 'Räthsel,' Ditfurth, Fränkische V. L., II, 110, No 146, has the same beginning, six pairs of riddles, and no conclusion.

* D 4, What is green as clover? What is white as milk? comes near to English A 15, C 13, D 5, What is greener than grass? C 11, D 2, What is whiter than milk? We have again, What is greener than grass? in 'Capt. Wedderburn's Courtship,' A 12; What is whiter than snow? What is greener than clover? in 'Räthselfragen,' Firmenich, Germaniens Völkerstimmen, III, 634; in 'Kranzsingen,' Erk's Liederhort, p. 342, 3; 'Traugemundlied,' 11; 'Ein Spiel von den Freiheit,' Fastnachtspiele aus dem 15n Jahrhundert, II, 555; Altdeutsche Wälder, III, 138. So, What is whiter than a swan? in many of the versions of Svend Vonved, Grundtvig, III, 786; IV, 742-3-7-8; Afzelius, II, 139, etc.; and Sin is blacker than a sloe, or coal (cf. C 15, Sin is heavier nor the lead), Grundtvig, I, 240, 247; IV, 748, 9; Afzelius, II, 139. The road without dust and the tree without leaves are in 'Ein Spiel von den Freiheit,' p. 557; and in Meier, Deutsche Kinderreime, p. 84, no doubt

Some of the riddles occur in nearly all the versions, some in only one or two, and there is now and then a variation also in the answers. Those which are most frequent are:

Which is the maid without a tress? **A-D, G.**
 And which is the tower without a crest? **A-D, F, G.**
 (Maid-child in the cradle; tower of Babel.)
 Which is the water without any sand? **A, B, C, F, G.**
 And which is the king without any land? **A, B, C, F, G.**
 (Water in the eyes; king in cards.)
 Where is no dust in all the road? **A-G.**
 Where is no leaf in all the wood? **A-G.**
 (The milky way, or a river; a fir-wood.)
 Which is the fire that never burnt? **A, C-G.**
 And which is the sword without a point? **C-G.**
 (A painted fire; a broken sword.)
 Which is the house without a mouse? **C-G.**
 Which is the beggar without a louse? **C-G.**
 (A snail's house; a painted beggar.)*

A ballad translated in Ralston's Songs of the Russian People, p. 356, from Buslaef's Historical Sketches of National Literature and Art, I, 31, resembles very closely German A. A merchant's son drives by a garden where a girl is gathering flowers. He salutes her; she returns her thanks. Then the ballad proceeds:

'Shall I ask thee riddles, beauteous maiden?
 Six wise riddles shall I ask thee?'
 'Ask them, ask them, merchant's son,
 Prithee ask the six wise riddles.'
 'Well then, maiden, what is higher than the forest?
 Also, what is brighter than the light?

a fragment of a ballad, as also the verses in Firmenich. The question in German, A 4, Welches ist das trefflichste Holz? (die Rebe) is in the Anglo-Saxon prose Salomon and Saturn: Kemble, Sal. and Sat. 188, No 40; 204; see also 287, 10. Riddle verses with little or no story (sometimes fragments of ballads like D) are frequent. The Traugemundlied, Uhland, I, 3, and the Spiel von den Freiheit, Fastnachtspiele, II, 553, have only as much story as will serve as an excuse for long strings of riddles. Shorter pieces of the kind are (Italian) Kaden, Italiens Wunderhern, p. 14; (Servian) 'The Maid and the Fish,' Vuk, I, 196, No 285, Talvj, II, 176, Goetze, Serbische V. L., p. 75, Bowring, Servian Popular Poetry, p. 184; (Polish) Wojcicki, I, 203; (Wendish) Haupt and Schmalzer, I, 177, No 150, II, 69, No 74; (Russian) Wenzig, Bibliothek Slav. Poesie, p. 174; (Es-thonian) Neus, Ehstnische V. L., 390 ff, and Fosterländskt Album, I, 13, Prior, Ancient Danish Ballads, II, 341.

