

THE RED ETIN

FROM THE BLUE FAIRY BOOK, EDITED BY ANDREW LANG



THERE were ance twa widows that lived on a small bit o' ground, which they rented from a farmer. Ane of them had twa sons, and the other had ane; and by-and- by it was time for the wife that had twa sons to send them away to seeke their fortune. So she told her eldest son ae day to take a can and bring her water from the well, that she might bake a cake for him; and however much or however little water he might bring, the cake would be great or sma' accordingly; and that cake was to be a' that she could gie him when he went on his travels.

The lad gaed away wi' the can to the well, and filled it wi' water, and then came away hame again; but the can being broken the maist part of the water had run out before he got back. So his cake was very sma'; yet sma' as it was, his mother asked if he was willing to take the half of it with her blessing, telling him that, if he chose rather to

have the hale, he would only get it wi' her curse. The young man, thinking he might hae to travel a far way, and not knowing when or how he might get other provisions, said he would like to hae the hale cake, com of his mother's malison what like; so she gave him the hale cake, and her malison alang wi't. Then he took his brither aside, and gave him a knife to keep till he should come back, desiring him to look at it every morning, and as lang as it continued to be clear, then he might be sure that the owner of it was well; but if it grew dim and rusty, then for certain some ill had befallen him.

So the young man set out to seek his fortune. And he gaed a' that day, and a' the next day; and on the third day, in the afternoon, he came up to where a shepherd was sitting with a flock o' sheep. And he gaed up to the shepherd and asked him wha the sheep belanged to; and the man answered:

“The Red Etin of Ireland
Ance lived in Bellygan,
And stole King Malcolm's daughter,
The King of fair Scotland.
He beats her, he binds her,
He lays her on a band;
And every day he dings her
With a bright silver wand
Like Julian the Roman
He's one that fears no man.
It's said there's ane predestinate
To be his mortal foe;
But that man is yet unborn
And lang may it be so.”

The young man then went on his journey; and he had not gone far when he espied an old man with white locks herding a flock of swine; and he gaed up to him and asked whose swine these were, when the man answered:

“The Red Etin of Ireland”—
(Repeat the verses above.)

Then the young man gaed on a bit farther, and came to another very old man herding goats; and when he asked whose goats they were, the answer was:

“The Red Etin of Ireland”—
(Repeat the verses above again.)

This old man also told him to beware of the next beasts that he should meet, for they were of a very different kind from any he had yet seen.

So the young man went on, and by-and-by he saw a multitude of very dreadfu' beasts, ilk ane o' them wi' twa heads, and on every head four horns. And he was sore frightened, and ran away from them as fast as he could; and glad was he when he came to a castle that stood on a hillock, wi' the door standing wide to the wa'. And he gaed into the castle for shelter, and there he saw an auld wife sitting beside the kitchen fire. He asked the wife if he might stay there for the night, as he was tired wi' a lang journey; and the wife said he might, but it was not a good place for him to be in, as it belanged to the Red Etin, who was a very terrible beast, wi' three heads, that spared no living man he could get hold of. The young man would have gone away, but he was afraid of the beasts on the outside of the castle; so he

beseechd the old woman to conceal him as well as she could, and not to tell the Etin that he was there. He thought, if he could put over the night, he might get away in the morning without meeting wi' the beasts, and so escape. But he had not been long in his hidy-hole before the awful Etin came in; and nae sooner was he in than he was heard crying:

“Snouk but and snouk ben,
I find the smell of an earthy man;
Be he living, or be he dead,
His heart this night shall kitchen[1] my bread.
[1] “Kitchen,” that is, “season.”

The monster soon found the poor young man, and pulled him from his hole. And when he had got him out he told him that if he could answer him three questions his life should be spared. The first was: Whether Ireland or Scotland was first inhabited? The second was: Whether man was made for woman, or woman for man? The third was: Whether men or brutes were made first? The lad not being able to answer one of these questions, the Red Etin took a mace and knocked him on the head, and turned him into a pillar of stone.

On the morning after this happened the younger brither took out the knife to look at it, and he was grieved to find it a' brown wi' rust. He told his mother that the time was now come for him to go away upon his travels also; so she requested him to take the can to the well for water, that she might bake a cake for him. The can being broken,

he brought hame as little water as the other had done, and the cake was as little. She asked whether he would have the hale cake wi' her malison, or the half wi' her blessing; and, like his brither, he thought it best to have the hale cake, come o' the malison what might. So he gaed away; and everything happened to him that had happened to his brother!

The other widow and her son heard of a' that had happened frae a fairy, and the young man determined that he would also go upon his travels, and see if he could do anything to relieve his twa friends. So his mother gave him a can to go to the well and bring home water, that she might bake him a cake for his journey. And he gaed, and as he was bringing hame the water, a raven owre abune his head cried to him to look, and he would see that the water was running out. And he was a young man of sense, and seeing the water running out, he took some clay and patched up the holes, so that he brought home enough water to bake a large cake. When his mother put it to him to take the half-cake wi' her blessing, he took it in preference to having the hale wi' her malison; and yet the half was bigger than what the other lads had got a'thegither.

So he gaed away on his journey; and after he had traveled a far way he met wi' an auld woman, that asked him if he would give her a bit of his bannock. And he said he would gladly do that, and so he gave her a piece of the bannock; and for that she gied him a magical wand, that she said might yet be of service to him if he took care to use it rightly. Then the auld woman, who was a fairy, told him a great

deal that whould happen to him, and what he ought to do in a' circumstances; and after that she vanished in an instant out o' his sight. He gaed on a great way farther, and then he came up to the old man herding the sheep; and when he asked whose sheep these were, the answer was:

“The Red Etin of Ireland
Ance lived in Bellygan,
And stole King Malcolm's daughter,
The King of fair Scotland.
He beats her, he binds her,
He lays her on a band;
And every day he dings her
With a bright silver wand.
Like Julian the Roman,
He's one that fears no man,
But now I fear his end is near,
And destiny at hand;
And you're to be, I plainly see,
The heir of all his land.”

(Repeat the same inquiries to the man attending the swine and the man attending the goats, with the same answer in each case.)

When he came to the place where the monstrous beasts were standing, he did not stop nor run away, but went boldly through among them. One came up roaring with open mouth to devour him, when he struck it with his wand, and laid it in an instant dead at his feet. He soon came to the Etin's castle, where he knocked, and was admitted. The auld woman that sat by the fire warned him of the terrible Etin, and what had been the

fate of the twa brithers; but he was not to be daunted. The monster soon came in, saying:

“Snouk but and snouk ben,
I find the smell of an earthly man;
Be he living, or be he dead,
His heart shall be kitchen to my bread.”

He quickly espied the young man, and bade him come forth on the floor. And then he put the three questions to him, but the young man had been told everything by the good fairy, so he was able to answer all the questions. When the Etin found this he knew that his power was gone. The young man then took up the axe and hewed off the monster's three heads. He next asked the old woman to show him where the King's daughters lay; and the old woman took him upstairs and opened a great many doors, and out of every door came a beautiful lady who had been imprisoned there by the Etin; and ane o' the ladies was the King's daughter. She also took him down into a low room, and there stood two stone pillars that he had only to touch wi' his wand, when his two friends and neighbors started into life. And the hale o' the prisoners were overjoyed at their deliverance, which they all acknowledged to be owing to the prudent young man. Next day they a' set out for the King's Court, and a gallant company they made. And the King married his daughter to the young man that had delivered her, and gave a noble's daughter to ilk ane o' the other young men; and so they a' lived happily a' the rest o' their days.