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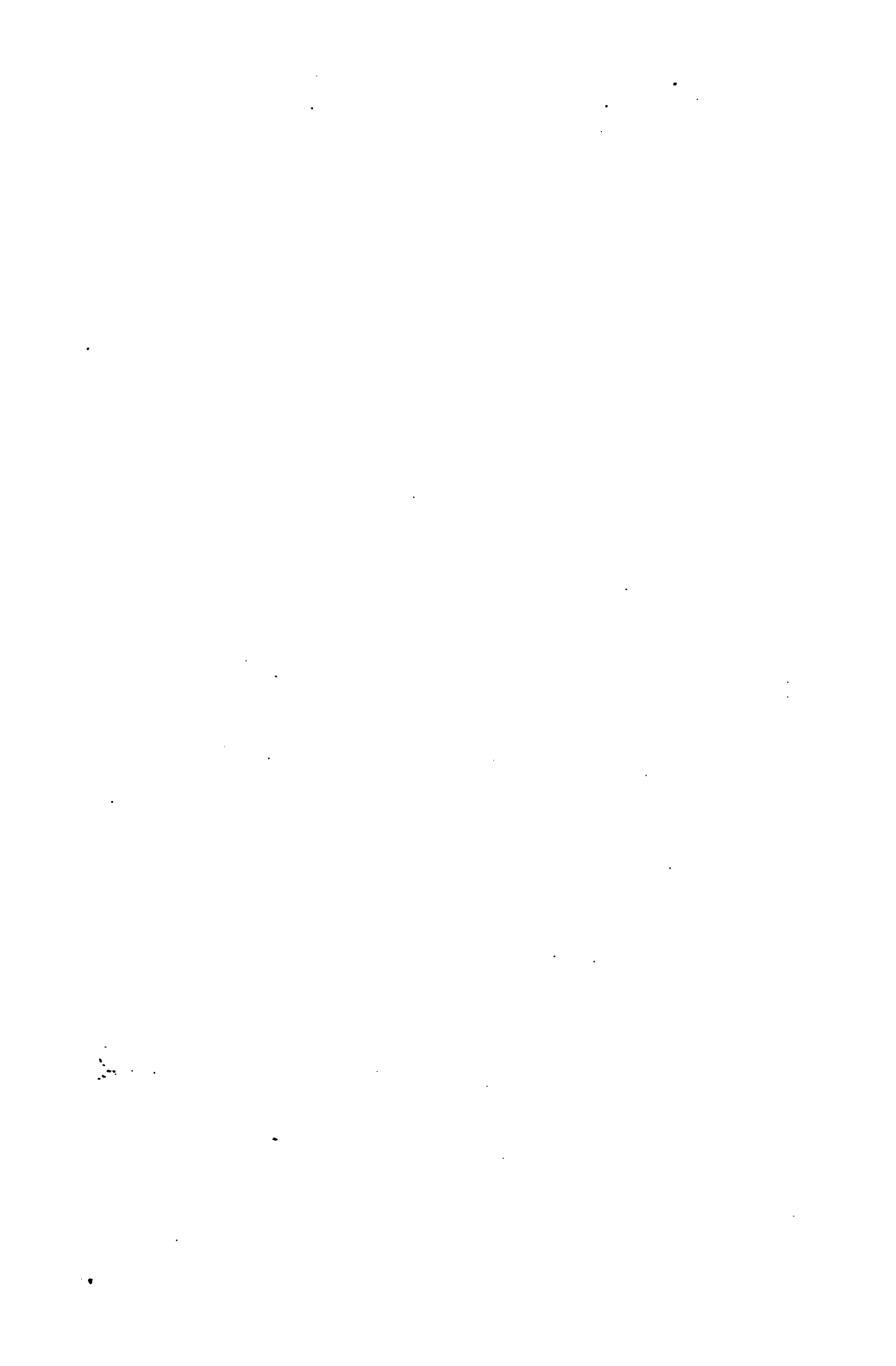
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THE
FROGS' PARISH CLERK







RANA, THE FROGLANDER, HEARS THAT THE BATRACHIANS WANT A KING.



THE
FROGS' PARISH CLERK;

AND
HIS ADVENTURES IN STRANGE LANDS.

—•—

A TALE FOR YOUNG FOLK,
BY THOMAS ARCHER.



ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHTEEN ENGRAVINGS.

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THE FROGS' PARISH CLERK.



CHAPTER I.

How Rana, the Froglander, was a Parish Clerk in Batrachia ; and how he loved Sauriana, the Mayor's Daughter.



