



# McDougalls Good Stories For Children



## Mystery of the Enchanted Valley and How It Was Solved by a Studious Lad's Clever Work

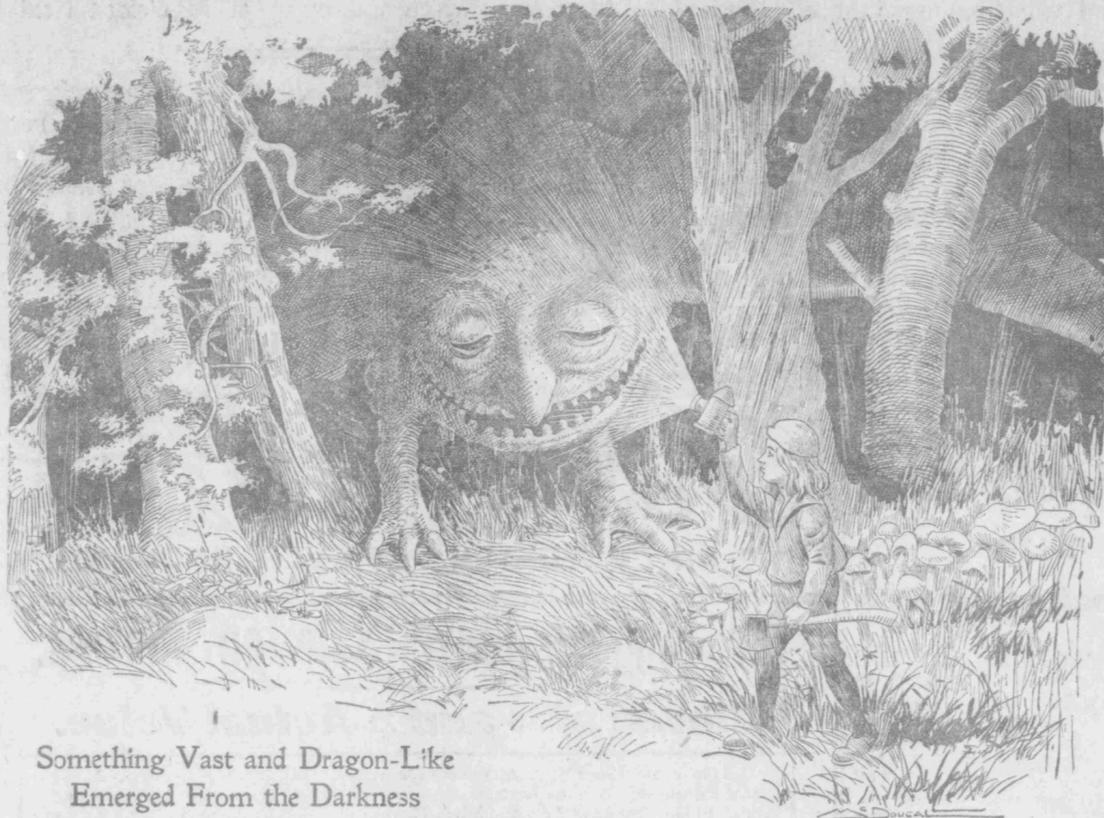
IN the kingdom of Atrophis, which is so small that it's not on the map, so there's no use in looking for it, yet which, small as it is, has many dark forests where the wild deer rove and even wolves are said to prowl, there lived a boy named Eric Hertzzen with an old man whom he supposed was his grandfather.

In truth, this old man, Victor Hertzzen, was not a relation of the boy at all. The lad had been found, when a small child, sitting beside the road in the woods on a winter evening.

The tracks of a carriage in the deep snow that lay in the road were the only signs that human beings had passed by and Victor always supposed that the child, who was little more than a baby, had fallen from the carriage and had not been missed; but, as strange things had and were still happening in the Dark Forest, perhaps some other explanation of the occurrence might be found.

The huntsman, however, didn't bother about finding any explanation; he expected that the people who had lost the pretty child would soon come seeking for him, but that never happened. The boy seemed completely forgotten, and as years passed Hertzzen, too, almost forgot that he was not his child, for he had named him after a son who was dead, and the boy grew up in the belief that the old man was really his grandfather.

Together they hunted the deer and the hares, and there was not a spot in the forest that the lad didn't know almost as well as he did the two rooms in their house, except, of course, the dread region known far and wide as the "Enchanted Valley," which he had never dared to explore, although he yearned to make the bold attempt.



Something Vast and Dragon-Like Emerged From the Darkness

tell you that myself. You bleed the wart, put some blood on a piece of bread and lay it in the road. Whoever picks it up will get your warts within a month!"

"Oh, but I don't want anybody else to get 'em," cried the boy. "I wish them to just go away!"

"Well, perhaps old Wizard Adams' book may have some remedy. I don't recollect. I never saw him sure warts."

