

not only tiresome, but it brought the old hag to her door to mock and laugh. So there he had to stand, the meanest, leanest-looking ass in England, and though the sun still shone and the bees hummed, Osmund thought the world was the blackest place in creation, and he hated the sight of the goody's hens, for he could think of nothing but that horrid egg; so, when one came near him, he kicked at it viciously. But he soon had cause to repent of even that, for, as you may have suspected, even Goody Greeneye's hens were quite different from others, and the moment he kicked at one she flew up on his back and began to scream and peck him so sharply that he bellowed with rage, and then the old witch ran out with her broomstick and fell to beating him over the head.

"Be still, you noisy ass!" she squealed, in a rage. "What! would you kick my hens? I'll teach you a lesson, Master Ass," and she whacked him so hard that poor Osmund saw stars, and was glad enough to be still when she and her hens departed toward the house, cackling and screaming in so much the same manner that he began to think that the witch must be a mixture of hen herself.

He understood now how the poor, dumb animals

had to suffer without redress, and he began to feel heartily sorry for every unkind word he had ever spoken to a horse, or a dog, or any other animal, and felt sure that he was smarting himself now for the thoughtless blows he had struck. It is neither brave, nor wise, nor kind to abuse dumb brutes, and I have no doubt that when we do, we get it all back at some time or another, though we may be so stupid that we do not know why we are punished. Osmund vowed in his heart that he would never be unkind to any dumb thing again, and then he tried to eat his thistles, but, dear me, they nearly choked him; indeed, they stuck hard and fast in his throat, and Goody Greeneye thought it very saving to feed him on them, for while they stayed in his throat he could not possibly eat anything else. You see, she was a horrid, mean, cold-blooded old monster of a witch, quite the worst I ever heard of. This is a really true story, as you must know, for the witch was truly tried for turning a man into an ass, and tried in an English court of law, so, of course, it must be every bit true.

Well, poor Osmund stayed all night under that tree, with the dew falling on his shaggy brown hide, and I can tell you he was cold and stiff the

next morning and full of thistles, when old Goody Greeneye came out, clad in her rocket, and began to pack two baskets with eggs and vegetables, which she finally swung across his back; and then, in spite of his braying and kicking, she mounted behind her baskets and set off for Exeter, beating her ass all the way and laughing at his efforts to run away with her or to throw her into a ditch. He tried very hard indeed to get rid of her, cutting all sorts of capers, plunging, and rearing, and kicking, until they drew near the town, and then poor Osmund lost his spirit, for he heard people laughing at him and calling him "a kicking scarecrow," and "a bag of bones," and "a skeleton ass," and he did not like to be made a jest of when he was in such bitter trouble; so he stopped kicking and prancing, and walked soberly along, with a hanging head, through the streets of Exeter to the market-place, where he found a great crowd buying and selling, and singing and fighting; for market day, in those times, was not much like market day now. It was almost like going to a circus; there was a Merry Andrew, and a dancing bear, and gypsies telling fortunes; and there were live sheep and cattle to sell, as well as poultry and eggs, but very few vegetables, hardly

any of those we have every day in the year, for people did not know anything then about raising the things that are raised so easily now. Lettuce and salads of all sorts were luxuries that came only from Holland, for the Dutch were the market gardeners of the world. There were some turnips, potatoes, and oats, and not much else, except the bright-hued serges for which Exeter was famous, and ribbons and finery that the country girls came to town to buy. But it was a gay scene: there was ballad singing, and bargaining, and selling, and no one had enjoyed market day more than Osmund; but now he stood there, forlorn enough, tied to a post, while Goody Greeneye sold her eggs and her herbs, and laughed and scolded with her gossips, and all the time her wretched-looking ass was the butt of every jest in that quarter of the market.

"Where did you get that beautiful beast, Goody?" laughed an honest farmer, eying Osmund with scorn.

"It's the goody's scarecrow come to life," explained a stout market woman, cackling with laughter.

"What does he eat? sawdust or nails, Goody Greeneye?" cried another bystander, joining in the jest.

But the old woman made no reply, she only grinned and leered at the ass in a knowing way.

"Hoot, 't is an ass made out of one of the witch's broomsticks," cried one observer, giving Osmund a sharp poke with her staff.