YOU will not find any account of the country called Batrachia in the geography books. Even Butler's " Use of the Globes " does not tell what is its latitude and longitude. Mrs. Mangnall asks none of her impertinent questions about it ; Pinnock's Catechism has no mention of it ; and it has been left out of my School Atlas, so I don't much think you will see any map of it in yours, unless you bought the edition published at Toppititti in the year 1354,

and that is scarcely likely if you are not older than I take you to be.

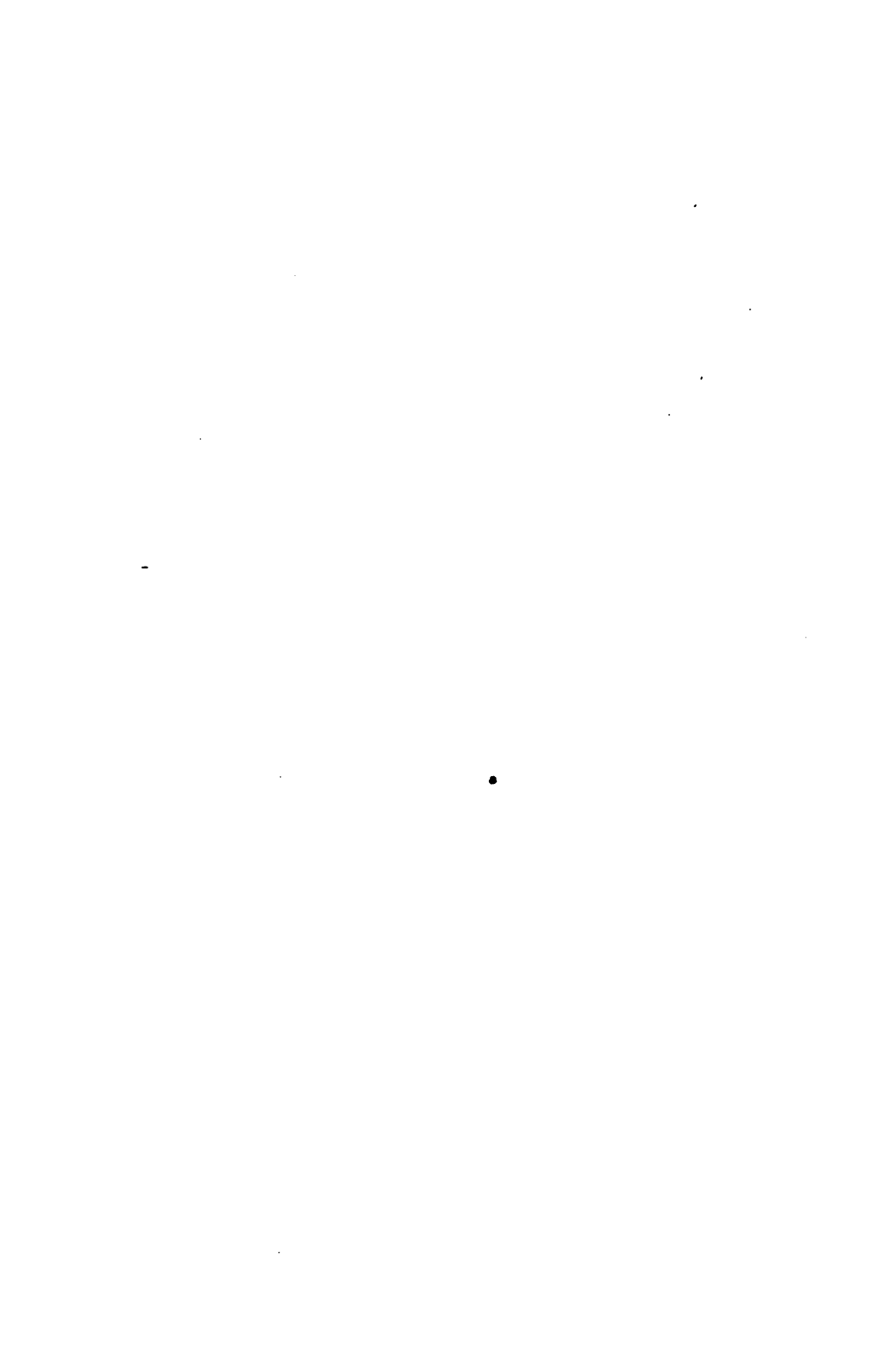
The kingdom of Batrachia, or, as some called it, Frogland, was, in fact, a very remarkable place, and, like the inhabitants, was not a bit better than might have been expected, because it consisted mostly of a number of little villages, and that part of it which was not swamp was marsh and morass. The principal village was named Slosh, and the great man of this place was the Mayor, who, having begun life as a sandboy, was a very jolly fellow, as you know all sandboys are.

