



Titania.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, ACT 2, SC. 3.

TITANIA.

TITANIA, wife of Oberon, was queen of a band of fairies, who used to revel in the beautiful wood "a league from the town" of Athens.

An ancient law of that city invested a father with the power of disposing of his daughter to death or celibacy, if she refused the choice of a husband; accordingly, Egeus, a citizen of Athens, had chosen Demetrius, but his daughter, Hermia, because she refused to marry him, was about to be executed for a witch. In despair, she fled to the forest, and was discovered by Oberon, the king of the fairies, who was enraged at her disobedience. He then sought Titania, and demanded that she should give him the child, which he had stolen from her. Titania refused, and the king of the fairies, in revenge, made her fall in love with a man whose face was as ugly as a toad.

Titania, who had no right to refuse, was obliged to give up her child, and was left alone in the forest, where she was found by the other fairies, who were also in love with the ugly man. They then all went to the forest, and lived in a state of confusion.

At the end of the play, the king of the fairies, who was now in love with the ugly man, was found by the other fairies, who were also in love with the ugly man. They then all went to the forest, and lived in a state of confusion.



TITANIA.

TITANIA, wife of Oberon, was queen of a band of fairies, who held nightly revel in the beautiful wood "a league from the town" of Athens.

An ancient law of that city invested a father with the power of dooming his daughter to death or celibacy, if she refused the husband of his choosing; accordingly, Egeus, a citizen of Athens, came before Duke Theseus and demanded that this law be enforced against his daughter Hermia, because she refused to marry Demetrius, whom he had selected for a son-in-law. In defence, Hermia urged that she loved, and was betrothed to, Lysander; moreover, that Demetrius was beloved by her dearest friend, Helena, for whom until lately he had professed ardent affection.

Notwithstanding the justice of her pleas, Theseus had no right to put aside the law, and Hermia was allowed four days only—to choose between death and a life of "single blessedness," in preference to marriage with a man whose fickle, faithless passion she despised.

Lysander came promptly to the rescue of his lady fair. He proposed that she should fly from her father's house to the fairy-

haunted wood; there he would meet her, and conduct her thence to another city, where they could be married. Hermia joyfully accepted this timely suggestion, and confided her secret to Helena, who, for the poor pleasure of having the company of her recreant lover to the wood and back again, told Demetrius—knowing that he would follow Hermia, but knowing also that it would be in vain.

Now, between Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairies, there was at this time pending a conjugal quarrel, the cause being a beautiful little Indian boy belonging to the queen, whom Oberon ardently desired for a page, but whom Titania firmly refused to give up. On the very night when the Athenian lovers agreed to meet in the wood, Oberon had made a last appeal to his wife, with no better result than before; and he determined to punish her for what he considered her undutiful and contumacious behavior, and to acquire by stratagem what he had failed to gain by fair means or foul words. So he summoned into his presence a fairy by the name of Puck, renowned for his expertness in all mischievous tricks, and commanded him to find a little flower called "Love in Idleness," at the same time confiding to him the use to which he intended to put it:

Fetch me that flower—the herb I show'd thee once;
The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.

* * * * *
* * * Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,)
She shall pursue it with the soul of love;
And ere I take this charm off from her sight,

(As I can take it, with another herb,)

I'll make her render up her page to me.

Before Puck returned with the flower, Demetrius passed by, followed by Helena, whose love he repulsed so cruelly that Oberon, touched with compassion, resolved to redress her wrongs by laying the same spell on Demetrius that he intended for Titania. Accordingly, he commanded Puck, when he returned, to follow this Athenian, whom he would know by his dress, and to take care to touch his eyes with the magic juice just when the object they must next rest upon would be Helena.

Forthwith Puck started on his errand; but it chanced that the first Athenian he saw was Lysander, who, at a respectful distance from Hermia, was stretched on the turf fast asleep, as likewise was the lady. So Puck anointed Lysander's eyes; but when he awoke, the first thing he perceived was Helena, who, deserted by Demetrius, was trying to find her way out of the wood. Immediately his love was transferred from Hermia to Helena, and leaving his true love still sleeping, he followed his new love with compliments and courtship.

About this time, Theseus, Duke of Athens, was on the eve of marriage with Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, and a company of actors who were preparing "a sweet comedy" to be performed in their august presence, in honor of the nuptials, assembled in this wood to rehearse the play. It happened that the spot selected for this purpose was near the "close and consecrated bower" of Queen Titania, wherein she now lay sleeping. Oberon, hastening to play his magic trick upon his wife, noted these "hempen home-spuns," and selected Bottom, a coarse, ignorant weaver, from among them, to be the first object that Titania should behold on awaking.

Of course the exquisite Titania straightway doted on this

"monster," whom Oberon had made even more ridiculous, by placing an ass's head on his brawny shoulders; she lured him away from his companions, heaped upon him her sweet favors, and put her sprites at his command.

Meantime Hermia awoke, to find her lover gone; and in looking for him she came upon Demetrius, who at once resumed his unwelcome suit. Oberon, passing that way, overheard their conversation, and discovered the mischief Puck had done by mistaking Lysander for Demetrius; but the blunder was easily rectified by the fairy king, who anointed the lovers' eyes with his love-juice, and then had their respective ladies brought before them at the proper moment.

Oberon found little difficulty in securing his page, now that his queen's whole soul was occupied only with Bottom, the weaver; and having accomplished his purpose, he took pity upon her ridiculous delusion, and released her from the spell. Then, all being harmony again, Oberon caused the events of the night to appear, to the "human mortals" concerned, but as a Midsummer Night's Dream.

Of course the lovers were married according to their hearts' desire, and the beneficent purposes of the "wee folk."

"Farewell rewards and fairies!

Good housewives now may say,

For now foule sluts in dairies

Doe fare as well as they;

And though they sweepe their hearths no less

Than mayds were wont to doe,

Yet who of late for cleanlinesse

Finds sixpence in her shoe?"

Had we lived in the days of a more beautiful and less sophisticated superstition than that of this table-tipping generation, we had scarcely ventured to arraign a *bona fide* fairy queen before our vulgar tribunal; indeed, as it is, we have "screwed our courage to the sticking-point" of this task, only by remembering that we have nothing to say that could offend faërial majesty, or tempt its prompt revenge.

Since those Swedenborgs of the elfin faith—Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm—have spoken, no one can deny to the tricky sprites strongly marked individualities, physical and mental; among no people are the pure affections more tenderly cultivated, the unworthy more severely rooted up—the lives of most of them being devoted to the rewarding of virtue and the punishing of vice.

Titania, however, is not to be classed with these moral economists: she is a sort of queen-bee in the fairy hive; her sole business is to be beautiful, and to enjoy the beautiful. She is the perfect fairy queen—exquisite, dainty, luxurious, self-willed, capricious, coquettish; and thoroughly royal in one and all. In her feud with her husband, King Oberon, she compels our sympathy throughout; she is in the right, and she maintains her position with commendable firmness and dignity. As to the shameful trick played upon her delicate fancy, we overlook the ridicule in which it involves her "style," to admire her tender solicitude for her new love, her graceful dalliance, and her lavish hospitality.

Though Titania is introduced to us in the heat of her temporary hostility to her liege lord, it must be confessed that their misunderstanding, especially on her part, is widely removed from the vulgar squabbles of "human mortals." The queen's argument for peace—not on her own account, but because their dissension is