"Did you ever see him conjure at all?" asked the lad.

"Oh, plenty of times," responded his grandfather. "He used to burn herbs that smelt awful, and say the most tremendous spells! The night before he died, I recall, he was fussing round until midnight, burning blue lights and striking up the atmosphere something dreadful, but nothing happened as far as I could see."

"Did he ever bewitch anybody that you knew?" inquired Eric.

"Well, I couldn't swear to that!" said Hertzzen. "You see, he didn't tell me his secrets; in fact, he died without revealing something that might have been very important, indeed, maybe!"

"Oh, what was it?"

"Well, the day before he passed away—owing me four dollars, too, which I never got—he went out just about dark into the woods and I followed him at a distance, having a curiosity to see what he was about, although I had never bothered about his doings before that. I now wish that I had taken advantage of my chances and learned more of his tricks. He had something hidden under his cloak, and I was curious to know what it was and what he was about to do with it."

"I followed him over to the big rock, and then down by the brook and across it until he came to the old blasted poplar tree that stands all alone where the road turns, and there he stopped and looked all about. I crouched behind a bush. When he was sure nobody was looking he walked away from the tree, and I thought he was measuring off the distance, but I never thought of counting his steps. I wish I had!"

"Why?" asked the boy.

"Because he stopped when he was a distance from the tree and took a spade from under his cloak and then he began to dig in a great hurry. When he had made a hole big enough to bury a cat in he took something else from beneath his cloak and put it in the hole, after which he hastily shoveled the earth into it and leveled it off."

"Then he hastened away and I followed him, for a storm was near; and, in fact, I only escaped a soaking because I ran home faster than he, for I was afraid he'd find that I had been there. He came home dreadfully wet and caught a cold that finished him."

"Well, I suppose you went and dug up what he had hidden?" guessed the boy.

"I tried to, but failed. In the first place, the rain had leveled the soil and completely concealed the spot by making all the field into a mud puddle, and in the day time I couldn't discover in just what direction he had walked away from the tree."

"Well, why didn't you dig all about?" asked Eric.

"That's exactly what I did, and I dug and dug for twenty years, but I never discovered the secret. After all, perhaps it was nothing of importance," said the old man with a sigh.

"I suppose that if I had put in all that time in doing some sort of work I would have been rich, but the thought of the treasure hidden there in the field kept me perpetually on the jump! I would wake at night and go out to dig, and I really think that I have turned over every inch of soil for a hundred yards about the old dead poplar tree!"

"Perhaps the wizard came back later that night and dug up the treasure himself!" suggested the boy.

"Gracious! I never once thought of that!" cried the huntsman. "But, no! That is quite impossible, as he was never out of my sight afterward. No, that's not the solution of it; but perhaps somebody else saw him bury it and came immediately to the spot and removed the treasure, whatever it was."

"But you said that you had seen the wizard go into the Enchanted Valley, and at night?"

"Yes, I have gone with him to carry his cloak and books more than once; but, of course, I remained

far from the confines of the gloomy place, and even had he commanded me to follow him I would never have dared to venture within its forbidding shades!"

"What do you suppose he did in the Enchanted Valley?" inquired Eric.

"I never even guessed near it," exclaimed the old man. "What would a wizard do in such a place but hob-nob with demons, elves and witches like himself, and practice his spells where no eyes could spy upon him! I am certain that all the wizard he did at home was very simple, and even a bit foolish, just stuff to delude the simple villagers and woodsmen hereabouts."

"Of course, he kept his strong conjuring secret and very private. You know anybody can grease a cat's tail to chase away cockroaches from a house, or hang the left hind leg of a frog in the milk house to keep cream from souring during a thunder storm. One doesn't have to go to a regular wizard for such spells, you know?"

"But, I say, I'd like to know who first found out the valley was enchanted?" asked Eric.

"Oh, that was discovered ages ago, for in all the ancient books it is mentioned as being filled with marvels and dangers," replied the old woodsman.

"I suppose that in the time of knights and armed men they perhaps used to venture in there in search of adventure, although I've never read about any of them doing it, and probably they never returned to tell their stories, anyhow! If they saw any more than I did they were simply scared to death, I reckon!"

"Well," said Eric, decidedly, "I intend to read those wizard books right off as soon as we get home, and after that I am going into the Enchanted Valley and see what's there!"

"Well, you may go, for it is a good thing for a lad to test his courage, and you need not be ashamed if fear seizes you. Better and bigger men than you or I have been frightened silly by what they saw only a few yards from the entrance of the valley, so if you come flying out as white as a sheet I shall not laugh at you, my son."

So when they reached home the woodsman got out the old books and Eric went at them instantly. They were filled with silly and foolish recipes that made even the boy smile, and were written in very high-sounding language, but without much sense.