His name was Master Frosch, and when he was made Mayor, the Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Batrachia said that the choice of such a Mayor was a great credit to the people of Slosh, who were just the sort of folks to respect honest industry and wealth gained in the sand trade ; and that these, when combined with hospitality and good living, were the very qualities most desirable in a chief magistrate. After saying this, the Baron went to dinner with the new Mayor, to his fine stone mansion at the edge of the island near which the village of Slosh was situated. You have heard of this island before, I dare say, for it was no other than the celebrated one called Toppititti, where, as you remember, there was neither land nor city, and the inhabitants were mostly engaged in digging potatoes with two-pronged forks.

Now it happened on the very day that Master Frosch was made Lord Mayor, that the Parish Clerk of Slosh, whose name was Rana, was coming home from the village

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■





The Frogs' Parish Clerk teaching the little Batrachians the whole art of Music.

school, where he had been giving the young Batrachians a lesson in the art of singing. He was a wonderful musician was Rana, and his method of tuition combined two systems, which have become very famous.

He wrote the lesson on a big leaf, which he stuck up against the trunk of a tree for the scholars to look at, just as the teachers do now on the black boards that are in use in some of our village schools; and when the little Batrachians once began to sing, it was on the Tonic-sol-fa plan: that is to say, they opened their mouths as wide as ever they could, nodded their heads, and beat with their hands to keep time, and shouted like good ones till their voices could be heard miles off above the booming of the Bitterns, a set of old-fashioned birds who lived in great style on the island of Toppititti, and even above the cawing of the solemn Rooks, who sometimes flew from their city of Minster over the fenny country of Batrachia.

Well, as we have said, Rana was coming home from the school when he saw the grand procession of the Lord Mayor's show coming along the high street of Slosh, and stood to see it pass, with a tear in his eye, and grief in his heart. It was a very wonderful sight, for a great many of the inhabitants of the countries round Batrachia had come there to honour Master Frosch. First there was a deputation of jolly Sand pipers, who sang choruses in honour of the great Mayor; but as they had never been taught on the Tonic-sol-fa plan, and sang out of tune, Rana stopped his ears till they had gone past.

Then there was the Water-bailiff, and the Water-bailiff's first cousin, a couple of Efts, both clad in scale armour; and there was the celebrated Grasshopper who was called to be Sheriff of Slosh, and who had such a long tongue that whatever he said went from one end of the kingdom to the other, and back again. There was his brother the Chamberlain, who made up for what he wanted in tongue by a nose of such tremendous size that when he spoke through it, which he generally did, it was a full quarter of an hour before his remarks reached the person who was listening.

Then followed a great array of men-at-arms, equipped with spear-rushes, sword-grass, lance weeds, and all sorts of weapons, amongst which the patent revolving arque-bus leaves were the newest and the most deadly. The troops of the Saurians, however, were the most brilliant in their shining armour; for Master Frosch, the greatest Mayor in the kingdom of Batrachia, had married into a great Saurian family. His wife was dead, but there in his state carriage of golden lilies, drawn by a team of glossy moles, sat his only daughter, Sauriana, in a dress of glittering green, decked with gems of the first water, which were only equalled by the lustre of her eyes.

Poor Rana felt his legs tremble as she approached, for he had long loved her dearly, and had reason to believe that his affection was returned.

Why had he not been a Sandboy instead of a learned Schoolmaster? What was knowledge when compared with riches? The wealthy Mayor, who could scarcely

spell his own name of Frosch, and always wrote it without the *c*, looked down upon him with a sort of condescending patronage.

He fixed his eyes on the lovely Sauriana as the carriage rolled past, followed by a glittering cavalcade; but she could only return his glance with one answering look, for beside her sat her father, swelled with importance and a civic breakfast, till his yellow waistcoat had to be let out behind; and opposite them both was Mr. Spider, the Solicitor, who had come out of his usual web on purpose to keep watch on the whole proceedings.

Poor Rana shut both his eyes, and stood there leaning against the stump of a tree till they had gone past, and then as he heard a great shouting and humming in the distance, he knew that the Mayor and his daughter had reached their house: he went sadly away to his own little home next door to the bank, and sat down to think what would become of him if the beautiful Sauriana should forget her love and obey the commands of her rich father, and the advice of the artful Spider, who had always sneered at the poor Parish Clerk.

Ever since he was a little fellow he had loved her, and before Master Frosch made a fortune Sauriana was his constant playmate. They had sat together many a day under that very tree-stump where he had just seen them pass by, and had caught midges and other wild insects for fun. Like all the young Batrachians, Rana had a big head and a long tail in those days. He had already nearly lost his life for her pleasure, for it happened one

evening that they were on the edge of the village pond, and Rana, whose father was Parish Clerk at that time, was singing quite melodiously for joy at having her with him, when she suddenly took a fancy for a little spray of weed-flower to make a salad for her supper. The weed was quite in the middle of the pond, but Rana was a good swimmer, and she no sooner asked for it than in he plumped to fetch it. He was coming back with it in his mouth, when a Pirate named Pike, who had come down from the great waters by the mill-stream to plunder the Froglanders, came out from a hole where he used to lie hidden, and made a rush at the venturous little fellow.