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Also, maiden, what is thicker than the forest?
 Also, maiden, what is there that's rootless?
 Also, maiden, what is never silent?
 Also, what is there past finding out?'
 'I will answer, merchant's son, will answer,
 All the six wise riddles will I answer.
 Higher than the forest is the moon;
 Brighter than the light the ruddy sun;
 Thicker than the forest are the stars;
 Rootless is, O merchant's son, a stone;
 Never silent, merchant's son, the sea;
 And God's will is past all finding out.'
 'Thou hast guessed, O maiden fair, guessed rightly,
 All the six wise riddles hast thou answered;
 Therefore now to me shalt thou be wedded,
 Therefore, maiden, shalt thou be the merchant's
 wife.'*

Among the Gaels, both Scotch and Irish, a ballad of the same description is extremely well known. Apparently only the questions are preserved in verse, and the connection with the story made by a prose comment. Of these questions there is an Irish form, dated 1738, which purports to be copied from a manuscript of the twelfth century. Fionn would marry no lady whom he could pose. Graidhne, "daughter of the king of the fifth of Ullin," answered everything he asked, and became his wife. Altogether there are

thirty-two questions in the several versions. Among them are: What is blacker than the raven? (There is death.) What is whiter than the snow? (There is the truth.) 'Fionn's Questions,' Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, III, 36; 'Fionn's Conversation with Ailbhe,' *Heroic Gaelic Ballads*, by the same, pp. 150, 151.

The familiar ballad-knight of A, B is converted in C into an "unco knight," who is the devil, a departure from the proper story which is found also in 2 J. The conclusion of C,

As soon as she the fiend did name,
 He flew awa in a blazing flame,

reminds us of the behavior of trolls and nixes under like circumstances, but here the naming amounts to a detection of the Unco Knight's quiddity, acts as an exorcism, and simply obliges the fiend to go off in his real character. D belongs with C: it was given by the reciter as a colloquy between the devil and a maiden.

The earlier affinities of this ballad can be better shown in connection with No 2.

Translated, after B and A, in Grundtvig's *Engelske og skotske Folkeviser*, p. 181: Herder, *Volklieder*, I, 95, after A d.

A

a. Broadside in the Rawlinson collection, 4to, 566, fol. 193, Wood, E. 25, fol. 15. b. Pepys, III, 19, No 17. c. Douce, II, fol. 168 b. d. Pills to Purge Melancholy, IV, 130, ed. 1719.

1 THERE was a lady of the North Country,
 Lay the bent to the bonny broom
 And she had lovely daughters three.
 Fa la la la, fa la la la ra re

2 There was a knight of noble worth
 Which also lived in the North.

3 The knight, of courage stout and brave,
 A wife he did desire to have.

* 'Capt. Wedderburn's Courtship,' 12: What's higher than the tree? (heaven). Wojcicki, *Pieśni*, I, 203, l. 11, 206, l. 3; What grows without a root? (a stone).

4 He knocked at the ladie's gate
 One evening when it was late.

5 The eldest sister let him in,
 And pin'd the door with a silver pin.

6 The second sister she made his bed,
 And laid soft pillows under his head.

7 The youngest daughter that same night,
 She went to bed to this young knight.

8 And in the morning, when it was day,
 These words unto him she did say:

9 'Now you have had your will,' quoth she,
 'I pray, sir knight, will you marry me?'

10 The young brave knight to her replied,
 'Thy suit, fair maid, shall not be deny'd.

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- 11 'If thou canst answer me questions three,
This very day will I marry thee.'
- 12 'Kind sir, in love, O then,' quoth she,
'Tell me what your [three] questions be.'
- 13 'O what is longer than the way,
Or what is deeper than the sea?'
- 14 'Or what is louder than the horn,
Or what is sharper than a thorn?'
- 15 'Or what is greener than the grass,
Or what is worse then a woman was?'
- 16 'O love is longer than the way,
And hell is deeper than the sea.'
- 17 'And thunder is louder than the horn,
And hunger is sharper than a thorn.'
- 18 'And poyson is greener than the grass,
And the Devil is worse than woman was.'
- 19 When she these questions answered had,
The knight became exceeding glad.
- 20 And having [truly] try'd her wit,
He much commended her for it.
- 21 And after, as it is verifi'd,
He made of her his lovely bride.
- 22 So now, fair maidens all, adieu,
This song I dedicate to you.
- 23 I wish that you may constant prove
Vnto the man that you do love.

B

Gilbert's Christmas Carols, 2d ed., p. 65, from the editor's
recollection. West of England.

