



Children's Stories That Never Grow Old.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

"DON'T cry," Hansel said to his sister, Gretel, "we will find our way home again."

A wicked stepmother and her husband, a woodcutter, had taken their children deep into the forest to lose them. They were so very poor that there was not food enough for the grown-up people, let alone the children, and the woodcutter's wife begged her husband to get rid of their children in this way.

But Hansel had overheard his father and mother talking over their plans, and made up his mind not to get lost. He had filled his pockets with small pebbles, and when his parents were not looking, had dropped them, one by one, as they were taken into the thick woods.

When they were left alone Hansel and Gretel were so tired they lay down under a tree and were soon fast asleep. It was dark night when they awoke, and Gretel, not knowing about the pebbles, began to cry.

"How are we ever to get home?" she said.



HANSEL comforted her, and said:

"Wait a little; we will soon find our way back;" and he told her about the white pebbles he had dropped along the path.

He took his little sister by the hand and followed the pebbles which they saw in the moonlight, and, after walking a long time, at last they came to their father's house.

The mother scolded them; but the father was glad that they had come back.

It was not long after this, however, that the wicked stepmother and their father took them again to the forest and left them.

Alas! this time poor Hansel did not have a chance to get the pebbles, so he dropped little crumbs of bread as they went along. But when the moon came up they could not find the crumbs; the birds had eaten them all. Though they walked for a long time they could not find their way out of the forest. They were very tired and



HUNGRY, and, after eating some wild strawberries which they found in the woods, they threw themselves down under the trees and went fast asleep. They were awakened by the song of a beautiful white bird which sat on a tree near them. As it sang it spread its wings and flew slowly before them. They followed the bird until it reached a little house, and there it lighted on the roof. When they came up to the house they saw that it was made of bread, covered with cakes, and the windows were candy.

"Oh," said Hansel, "I've never been so hungry in my life. I will eat a piece of the roof, Gretel, and you can eat some of the windows."

At that moment they heard a soft voice from within the house say:

"Nibble, nibble, gnaw; who is nibbling at my house?"



THE wind, the wind," the children answered, somewhat frightened; but they went on eating, they were so hungry.

Suddenly the door opened, and out came a very, very lame old woman. Hansel and Gretel were scared, and stopped eating in their fear of the ugly old woman.

"Oh, you dear children! Did you come to stay with me? Have no fear; no harm shall come to you," said the old woman.

She took them by the hand and led them into the house, and gave them lots of good things to eat. There were milk, pancakes, sugar, apples and nuts in plenty; and, after they had eaten all they wanted, she took them to two pretty little beds. Hansel and Gretel lay down and thought they were in heaven.

The old woman only pretended to be kind. She was really a wicked witch, who lay in wait to catch little children. Her little cake house was only meant to entice them. When children fell into her power she killed them and then cooked and ate them.



WHEN she saw Hansel and Gretel asleep in the little beds, she said to herself:

"That will be a dainty mouthful."

And then she seized Hansel and carried him into a stable and shut him up. He screamed and cried, but no one came to help him. The witch then went to Gretel and woke her with a rough shake.

"Get up, you lazy thing, and cook something for your brother." He is in the stable, and when he is fat enough I shall eat him," the wicked witch said.

Gretel went bitterly, but it did no good; she had to do what the witch told her. Every morning the witch crept to the stable and said:

"Hansel, stretch out your finger that I can feel how fat you are getting."

Hansel stretched out each time, instead, a little bone, which he



FOUND in the stable, and as the witch's eyes were dim, she thought it was Hansel's finger, and could not understand why he did not get fat. But after a while she grew angry, and said to Gretel:

"Let Hansel be fat or not, I shall kill and cook him today."

She then made a big fire to heat her oven, in which she intended to cook Hansel. Then she said to Gretel:

"Come here, girl; creep in and see if it is hot enough to roast your brother."

Though Gretel did not know it, she intended to cook and eat her, too. But Gretel was a bright little girl, and was not to be tricked.

"I do not know how I am to do it. Show me how," she said to the witch.

"Silly goose!" said the witch. "The door is very big; just see, I can get in myself," and she crept up and put her head in front of the oven door. At that Gretel gave her a big push that drove her far into the oven, and bang! she quickly shut the door.



THE wicked witch was herself roasted to death in the oven intended for the children!

Gretel ran quickly to the stable and let Hansel out, and together they went into the house, where they found large chests of pearls and jewels of all kinds. They filled their pockets, and started to find their way out of the witch's forest.

When they had walked for a long time they came to a great river.

"We cannot get over," said Hansel; "there isn't a bridge or a boat in sight."

"I see a white duck swimming out in the water," exclaimed Gretel. "If I ask her she will help us over, I know."

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"LITTLE duck, little duck, dost thou see? Hansel and Gretel are waiting for thee. There's never a plank or bridge in sight; Take us across on thy back so white."

The duck came to them, and Hansel seated himself on its back, and told his sister to sit beside him.

"No," replied Gretel; "that will be too heavy for the little duck."

The duck took them over, one by one, and, when they both were safely over, they found a path through the forest which led straight to their home, where they were received with cries of joy.

They emptied their pockets of the precious stones, and they all lived in happiness ever after.