Rana was valiant, but the Pirate was armed with double-edged teeth, and when he saw the young Froglander he opened his great jaws and made a snap at his tail. A wonderful thing happened. Rana's tail fell off, and a couple of beautiful legs grew out, so that he was not only able to dart to the shore, but to give a great leap, which brought him to Sauriana's side in a moment. He was only a child before, and the Batrachians used to speak of all their young people as Tadpoles.

Poor Sauriana changed colour a little when she saw that her lover was no longer a Tadpole, but a grown-up person with proper legs and arms; but somehow she loved him all the better for it; and he became so dignified and accomplished, that when his father died the young Batrachian was chosen by his neighbours as the best Parish Clerk in the kingdom.

It was very hard that when he hoped to be comfortably settled, and that after he had invented such a wonderful system of teaching music that he had actually been invited to Court to give a concert on the Queen's birthday, but had refused because Sauriana had no dress fit to go in, he should suddenly be told by the Spider that Master Frosch had made a great fortune, and had other intentions for his daughter, so that he couldn't think of her associating with a mere Schoolmaster.

All that night poor Rana sat moodily in his house, bewailing his fate ; but he was too proud to go with the rest of the villagers to the feast at Toppititti.

"I will be a Schoolmaster no longer," he said at last, jumping up and taking down his Mandolin, which was a sort of guitar made of a hazel-nut shell, and strung with melodious fibres. "I will be a Troubadour."

There are no Troubadours now ; there are only organ-grinders, ballad singers, brass bands, and negro serenaders ; but this was in the Middle Ages, and to be a Troubadour then meant to go out as a wandering minstrel with a sword and a guitar, a lute, or some musical instrument, and to travel about the country singing and seeking adventures.

"I will be off at once," said poor Rana, putting his supper in his pocket, and shutting his house by rolling a stone before the door ; "but first I will pay a visit to my old friend the Oozly bird, and hear what she has to say to me in the way of advice before I start on my journey."



CHAPTER II.

How Rana came to be called the Dutch Nightingale and sang to the Oozly Bird ; and what the Oozly Bird told him of the Stork family.

NOW Rana had a very intimate acquaintance amongst the birds in the person of Madam Philomel, a lady who had for some years been the principal singer at the Court of Batrachia, as well as in some other places to which she had travelled. She was one of the Nightingale family, and we have all heard what great musicians they were before the new systems of singing were any of them invented. This lady, who lived in a wood in the high land beyond Slosh, often

gave evening concerts, at which Rana contrived to be present, and he would sometimes stay a little later than the rest of the audience, and beg Madame Philomel to give him a lesson. As the lady had originally come from France, you may imagine that she had a slight contempt for everything that was not French ; but she was wonderfully polite and good-natured.

One evening, after the Parish Clerk had sung to her a song of his own composing, she said, " Ah, my poor little Rana, thy song is well enough, but thy voice is not that of a bird ; it hath a hoarse croak belonging to it that must come of the fens and the swamps of Batrachia. Your country is much like a place I once visited called Holland, a land with a hole in it, and where the hole is filled with water. The fog there gets into the throat of the people as it does into thine, and into that of my friend the Duck. You deserve to be a Nightingale, since you are my pupil, but you are so much like these people, that you can never be mistaken for a French singer. You shall be the 'Dutch Nightingale.'" And by this name Rana was known for a long time, and his fame actually travelled to France itself, where the Batrachians were generally spoken of as Dutch Nightingales, as you may see if you read the pages of history in the Middle Ages,—volume eleven hundred and three, chapter nineteen thousand and one.

Of all the birds that Rana knew, the Oozly bird was by far the wisest ; she was a downy bird, with very fluffy feathers, short wings, and a large family, and she lived

amongst the reeds and rushes by a stream on the north-west side of Toppititti.