- 1 THERE were three sisters fair and bright,
Jennifer gentle and rosemaree
And they three loved one valiant knight.
As the dew flies over the mulberry tree
- 2 The eldest sister let him in,
And barred the door with a silver pin.
- 3 The second sister made his bed,
And placed soft pillows under his head.
- 4 The youngest sister, fair and bright,
Was resolved for to wed with this valiant
knight.
- 5 'And if you can answer questions three,
O then, fair maid, I will marry with thee.'
- 6 'What is louder than an horn,
And what is sharper than a thorn?'
- 7 'Thunder is louder than an horn,
And hunger is sharper than a thorn.'
- 8 'What is broader than the way,
And what is deeper than the sea?'
- 9 'Love is broader than the way,
And hell is deeper than the sea.'
- * * * * *
- 10
'And now, fair maid, I will marry with thee.'

C

Motherwell's MS., p. 647. From the recitation of Mrs
Storie.

- 1 THERE was a knight riding frae the east,
Sing the Cather banks, the bonnie brume
Wha had been wooing at monie a place.
And ye may beguile a young thing sune
- 2 He came unto a widow's door,
And speird whare her three dochters were.
- 3 The auldest ane 's to a washing gane,
The second 's to a baking gane.
- 4 The youngest ane 's to a wedding gane,
And it will be nicht or she be hame.

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- 5 He sat him down upon a stane,
Till thir three lasses came tripping hame.
- 6 The auldest ane's to the bed making,
And the second ane's to the sheet spreading.
- 7 The youngest ane was bauld and bricht,
And she was to lye with this unco knight.
- 8 'Gin ye will answer me questions ten,
The morn ye sall be made my ain.
- 9 'O what is heigher nor the tree?
And what is deeper nor the sea?
- 10 'Or what is heavier nor the lead?
And what is better nor the breid?
- 11 'O what is whiter nor the milk?
Or what is safter nor the silk?
- 12 'Or what is sharper nor a thorn?
Or what is louder nor a horn?
- 13 'Or what is greener nor the grass?
Or what is waur nor a woman was?'
- 14 'O heaven is higher nor the tree,
And hell is deeper nor the sea.
- 15 'O sin is heavier nor the lead,
The blessing's better nor the bread.
- 16 'The snaw is whiter nor the milk,
And the down is safter nor the silk.
- 17 'Hunger is sharper nor a thorn,
And shame is louder nor a horn.
- 18 'The pies are greener nor the grass,
And Cloutie's waur nor a woman was.'
- 19 As sune as she the fiend did name,
He flew awa in a blazing flame.

D

Motherwell's MS., p. 142.

- 1 'O WHAT is higher than the trees?
Gar lay the bent to the bonny broom
And what is deeper than the seas?
And you may beguile a fair maid soon
- 2 'O what is whiter than the milk?
Or what is softer than the silk?
- 3 'O what is sharper than the thorn?
O what is louder than the horn?
- 4 'O what is longer than the way?
And what is colder than the clay?
- 5 'O what is greener than the grass?
And what is worse than woman was?'
- 6 'O heaven's higher than the trees,
And hell is deeper than the seas.
- 7 'And snow is whiter than the milk,
And love is softer than the silk.
- 8 'O hunger's sharper than the thorn,
And thunder's louder than the horn.
- 9 'O wind is longer than the way,
And death is colder than the clay.
- 10 'O poison's greener than the grass,
And the Devil's worse than eer woman was.'

A. a. *Title.* A Noble Riddle wisely Expounded:
or, The Maids answer to the Knights Three
Questions.
She with her excellent wit and civil carriage,
Won a young Knight to joyn with him in mar-
riage;
This gallant couple now is man and wife,
And she with him doth lead a pleasant Life.
Tune of Lay the bent to the bonny broom.

WOODCUT OF
THE KNIGHT.

WOODCUT OF
THE MAID.

c. Knights questions. Wed a knight . . .
with her in marriage.