This was too much; Osmund could not endure it; and he let fly his heels, upsetting a basket of eggs and smashing them all over the last speaker, an old woman, who flew into a fury and began to beat him and scream. And then Goody Greeneye interfered, for though she liked nothing better than beating Osmund herself, she hated this particular old woman: she went at her, and in less than a minute they were fighting each other over Osmund's back, hitting each other with sticks and stones, but more often hitting him, while the other people stood by and laughed and applauded. This went on until Goody Greeneye really began to beat the other old hag black and blue, and then there was a cry for the watch—that was what they called a policeman then—and the witch, afraid of being punished for her ill temper, leaped on Osmund's back and made him run out of town at the top of his speed. A rabble of men, and women, and children, and dogs ran shrieking, and screaming, and barking behind,

calling Goody Greeneye "a witch!" and a great many other bad names, while poor Osmund got hit with more than one stone in their mad flight; he reached the old hut at last, sober, and weary, and frightened almost to death. If this was market day for an ass, what in the world would become of him? Besides, the goody was in a frightful humor and tied him up so tight to the apple tree that she nearly choked him, and went to her own supper without giving him even a drop of water. Poor Osmund, how wretched he was! and worse than all, he heard his brothers and sisters go by clamoring for him, and hunting everywhere for him, and never once thinking of Goody Greeneye's ass. And no help came—no, not a bit; he lived so for a long time, for it takes a long time to starve to death, and the witch gave him just enough to keep the life in him; it was only when she brought him into the hut, as she sometimes did at night, that he got any chance of revenge. You must know that the peasants often kept their animals in the same hut with themselves, and once when Goody Greeneye brought Osmund in and tied him, as she thought, tightly enough, he managed to reach up and snatch her straw bed from the attic floor and eat it, although she beat him and

screamed with rage. But after all, he could not punish her and he had to listen to her threats and her taunts.

"Ha, ha!" she would say; "how do you like being an ass, my fine gentleman? Mock old Goody Greeneye now, if you can — oh, ho!"

And then she would beat him with brambles until he bled. It was almost too much to bear, but Osmund had to bear it, until one market day something happened that made a great change for the poor lean ass.

Osmund had been mourned for lost by his family for twelve months and more, when it chanced that one fine day Goody Greeneye set out for market in a very good humor. She had on a fine new red rocket and carried a fine basket of new-laid eggs, and away she rode in high glee, though Osmund was so thin by this time that his bones were nearly through his skin. In fact, he cut such a miserable figure that he was an object of scorn and pity wherever he appeared; as soon as he got into the streets of Exeter, all the hard-hearted boys and girls began to laugh and make game of Goody Greeneye's ass, so that by the time he reached the market-place there was a whole string of children behind him, scream-

ing, and laughing, and pointing their fingers, instead of being sorry for the poor lean animal. But you can imagine that Osmund and Goody Greeneye were a strange-looking pair; she in her red rocket, with a high, steeple-crowned hat, and a big yellow starched ruff about her neck, and a short, stuffed petticoat that showed her great feet, and above all, her wrinkled, hateful, old face with the nose and chin nearly meeting. In fact, when she was angry it seemed as if it would need a crowbar to pry the two apart, and her eyes were as sharp as gimlets and as green as green could be; yet she rode with an air, sitting quite jauntily, perched on the back of the worst-looking ass you ever dreamed of. His poor long legs were knock-kneed and shambled along under a miserable, bony body, with a coat of shaggy brown fur so rough that it looked motheaten, and his long neck stuck straight out in front of him, with a big bony head on it, and his ears were at least half a foot longer than the ears of any other ass in the world, while his tail was a mean, black leather string, with a tassel on the end. When Goody Greeneye made him into an ass she almost forgot about the tail; it was an after thought and it looked like one, and had the feeblest kind of a whisk to it.

So, after all, it was certainly a strange sight, and it was scarcely a wonder that the children made such a fuss about it. Osmund himself was getting quite used to the ridicule, and walked along without any spirit, and stood in the same forlorn way in the market-place. But on this particular day the people soon had something else to do besides staring at him, for presently there was a great stir and racket, and the sound of galloping horses, and every one ran to see what was coming. And lo and behold, down a street that led to the market-place came a wonderful coach and four, with outriders and attendants on horseback, and the greatest jingling of chains and rumbling of wheels, and a cry went up: "The Princess — the Princess Beautiful!" and even poor Osmund turned to gaze.

On the procession came: first were six gay esquires, mounted on fine black horses, and dressed in blue and gold, with shining helmets on their heads and great swords at their sides; then came six more on bay horses, all dressed in green and silver, with helmets and swords; and then followed the great coach, a low, wide-topped coach, painted and gilded, with great glass windows, and it was drawn by four milk-white horses, with blue and