Yet here and there he came upon what seemed to be the echoes of ancient magic from the days of the Arabians and Persians, when magic was magic; but these scraps were so incomplete that they only made him mad. A spell, for instance, that would change a man into a white horse was half told and then all muddled up with words and phrases in some unknown tongue; or the magic formula for flying through the air, or for becoming invisible, was written with spaces left blank, so that they were quite worthless to anybody who knew not the missing words.

"Gee! It's like a guessing contest in the papers!" cried Eric. "Only not half as easy! I'd rather tackle fifty puzzles than try to guess this!"

Still, he found that the old wizard had been a careful student of animals, birds and insects, and had written down the strange things that he had seen in the woods by day and night, so that, after all, Eric learned many a fact that he might have been unable to discover by himself, sharp as his eyes were.

He learned, too, what plants were used to cure diseases, both of men and animals, so that after a few weeks of study and experiment he was able to concoct some wonderful mixtures that cured his neighbors' cows and horses of various illnesses, their chickens of the pip, their cats and dogs of what ailed them, and soon he was in a fair way to be considered quite a little wizard himself, although that really, as he well knew, was nearly impossible until he was able to understand the mysterious books much better.

On the last page of one book were a number of figures, as if the wizard had been studying arithmetic, and below them was written this sentence:

"XXX PACES FROM THE || IOHAI ||  
III || I BURIED IT. AT SEVEN IN THE  
EVENING, IN THE FULL OF THE  
MOON, IN JUNE, AT THE EXTREME  
END OF THE SHADOW CAST BY  
THE IOHAIHII IT LIES UNTIL  
I COME."

This was the greatest and hardest puzzle of all! What the straight row of I's meant Eric could not imagine, and he pondered over it for many an hour until the woodsman grew alarmed at such absorption. One night he was thinking very hard, when suddenly a tiny ray of light shot across his mind.

"Perhaps the I's are merely parts of letters!" he exclaimed, and instantly copied them on another sheet of paper, after which he began to make other letters of them in an endeavor to form words that would make sense of the whole sentence. If you try it yourself you will see what a difficult task the lad had set himself.

Yet he was now so sure that he was on the right track that he never stopped, although it seemed impossible to find the correct words; but happening to think of the blasted poplar tree near which the wizard had buried the mysterious something all suddenly became clear as light itself! He rapidly added to the eight I's the needed marks to form the words

### "POPLAR TREE"

and the sentence was complete! It was June and the moon was full, too, and shining in on him as he read.

"To-morrow night at seven I'll go and dig there where the shadow ends!" he cried. "Whatever it was, perhaps it's there yet, and grandfather never came near it with his spade!"

He could scarcely wait for night to fall next day, but at last darkness came and the great round moon, perfectly full, rose over the low hill in the east.

The blasted poplar tree, gnarled and leafless, cast a long, straight shadow across the field like a finger pointing toward the hiding place of the treasure. At seven o'clock the shadow ended exactly where a small burdock grew, and pulling up the weed Eric began to dig hurriedly, as if he feared the shadow might move away and carry the buried treasure with it. In a few minutes the spade struck something with a sound that indicated metal, and with beating heart the lad turned up the hidden object.

What do you suppose it was?

Nothing at all but a mean little iron lantern! A sort of dark lantern, with a small square glass window in front, covered with rust and dirt!

When he had searched deeper and at last was quite certain that there was nothing more valuable nor important in the hole, he again examined the lantern in the moonlight and was disgusted, indeed. He took it home and then he told his grandfather all about it.

"Depend upon it, it's precious!" asserted the aged woodsman. "Wizard Adams never would have buried it so carefully, nor have made the memorandum in his book, unless it was very valuable to him; and, if to him, why not to you? Study farther in his old books and see what it says about lanterns. I've heard tell of magic lanterns ever now!"

"Oh, so have I!" said Eric, "but I know all about them. I saw a magic lantern exhibition in the church once!"

"Well, this is one of them, I am sure!" said the huntsman. "I will clean it up with sand-soap and polish it, after which, maybe, we can experiment with it. I never saw Adams use it, and never knew he owned it, so it was doubtless one of his secrets."

But the only reference to lanterns in any of the books was in a paragraph that was perhaps the most senseless of them all, that read thus:

"IF A MAN BUT POSSESS AND CARRY IN HIS HAND THAT WONDROUS LANTERN THAT EVIL THINGS TO FLEE IN TERROR FROM BEFORE ITS LIGHT HE MAY WALK IN THE DOTH DRIVE AWAY FEAR FROM THE HEART FIRST AND SECONDLY CAUSE ALL MANNER OF DREAD VALLEY IN PEACE AND NO THING SHALL TROUBLE HIM ONE JOT OR TITTLE."