The Ancients always supposed the Owl to be the very emblem of wisdom, because the Owl never made known anything at all, but was constantly hooting at other people. You will often find it the case that those who laugh loudest, and hoot longest, at what others say and believe, manage to get a reputation for being very clever. The Ancients, as I said before, and as you very likely know, thought that there was nobody so clever as the Owl. They were many of them great donkeys, those Ancients, and were easily imposed upon by a solemn look and a hookey nose. The fact is, that whatever little sense the Owl had was all spoilt by late hours, and that dreadful habit of sitting up at night, and going to sleep in the morning. The Owl was nothing at last but a stupid old frump, not to be compared even to the Raven, who was a very artful person, or to the Rook, who had taken a living in the Church. But none of them all could equal the Oozly bird. To prove what I say, let me ask you if you have ever seen an Oozly bird in a cage, or shut up in a wire house at the Zoological Gardens, or sitting tame on a perch? No, there never was one caught alive, and nobody but a gentleman named Darwin has ever seen one stuffed, or the skeleton of one. The Oozly bird's legs were green, with great broad feet like a rhubarb leaf, and whenever anybody came near the place, amongst the rushes and weeds where she had set her nest, she and her young ones would plunge head

first down into the mud and ooze at the bottom of the river, with only their legs sticking up, like those that you see coming through the crust of a pigeon pie. As these legs were green and the feet were like rhubarb leaves, they could not be distinguished from weeds. One day an old Botanist thought he should like to take one of these great leaves home with him to put his silkworms in; but he no sooner touched it than his old spectacles were torn off in a moment, and he was obliged to give a man sixpence to take him across the fields to the optician's to buy a new pair.

I wish I had more time to tell you about the Oozly bird, and how in her long life she had come to know almost everything about everybody in and around Batrachia; for though she seldom went very far from Top-pititti at the time of which I am writing, she had been a great traveller. Everybody knew that she was connected with very ancient families. She was first cousin to the Ibises, related on her uncle's side to the Phœnixes, and might, if she had liked to go to the Antipodes, have come into the great Dodo estates; but she didn't. She preferred to stay at Batrachia, eat water-cresses with her tea, and attend to the education of her family. It was wonderful how many things she heard, and how much she knew about the private histories of almost everybody. It was even said that the King himself would sometimes go to see her like a common Batrachian, and take her advice about the national affairs.

She had often encouraged Rana to call on her after

evening school, and to bring his Mandolin to play and sing to the little ones, and so he naturally thought he had better consult her on the subject of his journey.

She gave him a great deal of information about the country round Batrachia, and told him something of the people and of their habits. She advised him to avoid gluttony, which had been the ruin of so many young people; to hear what people had to say before he gave an opinion, and, above all, not to be too ready to talk, especially as it was his business to sing.

What cheered him most, however, was her assurance that Sauriana still loved him, in spite of the Spider; for as she had sat there quietly in her nest she had overheard the Duck, who was in the Spider's confidence, cackling all their secrets, and so had learned that Sauriana was shut up in her own room for refusing to listen to his suit, and being shut up, had gone off into one of those long sleeps to which her family were very subject, and which might perhaps last for days and days before she could be awakened.

"My advice to you, my dear Rana," said the Oozly bird, when she had seen what an effect this last piece of news had upon the young Froglander, "is to set out without delay, and do something worthy of your love, so that when you come back again you may boldly claim the Mayor's daughter as an equal, and defy all the Spiders and all the Sandboys, to say nothing of all the silly Ducks in Batrachia."

"Ah, but what if I can find nothing to do?" said Rana.

"Go and look for it. Nobody ever looked for some duty to be performed without finding out what it was that they must do first."

"I will go," said the Parish Clerk, "and in the morning there will be no school. When I come back it will be as Rana the Troubadour."

"Will you promise me," said the Oozly bird, in a solemn voice, "that you will never whisper what I am about to tell you till you return. It may be that you can do the King a great service, and I know of no one that I can trust better."

"I promise," said Rana, as tears fell from his eyes upon the friendly pinion that the old bird held out to him. "I will be as loyal to you as to Sauriana herself."

"Have you heard of any troubles at the Court?" asked the Oozly bird, fixing a cautious eye upon him.

He was silent till she took that cautious eye off him again, and then said he knew nothing of any events beyond those that happened in his own village.

"Then," said she, "I will trust you with a state secret. The King's health is not as it used to be, and there has been a clamour amongst the people (who are not satisfied with the game laws which preserve the King's land when he goes out midge-hunting), that he should appoint a successor. You know of course that the infant Prince is only what, if he were a common Batrachian, would be called a Tadpole; but I need not tell you that Royal Families are essentially different from those of the

common people, so that nobody was ever found bold enough to hint that His Royal Highness could possibly have a tail. You will see then that unless the reformers consent to the Queen acting as a sort of Regent in case of the King's death, a stranger may come in. The King objects to this, so does the Queen; but the people say it must be so until the Prince is of age, and they declare that it doesn't matter who rules over them, so that it is somebody representing kingly authority and power; and one of their leaders called out that they would sooner have a log than a woman or a dead King. Now my dear Rana, although His Majesty knows nothing about who is at the bottom of this wickedness, *I do*. You are aware that I have very great connections amongst the Ibises and other high families, and that we have always had a number of poor relations, as all old families have. Of these the most troublesome have been the Storks. We have done everything that could possibly be done to provide for them; they have been placed in the Army; some of them have even had posts connected with the Church; and not a few have been put to the Bar; but they are still poor, and I am sorry to say that they are very unscrupulous and dishonest. They live how they can, indeed, and though they have many of them good friends in some of the large towns, they are a restless, fighting, disagreeable family. One virtue they may have. I have heard that they don't suffer their Parents to want at least I've heard a poet say,—