- a. Printed for F. Coles, T. Vere, I. Wright, and I. Clarke.
- b. Printed for W. Thackeray, E. M. and A. M.
- c. Licens'd according to Order. London. Printed by Tho. Norris, at the L[o]oking glass on London-bridge. And sold by J. Walter, in High Holborn.
- In Rawlinson and Wood the first seven lines are in Roman and Italic type; the remainder being in black letter and Roman. The Pepys copy has one line of the ballad in black letter and one line in Roman type. The Douce edition is in Roman and Italic.*
- A. 1¹. c, i' th' North : d, in the.
 3¹. c, This knight.
 5¹. a, b, c, d, The youngest sister.
 7¹. b, d, The youngest that same. c, that very same.
 7². a, with this young knight.
 9². d, sir knight, you marry me.
After 10, there is a wood-cut of the knight and the maid in a; in b two cuts of the knight.
 11². c, I'll marry. d, I will.
 12¹. c omits in love. 12². b, c, d, three questions.
 14¹. d, a horn.
After 15: a, Here follows the Damosels answer to the Knight's Three Questions: c,
- The Damsel's Answers To The Knight's Questions: d, The Damsel's Answer to the Three Questions.
 17, 18. b, c, d, thunder's, hunger's, poyson's, devil's.
 18². d, the woman.
 19¹. c, those.
 20. a, b omit truly.
 21¹. b, c, d, as 't is.
- B. *The burden is printed by Gilbert, in the text, "Jennifer gentle and Rosemaree." He appears to take Jennifer and Rosemaree to be names of the sisters. As printed under the music, the burden runs,*
- Juniper, Gentle and Rosemary.
- No doubt, juniper and rosemary, simply, are meant; Gentle might possibly be for gentian. In 2 H the burden is,*
- Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme :
- curiously varied in I thus :*
- Every rose grows merry wi thyme :
- and in G,*
- Sober and grave grows merry in time.
- C. 18. "Vergris in another set." M.
- D. *MS. before st. 1, "The Devil speaks;" before st. 6, "The maiden speaks."*

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THE ELFIN KNIGHT

- A. 'A proper new ballad entituled The Wind hath blown my Plaid away, or, A Discourse betwixt a young [Wo]man and the Elphin Knight;' a broadside in black letter in the Pepysian library, bound up at the end of a copy of Blind Harry's 'Wallace,' Edin. 1673.
- B. 'A proper new ballad entituled The Wind hath blawn my Plaid awa,' etc. Webster, A Collection of Curious Old Ballads, p. 3.
- C. 'The Elfin Knicht,' Kinloch's Anc. Scott. Ballads, p. 145.
- D. 'The Fairy Knight,' Buchan, II, 296.
- E. Motherwell's MS., p. 492.
- F. 'Lord John,' Kinloch MSS, I, 75.
- G. 'The Cambrick Shirt,' Gammer Gurton's Garland, p. 3, ed. 1810.
- H. 'The Deil's Courtship,' Motherwell's MS., p. 92.
- I. 'The Deil's Courting,' Motherwell's MS., p. 103.
- J. Communicated by Rev. Dr Huntington, Bishop of Western New York, as sung at Hadley, Mass.
- K. Halliwell's Nursery Rhymes of England, p. 109, No 171, 6th ed.
- L. Notes and Queries, 1st S., VII, 8.

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PINKERTON gave the first information concerning **A**, in *Ancient Scottish Poems* . . . from the MS. collections of Sir Richard Maitland, etc., **II**, 496, and he there printed the first and last stanzas of the broadside. Motherwell printed the whole in the appendix to his *Minstrelsy*, No **I**. What stands as the last stanza in the broadside is now prefixed to the ballad, as having been the original burden. It is the only example, so far as I remember, which our ballads afford of a burden of this kind, one that is of greater extent than the stanza with which it was sung, though this kind of burden seems to have been common enough with old songs and carols.*

The "old copy in black letter" used for **B** was close to **A**, if not identical, and has the burden-stem at the end like **A**. 'The Jockey's Lamentation,' Pills to Purge Melancholy, **v**, 317, has the burden,

'T is oer the hills and far away [*thrice*],
'The wind hath blown my plaid away.

The 'Bridal Sark,' Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, p. 108, and 'The Bridegroom Darg,' p. 113, are of modern manufacture and impostures; at least, they seem to have imposed upon Cromek.

A like ballad is very common in German. A man would take, or keep, a woman for his love or his wife [servant, in one case], if she would spin brown silk from oaten straw. She will do this if he will make clothes for her of the linden-leaf. Then she must bring him shears from the middle of the Rhine. But

* All that was required of the burden, Mr Chappell kindly writes me, was to support the voice by harmonious notes under the melody; it was not sung *after* each half of the stanza, or after the stanza, and it was heard separately only when the voices singing the air stopped. Even the Danish ballads exhibit but a few cases of these "burden-stems," as Grundtvig calls them: see *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser*, **II**, 221, **B** 1; 295, **B** 1; 393, **A** 1: **III**, 197, **D**; 470, **A**. Such burden-stems are, however, very common in Icelandic ballads. They are, for the most part, of a different metre from the ballad, and very often not of the same number of lines as the ballad stanza. A *part* of the burden stem would seem to be taken for the refrain; as *Islenzk Fornkvæði*, **I**, 30, of four verses, 1, 2, 4; 129, of two, the last half of the first and all the second; 194, of four, the last; 225, of five, the last two; **II**, 52, of five, the second and last two.