"Now, that's a fine lot of rubbish!" cried Eric, and then he paused. Perhaps this, also, was a puzzle that was meant to be turned and twisted about in order to read properly, and in another minute he had thought of reading every other line, so that it then read:

## The Story of How a Beautiful Girl Was Rescued by a Long-Lost Prince Who Won Immense Wealth

"BUT IF A MAN BUT POSSESS AND CARRY IN HIS HAND THAT WONDROUS LANTERN THAT DOTH DRIVE AWAY FEAR FROM THE HEART FIRST, AND, SECONDLY, CAUSE ALL MANNER OF EVIL THINGS TO FLEE IN TERROR FROM BEFORE ITS LIGHT, HE MAY WALK IN THE DREAD VALLEY IN PEACE AND NO THING SHALL TROUBLE HIM ONE JOT OR TITTLE."

Then he understood! That night—for, of course, it was plain that one shouldn't carry a lighted lantern by day—he took it and went to the dread Enchanted Valley. Strange to say, he felt not in the least fear; his heart beat as calmly as if he were in his bed as he strode down the gloomy forest aisles.

Suddenly something vast and dragon-like emerged from the blackness before him, its immense form seeming covered with scales of glittering jet and its eyes of fire flashing tiny sparks!

That it had bat-like wings he saw, but they were so great that they were lost in the darkness on either side. Its head was like something resembling both a lizard and a parrot, and it had claws! Such claws as one sees on a Japanese carving, but simply tremendous! But when he flashed his light upon it to see it more clearly the thing uttered a silly, ridiculous little squeak of fear and flopped its great wings in terror, after which it suddenly squawked and flew away.

He walked on and on until the way was stopped by an immense rock, to which he saw a beautiful young girl chained. She reached out her hands to him as he approached, and said:

"At last you have come. I have waited many years, and I couldn't grow up until you came. Go back home and get a key that is hidden under the hearthstone and unlock this padlock that secures these chains."

"The chains are rusty and weak!" replied Eric. "I can break them with my axe!"

He raised the axe, but she said:

"Hold! Before you release me, ask me whatever you wish to know! I was placed here by magic as the wizard's question-answer, and here he came daily to learn from me all he desired; but once free from this rock I shall be unable to answer any of the mystic questions. So now learn what you will!"

"I hardly know of anything just now," replied Eric. "It's too sudden, you see!"

"Don't you wish to know who you are?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" demanded the boy, puzzled. "You think you are Hertzzen's son, but you are the king's son, thrown into the snow by his uncle, who wished to gain the throne, and found by the forester instead of perishing as the villain expected. Hertzzen has a diamond locket that was hung on a chain about your neck, and in it is the picture of your mother, the queen."

"I shall ask Hertzzen about this when we get home!" cried Eric, and then he shattered the chains that bound the girl.

"Come with me!" he said. "I will take you out of this place!"

"Before we go," said she, "I will show you where the wizard hid a great chest filled with gold and diamonds, which you will need when you go to your father, the king, for he is now so poor that he cannot pay his soldiers, and his brother is about to make war on him."

"That's all right," replied the boy. "If I am really his son, of course, I must go to him and help him out, but it seems very funny that grandfather never said anything about it."

Hertzzen laughed when Eric asked him who he was, and said:

"I found you in the snow; that's all I know about it. I never happened to think of telling you, that's all!"

When the girl opened the locket, however, and revealed the queen's portrait, the old forester was dumb with amazement, but finally cried:

"It must be true, for I now remember that the prince was lost! Fool that I am not to have thought you were the lost baby! I am a numbskull! To-morrow we will set out for the court, and you shall be restored to your parents!"

"First we must bring out all the gold, however, for my father will need it!" said Eric, and so early the next day they went to work, and, strange to say, neither of them saw anything more terrifying in the Enchanted Valley than some timid rabbits.

They took all the gold, more than six million dollars' worth, to the house, and then loaded it on a cart, after which they set off for the city of the king.

You can imagine what excitement was produced by Eric's appearance, and with what joy he was welcomed by his parents, who had never given up the hope of having him back again. The army was so delighted that every soldier offered to fight without pay, but there was plenty of money now in Atrophis for everybody, and when the wicked brother appeared with his army his soldiers instantly deserted and came over to fight for the king, who had the good, hard cash. So the bad brother was compelled to flee, and was never heard of again.

So Eric was now a prince; but, to tell the truth, he didn't like it very much, and often he would steal away with Elvira, the girl whom he had rescued, and spend the day in the woods with the huntsman, for he was tired of the display and pomp of the court.

When he is a king, which will happen some day, he is going to hire a good man to rule the people and spend his time traveling all over the world with Elvira, and perhaps he will come to America, so that we all may see him. So that's all at present about Eric, the amateur wizard.

WALT McDUGALL.