“The stork his father loves;”

but then poets make such mistakes. However this may be, Rana, the riot in Batrachia is caused by one of my elder cousins in the Stork family ; for as I was on the Island a day or two ago, I saw the leader of the mob in close conversation with a Martin ; and it is an old saying, the Stork to the roof, the Martin to the eaves. The Martin was my cousin's messenger."

"And what did they say ?" asked Rana.

"The rioter said, 'I will bring King Log till you can fetch King Stork.' That was all I heard ; but look there, keep closer amongst the weeds and listen."

The Oozly bird pointed with her wing to a great bright patch of moonlight on the stream, and there was a great mob of the Batrachians, who were all croaking and murmuring hoarsely as they came along bearing amongst them a great block of wood which floated in the water, and on the top of which their leader sat with a dreadful grin upon his face.

"Log shall be our king, and there shall be no more laws."

"Log ! Log ! no laws ! no laws !" they muttered as they splashed and scrambled past.

Rana's ears were sharp, and he heard the leader, who sat upon the block of wood, laugh to himself as he said softly "Yah ! Yah ! you idiots, King Log will make you fit subjects for King Stork, and then we will rule you and make you pay dearly in the name of liberty ; haw ! haw ! haw !"

"What can be done ?" said the Parish Clerk, when they

had passed. "Let me go at once to seek the Stork, and try what I can do."

"You shall," replied the Oozly bird; "but take care that you see him without his seeing you, or you are a dead Batrachian. Take no weapons—you will have to learn how to use them—but let your Mandolin and a wallet be your only encumbrance. Go boldly for love of Sauriana and Frogland, open your eyes, shut your mouth, and see what luck befalls you. It is a long journey, but you know how to make friends. Start to-morrow from the bottom corner of the pond on the other side of Toppititti, and success attend you."







Rana believes that Sauriana is false to him, and bids her farewell.





CHAPTER III.

How the Frog REALLY "went a wooing," and how he was taken in by the Spider. The story invented by the Spider and the Duck.

YOU may imagine that Rana passed a sleepless night in thinking over all that the Oozly bird had told him, so that he did not fall into a doze until an hour before sunrise, and was awake again by the time that the Lark began his morning toilet in the dewy grass on the slope of the island of Toppititti. His simple breakfast was soon prepared, and after eating a little, and packing up the remainder in his wallet, young Batrachian closed his house, slung his beloved Mandolin over his shoulders, and bade farewell to the village where his life from babyhood had been spent. But he could not tear himself away without first going past the place where his Sauriana was sleeping. She might even be awake, and then whose voice but his would she desire to hear. He would tell her of his great enterprise, entreat her to be true to her first affection, bid her farewell till he should come back to claim her for his own.

There was the house of Master Frosch, Mayor and

Sandboy, shining in the morning sun in one of the best situations in Slosh, its great stone front all overgrown with moss, and the windows overlooking the warmest corner of the island of Toppititti.

It was to one of the back windows, reached by a sort of rough balcony, that Rana directed his attention, however, for it was there that the lovely Sauriana lay asleep in an inner chamber all hung with lichens and wild flowers.

Perhaps she was awake and would give him a parting word; he might even climb the balcony and take a tender farewell. The thought made him hasten onward; he took his Mandolin from his shoulder, and began to tune it ready for the song with which he would call her attention to the voice of love.

Imagine his dismay, his doubt, his indignation, when across the doorway leading from the balcony to Sauriana's room he saw the Spider's web stretched like an ugly slimy curtain, and the artful Spider himself sitting on a ledge watching him as he came up the road.

"Aha!" said the Spider, with a sneering laugh, as he sat swinging his long legs about over the edge of his seat; "I see you are an early riser, Master Rana; but pray don't make a noise, or you will wake my friend Sauriana; and as her father has made me her guardian, I must take care that she is not annoyed." And the Spider crossed his hairy arms, and sat rocking himself to and fro in silent laughter to see the poor Batrachian's melancholy face.

“I don't know what right you have to spin your web before that door,” said Rana, at last; “and if Sauriana be awake, she will come out to speak to me; so stand aside, or I'll jump through your meshes and sweep you off that ledge, even though you are the Mayor's Attorney.”