In later times the Danish *stev-stamme* was made to con-

form to the metre of the ballad, and sung as the first stanza, the last line perhaps forming the burden. Compare the *stev-stamme*, Grundtvig, **III**, 470, with the first stanza of the ballad at p. 475. If not so changed, says Grundtvig, it dropped away. Lyngbye, at the end of his *Færøiske Qvæder*, gives the music of a ballad which he had heard sung. The whole stem is sung first, and then repeated as a burden at the end of every verse. The modern way, judging by Berggreen, *Folke-Sange og Melodier*, 3d ed., **I**, 352, 358, is simply to sing the whole stem after each verse, and so says Grundtvig, **III**, 200, **D**. The whole stem is appended to the last stanza (where, as usual, the burden, which had been omitted after stanza 1, is again expressed) in the *Færøe* ballad in Grundtvig, **III**, 199, exactly as in our broadside, or in Motherwell's *Minstrelsy*, Appendix, p. iii. I must avow myself to be very much in the dark as to the exact relation of stem and burden.

'Store Fordringar,' Kristensen, *Jydske Folkeviser*, **I**, 221, No 82, and 'Opsang,' Lindeman, *Norske Fjeldmelodier*, No 35 (*Text Bilag*, p. 6), closely resemble German

M, N. In the *Stev*, or alternate song, in *Landstad*, p. 375, two singers vie one with another in propounding impossible tasks.

A Wendish ballad, Haupt and Schmalzer, I, 178, No 151, and a Slovak, Čelakowsky, II, 68, No 12 (the latter translated by Wenzig, *Slawische Volkslieder*, p. 86, *Westslavischer Märchenschatz*, p. 221, and *Bibliothek Slavischer Poesien*, p. 126), have lost nearly all their story, and, like German *K*, *L*, may be called mere wit-contests.

The *Graidhne* whom we have seen winning *Fionn* for husband by guessing his riddles, p. 3, afterwards became enamored of *Diarmaid*, *Fionn*'s nephew, in consequence of her accidentally seeing a beauty spot on *Diarmaid*'s forehead. This had the power of infecting with love any woman whose eye should light upon it: wherefore *Diarmaid* used to wear his cap well down. *Graidhne* tried to make *Diarmaid* run away with her. But he said, "I will not go with thee. I will not take thee in softness, and I will not take thee in hardness; I will not take thee without, and I will not take thee within; I will not take thee on horseback, and I will not take thee on foot." Then he went and built himself a house where he thought he should be out of her way. But *Graidhne* found him out. She took up a position between the two sides of the door, on a buck goat, and called to him to go with her. For, said she, "I am not without, I am not within; I am not on foot, and I am not on a horse; and thou must go with me." After this *Diarmaid* had no choice. 'Diarmaid and Grainne,' *Tales of the West Highlands*, III, 39–49; 'How Fingal got Grainne to be his wife, and she went away with Diarmaid,' *Heroic Gaelic Ballads*, p. 153; 'The Death of Diarmaid,' *ib.*, p. 154. The last two were written down c. 1774.

In all stories of the kind, the person upon whom a task is imposed stands acquitted, if another of no less difficulty is devised which must be performed first. This preliminary may be something that is essential for the ex-

ecution of the other, as in the German ballads, or equally well something that has no kind of relation to the original requisition, as in the English ballads.