white plumes nodding on their heads, and on each horse was a rider, all dressed in silver and white, while in the coach sat the most beautiful princess in the world, — oh, yes, quite the most beautiful, — and she was wonderfully robed in white and rose color, and looked, Osmund thought, like a beautiful rose herself; and behind the coach were six more attendants in red and gold, mounted on beautiful gray horses. They all came on through the market-place, glittering in the sunshine, and the crowd fell back to make room for the Princess Beautiful, and bowed and applauded as crowds always do when they see any one very rich and very powerful. A whole lot of people are a great deal more foolish than just one, for they have the folly of all the crowd rolled up together, until it is the greatest lot of folly that can be put in one place; for it is very foolish to admire and praise any one for being merely beautiful and rich, and not because he is truly wise and good and great. However, this princess was good, as you shall hear, so she deserved the praise and admiration she received wherever she went. Now, as luck would have it, the peasants about Osmund were all so anxious to see this great personage that they began

to beat the poor ass from side to side, making him turn this way and that to make room, first on one side and then the other, and poor Osmund's sides were so sore that he could not help braying with pain. The princess heard it and turned her head in his direction; and as soon as she saw the wretched creature her heart was filled with compassion, and she lifted her hand, and in an instant the outriders shouted, the attendants galloped up, and the whole procession stood still, while the princess spoke in the sweetest of sweet voices.

"Pray tell me," she said, "whose ass is that?"

At this, Goody Greeneye came curtsying and smirking through the crowd, and tried to look sweet at the beautiful princess.

"Mine, please, your Highness," she cackled, bowing low. "I'm only a poor old woman, and I can't keep a better beast."

"She's an old witch!" screamed some one in the crowd.

The princess shuddered, and tossed a purse into the old hag's hands.

"I will buy your ass, Goody," she said, and signed to one of her attendants to take Osmund by the halter and lead him away.

You may be sure that the fine gentleman was in no haste to do this, for all the others began to smile at the figure he cut, leading the skinny old ass, with his wretched old halter of rope. But the princess frowned at their mirth, and they dared not object to her wishes, so on they went, in a fine cavalcade, with Osmund struggling along in the rear, and trying so hard to keep up that his wisp of a tail stood out straight; and the crowd behind laughed and squealed at the sight, while the fine gentleman who was leading the ass was in such a rage at the laughter he caused that he jerked the poor fellow along at a rate that nearly pulled Osmund's head off his lean neck. Away and away they trotted, and galloped, and ran, over the moors, up hill and down dale, until at last, as the sun was setting, they came in sight of a great castle of gray stone, perched on a hill that overlooked the blue sea, and guarded on that side by fierce, steep rocks, so high and so straight up that only a wild bird could ascend them, while at the foot leaped the sea, roaring and tossing its mane of foam like a lion looking for his prey. All around the other three sides of the castle wall was a moat, wide, and deep, and full of water; and the whole cavalcade, Osmund and all, went over a draw-

bridge into the castle yard; and then the bridge was drawn up with chains, and a great iron gate was closed behind them, so no one else might come in to harm the Princess Beautiful, or carry her off. And now the poor ass was sent off to the stables, while the princess and all her fine attendants were going into the castle to supper.

Osmund had hoped, when he got away from the horrid old witch, that he would find peace and comfort at last, even though he was an ass; but, dear me, it was out of the frying-pan into the fire. You see, the kind and beautiful princess could not see what all her servants were doing; and they were not as kind as she was; and her grooms and stable-boys at first roared with laughter at Osmund, and then were so angry to have this horrid, ugly old ass brought there, that he got only kicks and blows, and hardly any more food than Goody Greeneye had given him. As the princess entirely forgot him, he was very soon turned out into a field near the castle, and left to get food as he could. He stayed there, too, without any shelter either from the hot sun or the wind and rain, day in and day out, and no one remembered him any more, even to beat him. Poor Osmund! I think his

heart broke then, and, oh, how often he wished that he had never stolen Goody Greeneye's apples or mocked her; and he was very near dying of hunger and sorrow, when one day, while searching for food in this barren pasturage, he saw a new, fresh little green plant; and while he was smelling of it, rather suspicious lest it were Goody Greeneye's enchantment in a new form, — you see he had grown much wiser, — well, while he was sniffing at it, he heard a wee voice come from it.

"Eat me!" it said.

Osmund jumped as if a pin had been stuck in him.

"Oh, no," he thought; "not I, — 't is Goody Greeneye's egg in another shape;" but the little voice pleaded hard.

"Eat me," it said, "and your tongue will be untied, and you can tell your sorrows."

But Osmund could not be quite persuaded, and he was standing there looking at the plant, when lo and behold, there came the princess herself and a couple of damsels, her ladies-in-waiting, behind her. She tripped along as fair and sweet as the morning, and Osmund looked at her mournfully, wishing he could tell her all, and the tears ran down his face

and fell in such torrents, — he was broken hearted, you see, — that there was very soon a little rivulet flowing through the field; and when the princess came to it she gave a cry of surprise.