Stop!” said the Spider, crawling up a little higher, and trembling so that his web shook again. “I don't want to be uncivil, Mr. Schoolmaster; but if you come here to ask for charity, there is Master Frosch's steward round the corner. Miss Sauriana asked me particularly to wait, that I might take her for an excursion, and she begged that if the Parish Clerk should come, I would refer him to the steward. You know him, don't you? Mr. Snail,—you'll find him in his little office round the corner; but as he's rather deaf, you must knock pretty loud before he'll come out. Pray don't stay. Miss Sauriana is dressing, and as she don't like street music, I shall be compelled to make you move on if you begin to play.”

He said this because Rana, without taking any notice of his insolent speech, unslung his Mandolin and began to tune it. He thought that its sound might bring Sauriana to the window if she was really dressing, for already the false words of the Spider began to rankle in his heart, and he feared that his love might be untrue to him, now that she was moving in the great state that belonged to a Mayor's daughter.

The Spider was evidently a little uneasy, but he sat

there shaking so much that nobody could have told whether it was with fear or laughter, he was so artful.

When Rana had tuned his instrument, he burst forth with a clear voice into the following serenade, which proved him to be not only a poet, and a born Troubadour, but also an accomplished Schoolmaster ; for as you will observe, it exhibits not only an acquaintance with metre and geography, but also a knowledge of *accent*, which is very important both in speaking and singing.

Oh ! I am going far away,
 Perhaps as far as Varna ;
 And only wait a word to say
 To lovely Sauriāna.

(This was instrumental.)

Toodle dum, tee toodle doo.
 If I could spin a yarn, a
 Story I could tell to you,
 My darling Sauriāna.

But ah ! ha ! ha !—ah ! ha ! ha !

I don't know where you are ; nor
 Will you come to say ta ta
 To your own loving Rāna.

Toodley um de toodey doo
 fal de ral de da da.

(This was instrumental.)

He waited, but no answer came from the window, where the Spider still sat shaking with his ugly finger on his ugly nose.

Then Rana struck up again in a livelier strain :—

I really don't know why you mean
 To treat me in this manner ;
 For even though you're Beauty's Queen,
 You're still Miss Sauriāna.

(This was instrumental.)

Ri too loo ral loo ral lay.
True hearts never can a
Love forget, and so I say
I love you, Sauriāna.

(So was this.)

But—ah! ha! ha! boo! hoo! hoo!
'Twere better if you ran a
Knitting needle through and through,
You wretched faithful Rāna,

Than—Boo! hoo! ha! Boo! he! hoo!
Nickety hoo de dido.

(This likewise with emotion.)

It was of no use; not a glimpse did the minstrel obtain of the mistress of his heart, and there sat the Spider still laughing, or at all events shaking, and with *both* his ugly hands up to his ugly nose.

Poor Rana was almost beside himself with grief and rage, and this was why he half believed the Spider's story, and forgot that if Sauriana had really fallen into one of her long sleeps, it would take the music of a hundred Troubadours to wake her. To tell the truth, she had gone to sleep a day or two before, and was now lying in a little dark stone cell quite in the middle of the Mayor's house, and not anywhere near the place where the Spider had spun his web. For Master Frosch had thought it best to keep her out of the way for a time, that she might forget all about her childish affection for the young Parish Clerk, and he had some reason for thinking that she might favour the suit of the young prince of the Grasshoppers, who was then on a visit to the Court at Toppititti; but this design he kept to himself for fear of the Spider.

When Rana found that his second appeal was unheeded, the tears fell amongst the strings of his Mandolin, but he made one more effort, and in a low, plaintive voice, sang:—

My darling knows I would not say
A single word to pain her ;
But—dark the hour and dull the day
When I loved Sauriana.

(Plaintive movement.)

Dum de dido doo de doo.
I sing this last refrain, a
Last farewell to say to you,
False, fickle Sauriana ;

(Arpeggio)

And oh ! ha ! oh ! Oh ! Heigh ! oh !
If I come back again, a
Passing thought you may bestow
On your still faithful Rana.
So—*Yah ! bah !! boo !!!*
Thriiddle-twiddle-bang !
Swish Swash fol de riddle di do !!!!

The last notes were loud and stirring, for at that moment Rana had seen the malicious grin on the Spider's face, and he swept the strings of his Mandolin with defiant chords, at the same time shouting, "Your time will come, Master Pettifogger."

"Leave us a lock of your hair," said the Spider, as the young Batrachian turned the corner.

But Rana scorned to reply, except by a contemptuous glance, for he was no longer the Parish Clerk of Slosh ; he was a Troubadour, and he might yet become a Knight ; for in the Middle Ages, artists, and authors, and musi-

cians, were actually sometimes invited to Court, and there they mingled with the nobles, and generals, and other grandees of the land. Of course Monarchs have learned better nowadays, and people are kept in their proper places; but it was so at that time, and Rana strode briskly along the road, with his heart sad but not desponding, as he made his way to the point at which the Oozly bird had told him his journey should commence.