An early form of such a story is preserved in *Gesta Romanorum*, c. 64, *Oesterley*, p. 374. It were much to be wished that search were made for a better copy, for, as it stands, this tale is to be interpreted only by the English ballad. The old English version, *Madden*, XLIII, p. 142, is even worse mutilated than the Latin. A king, who was stronger, wiser, and handsomer than any man, delayed, like the Marquis of Saluzzo, to take a wife. His friends urged him to marry, and he replied to their expostulations, "You know I am rich enough and powerful enough; find me a maid who is good looking and sensible, and I will take her to wife, though she be poor." A maid was found who was eminently good looking and sensible, and of royal blood besides. The king wished to make trial of her sagacity, and sent her a bit of linen three inches square, with a promise to marry her if she would make him a shirt of this, of proper length and width. The lady stipulated that the king should send her "a vessel in which she could work," and she would make the shirt: "michi vas concedat in quo operari potero, et camisiam satis longam ei promitto." So the king sent "vas debitum et preciosum," the shirt was made, and the king married her.* It may be doubted whether the sagacious maid did not, in the un mutilated story, deal with the problem as is done in a Transylvanian tale, *Halt- rich*, *Deutsche Volksmärchen*, u. s. w., No 45, p. 245, where the king requires the maid to make a shirt and drawers of two threads. The maid, in this instance, sends the king a couple of broomsticks, requiring that he should first make her a loom and bobbin-wheel out of them.

The tale just cited, 'Der Burghüter und seine kluge Tochter,' is one of several which have been obtained from tradition in this century, that link the ballads of *The Clever Lass* with oriental stories of great age. The

* Grundtvig has noticed the resemblance of G. R. 64 and the ballad. — Much of what follows is derived from the admirable Benfey's papers, 'Die kluge Dirne, Die indischen

Märchen von den klugen Räthsellösern, und ihre Verbreitung über Asien und Europa,' *Ausland*, 1859, p. 457, 486, 511, 567, 589, in Nos 20, 21, 22, 24, 25.

2. THE ELFIN KNIGHT

9

material points are these. A king requires the people of a parish to answer three questions, or he will be the destruction of them all: What is the finest sound, the finest song, the finest stone? A poor warder is instructed by his daughter to reply, the ring of bells, the song of the angels, the philosopher's stone. "Right," says the king, "but that never came out of your head. Confess who told you, or a dungeon is your doom." The man owns that he has a clever daughter, who had told him what to say. The king, to prove her sagacity further, requires her to make a shirt and drawers of two threads, and she responds in the manner just indicated. He next sends her by her father an earthen pot with the bottom out, and tells her to sew in a bottom so that no seam or stitch can be seen. She sends her father back with a request that the king should first turn the pot inside out, for cobblers always sew on the inside, not on the out. The king next demanded that the girl should come to him, neither driving, nor walking, nor riding; neither dressed nor naked; neither out of the road nor in the road; and bring him something that was a gift and no gift. She put two wasps between two plates, stripped, enveloped herself in a fishing-net, put her goat into the rut in the road, and, with one foot on the goat's back, the other stepping along the rut, made her way to the king. There she lifted up one of the plates, and the wasps flew away: so she had brought the king a present and yet no present. The king thought he could never find a shrewder woman, and married her.

Of the same tenor are a tale in Zingerle's *Tyroler Kinder u. Hausmärchen*, 'Was ist das Schönste, Stärkste und Reichste?' No 27, p. 162, and another in the Colshorns' *Hanoverian Märchen u. Sagen*, 'Die kluge Dirne,' No 26, p. 79. Here a rich and a poor peasant [a farmer and his bailiff] have a case in court, and wrangle till the magistrate, in his weariness, says he will give them three

questions, and whichever answers right shall win. The questions in the former tale are: What is the most beautiful, what the strongest, what the richest thing in the world? In the other, What is fatter than fat? How heavy is the moon? How far is it to heaven? The answers suggested by the poor peasant's daughter are: Spring is the most beautiful of things, the ground the strongest, autumn the richest. And the bailiff's daughter answers: The ground is fatter than fat, for out of it comes all that's fat, and this all goes back again; the moon has four quarters, and four quarters make a pound; heaven is only one day's journey, for we read in the Bible, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The judge sees that these replies are beyond the wit of the respondents, and they own to having been prompted by a daughter at home. The judge then says that if the girl will come to him neither dressed nor naked, etc., he will marry her; and so the shrewd wench becomes a magistrate's wife.