"Where in the world did this stream come from?" she asked. And then, looking about, she saw the poor ass weeping bucketfuls of tears at the end of the field. In an instant, she saw how badly her servants had treated the poor animal, and she stamped her foot on the ground with anger.

"What means this?" she cried; "did I not order that this ass should be fed and groomed as my own?"

"Yes, indeed, your Highness!" replied the two maids, all of a tremble, for the princess could be very stern when she had just cause for anger.

"Some one has done wrong," continued her Highness, and she walked along the edge of the brook made by Osmund's tears until she came up to him. "My poor, poor fellow," she said very kindly, "you are surely starving to death!"

"Oh, if I could only tell her the truth!" thought Osmund, and then he heard again the wee voice pleading so hard, "Eat me," and what do you think Osmund did?

Why, he ate that green plant, and, wonder of wonders! he found he could speak; and with the tears still streaming — the rivulet was nearly a lake now — he began to tell the princess who he was. At first, she was very much startled at hearing an ass begin to talk, but she was a princess, and she would not let any one think her afraid. Her ladies, however, ran screaming away in such haste that one of them fell into the lake made by Osmund's tears, and was dragged out with great difficulty by some servants who heard her cries.

Meanwhile, the Princess Beautiful was listening to Osmund's whole doleful story, and very indignant she was.

"My poor fellow," she cried; "you shall be righted. I'll send for that wicked woman, and make her turn you back into a man. I am a princess," she added, proudly, "and I will be obeyed; and as for my servants, they shall be punished, too, for their treatment of you. Come, with me, sir, and you shall have a good dinner, while I send for the witch at once."

And off she went, stately and fair in her splendid gown, walking along with the poor, dirty, starved, old ass, and if they had dared, her people would

have laughed at the sight, but they did not dare. I can tell you that there was an awful stir; the grooms and the stable boys were well punished for their neglect, and lived on dried apples and hot water for a week and a day, to make amends for their treatment of Osmund. Meanwhile, eighteen of the attendants of the princess rode off, with very long swords, and helmets, and suits stuffed with straw to protect them, and they carried a long stout bag, into which they popped Goody Greeneye, and brought her back to the castle in less than no time. Then the princess had her brought before her with Osmund, and she repeated the whole story to all her people, and commanded Goody Greeneye to make Osmund a man again.

At first, the old witch stoutly refused; indeed, she declared that Osmund deserved to be an ass, and should stay one forever.

"What did he do but mock me and steal my apples?" she cackled, strutting about like a hen with ruffled plumage. "He can stay as he is, for all I care, and eat thistles to the end of his days."

The princess gave her a terrible look, and signed to her attendants to bring a rope, which they suddenly threw over Goody Greeneye's head and, draw-

ing the noose very tight around her neck, made her eyes almost pop out of her head. She set up an ear-splitting squeal, and could hardly be hushed long enough to listen to the princess.

"You forget," her highness remarked, "that my godfather is the King of the Derricks, and he will carry you down to the bottom of the sea, if you dare to insult me. Turn this ass back into a man, witch, or I'll have you hung over the edge of the cliff until my godfather takes you away."

At the sound of this dreadful threat Goody Greeneye's knees shook under her, for she was fearfully afraid of the King of the Derricks, and she begged to be given only five minutes.

"Very well," said the princess; "five minutes, but not one second more!"

Goody Greeneye, with the rope still tight around her neck, fell on her knees and began to chant the strangest kind of a song, and she waved her hands and scratched the earth like a hen with her finger nails; and while she mumbled, and all the court of the princess looked on, the hide of the lean old ass began to fly off in fragments, and out of the litter of skin and hair rose Osmund, tall, and handsome, and strong as ever, — even in his dress of a

farmer's son the finest-looking young man in the place. The princess was so pleased that she ordered her servants to release Goody Greeneye, and perhaps she intended to thank her, but — dear me! — there was no time; the old hag had been too frightened to stay there a minute, and the instant the rope was off her neck — whiz! phiz! — there was a sound as if they had taken the cork out of a champagne bottle, and Goody Greeneye rose in the air, mounted on a broomstick, and flew off over the great cliff above the sea. The very last they saw of her was the flutter of her red rocket as she vanished through the hazy air, evidently on her way to France, where I expect she did no end of mischief.

Meanwhile, Osmund, quite restored to himself, was very thankful and very devoted to the princess, and his parents and all his eleven brothers and sisters came to rejoice and embrace him after having mourned for him as dead. And his dreadful experience had done him so much good, and taught him to be so kind, and merciful, and honest, that he grew to be a wonderfully wise and brave man, and I have heard reports, and I believe they are true, that he married the Princess Beautiful and lived ever after in the great Castle of Success that towered over the wide blue sea.

*LITTLE ELEANOR AND LITTLE
PEPPER*