'Die kluge Bauerntochter,' in the Grimms' *K. u. H. märchen*, No 94, and 'Die kluge Hirtentochter,' in Pröhle's *Märchen für die Jugend*, No 49, p. 181, afford another variety of these tales. A peasant, against the advice of his daughter, carries the king a golden mortar, as he had found it, without any pestle. The king shuts him up in prison till he shall produce the pestle [Grimms]. The man does nothing but cry, "Oh, that I had listened to my daughter!" The king sends for him, and, learning what the girl's counsel had been, says he will give her a riddle, and if she can make it out will marry her. She must come to him neither clothed nor naked, neither riding nor driving, etc. The girl wraps herself in a fishing-net [Grimms, in bark, Pröhle], satisfies the other stipulations also, and becomes a queen.*

Another story of the kind, and very well preserved, is No 25 of Vuk's *Volksmärchen der Serben*, 'Von dem Mädchen das an Weisheit den Kaiser übertraf,' p. 157. A poor

* Ragnar Loðbrok (*Saga*, c. 4, Rafn, *Fornaldar Sögur*, 1, 245), as pointed out by the Grimms, notes to No 94, requires Kraka (*Aslaug*) to come to him clothed and not clothed, fasting and not fasting, alone and not without a

companion. She puts on a fishing-net, bites a leek, and takes her dog with her. References for the very frequent occurrence of this feature may be found in Oesterley's note to *Gesta Romanorum*, No 124, at p. 732.

man had a wise daughter. An emperor gave him thirty eggs, and said his daughter must hatch chickens from these, or it would go hard with her. The girl perceived that the eggs had been boiled. She boiled some beans, and told her father to be ploughing along the road, and when the emperor came in sight, to sow them and cry, "God grant my boiled beans may come up!" The emperor, hearing these ejaculations, stopped, and said, "My poor fellow, how *can* boiled beans grow?" The father answered, according to instructions, "As well as chickens can hatch from boiled eggs." Then the emperor gave the old man a bundle of linen, and bade him make of it, on pain of death, sails and everything else requisite for a ship. The girl gave her father a piece of wood, and sent him back to the emperor with the message that she would perform what he had ordered, if he would first make her a distaff, spindle, and loom out of the wood. The emperor was astonished at the girl's readiness, and gave the old man a glass, with which she was to drain the sea. The girl dispatched her father to the emperor again with a pound of tow, and asked him to stop the mouths of all the rivers that flow into the sea; then she would drain it dry. Hereupon the emperor ordered the girl herself before him, and put her the question, "What is heard furthest?" "Please your Majesty," she answered, "thunder and lies." The emperor then, clutching his beard, turned to his assembled counsellors, and said, "Guess how much my beard is worth." One said so much, another so much. But the girl said, "Nay, the emperor's beard is worth three rains in summer." The emperor took her to wife.

With these traditional tales we may put the story of wise Petronelle and Alphonso, king of Spain, told after a chronicle, with his usual prolixity, by Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Pauli, I, 145 ff. The king valued himself highly for his wit, and was envious of a knight who hitherto had answered all his questions. Determined to confound his humbler rival, he devised three which he thought unanswerable, sent for the knight, and gave him a fortnight to consider his replies, which failing, he would

lose his goods and head. The knight can make nothing of these questions, which are, What is that which needs help least and gets most? What is worth most and costs least? What costs most and is worth least? The girl, who is but fourteen years old, observing her father's heavy cheer, asks him the reason, and obtains his permission to go to court with him and answer the questions. He was to say to the king that he had deputed her to answer, to make trial of her wits. The answer to the first question is the earth, and agrees in the details with the solution of the query, What is fatter than fat? in the Tyrolese and the Hanoverian tale. Humility is the answer to the second, and pride the third answer. The king admires the young maid, and says he would marry her if her father were noble; but she may ask a boon. She begs for her father an earldom which had lately escheated; and, this granted, she reminds the king of what he had said; her father is now noble. The king marries her.

In all these seven tales a daughter gets her father out of trouble by the exercise of a superior understanding, and marries an emperor, a king, or at least far above her station. The Grimms' story has the feature, not found in the others, that the father had been thrown into prison. Still another variety of these stories, inferior, but preserving essential traits, is given by Schleicher, *Litauische Märchen*, p. 3, 'Vom schlaunen Mädchen.'

A Turkish tale from South Siberia will take us a step further, 'Die beiden Fürsten,' Radloff, *Proben der Volkslitteratur der türkischen Stämme Süd-Sibiriens*, I, 197. A prince had a feeble-minded son, for whom he wished to get a wife. He found a girl gathering fire-wood with others, and, on asking her questions, had reason to be pleased with her superior discretion. He sent an ox to the girl's father, with a message that on the third day he would pay him a visit, and if by that time he had not made the ox drop a calf and give milk, he would lose his head. The old man and his wife fell to weeping. The daughter bade them be of good cheer, killed the ox, and gave it to her parents to eat. On the