It was well that he was too much occupied with his reflections to notice that the Duck stood at the edge of the pond watching him, and saw him plunge in with his Mandolin under his skirt to keep it dry: for the Duck immediately waddled off to tell her friend the Spider what she had seen, and then they both of them set afloat a story which, while it was intended to make Rana appear ridiculous, also declared that he had met with a violent and sudden death.

They both swore that the story was true in the main, although it had been embellished a little, and the Duck went about singing it in that croaking voice which had been the cause of her hatred of the Froglanders, because they used to imitate it, and mock all the Ducks they saw by crying out "Quack! barak! rekerek! quack! quack!"

The fact is, that several of the young Tadpoles had been killed by some big angry Ducks in consequence of this, and so there were some who believed that Rana had actually been gobbled up; though wiser folks shook

their heads, and said under their breath that Master Spider had a worthy companion in Madam Duck, since one was a trickster and the other a teller of fibs.

You all know the story, for, like many other false statements, it has lasted a long time. It begins,—

A frog he would a wooing go,
Heigh ! ho ! says Rowley,
Whether his mother would let him or no.

And so on ; but we know that poor Rana had neither father nor mother, and that he went to bid his love farewell.

Then this stupid story went on to say how Rowley, which is another name for Rana, put on an opera hat. This was a silly malicious allusion to his having his Mandolin with him, and to his having taken lessons of Madame Nightingale. Of course the whole statement of the "white Duck" gobbling him up was an entire falsehood, and intended to answer two purposes ; to impress the Froglanders with the superiority of the Ducks, and to make the story quite a common one by the time that Sauriana awoke, that she might be induced to believe in the death of her lover. What really became of Rana, and how he set out on his adventures, will be told in the next chapter.



CHAPTER IV.

How Rana came out at the bottom of the pond and made a third at a terrible duel.

THE water of the pond was icy cold, and before Rana had reached the bottom he was aware that a sort of current was flowing upwards from that corner of it to which he endeavoured to make his way.

The weight of his gittern helped to take him down, and as he was an expert diver, he soon found himself at the mouth of a chasm, up which the water flowed and filled the basin of the pond. It was a spring which ran continually, and he was at first afraid to trust himself near the edge of the hole ; but presently taking courage, he plunged straight downwards, and after a minute of

darkness, with the water hissing and bubbling round him, he found that he could rise again, and came to the surface of a small rill which ran down from a pile of rocks above him. He was so exhausted, that it was as much as he could do to crawl out upon the edge of the little stream, where he lay gasping against a great stone till he felt able to eat part of what remained from his breakfast, to which he added a fresh salad from one of the pools that had been made here and there by the rains.

Thus refreshed, he prepared to climb the rocks, for these rocks divided the country round Slosh, and indeed the whole kingdom of Batrachia, from the lands to which he was about to travel, and the road could only be discovered from the highest of the stony peaks that still towered far overhead.

The day had almost gone before he reached them, and he sat down on a great stone tired and panting for breath, to wait till the moon rose, that he might continue his journey.

Now it happened that just on the other side of the mountain there was a great old Abbey Church, with a ruined grey stone tower all covered with ivy, and in this place the Owls had set up a school, where they sent their young Owlets to have as much crammed into their stupid heads as those heads could contain, for the belief that these solemn-looking, grave, silent birds were very wise and experienced was still quite common; and so, for the credit of the family, they were obliged to try and keep up their character.

You have heard one of the reasons why the Owls had become such ignorant fellows. They kept late hours, and *would* stay out of a night, when quiet folks often heard them yelling and whooping in the streets and the country lanes.

Another reason was that they had grown too pompous and conceited to learn, and fancied that wisdom was born with them, just because they were Owls, and people had given them credit for knowledge that they never possessed. This made them so overbearing, that they never thought any company good enough for them, and whenever they were out, they attacked and abused everybody who came in their way, and who was not strong enough to resist them. The young Owlets at the old church were the terror of that neighbourhood, and scarcely a night passed without some quarrel in which they were concerned, while several innocent villagers of the next parish of Cricketbury had been wounded grievously, and an ambassador who was on his way from Musburg, in the kingdom of Mouseland, had been murdered outright.

Now at the very moment that the moon rose, while Rana sat to rest upon the stone, two of these young roysterers came out from their corner in the tower, where they had been asleep all day, and began to shriek and bluster as they made their way across the rocks. The worst of it was, that they were wakeful enough when every one else was asleep, and so they saw the Batrachian before he could get out of their way, and at

once set upon him, though he sprang up the rocks to escape their tipsy fury. At the very top he paused a moment to take breath, and saw that they were both coming on together. There was no other way to avoid them than to go over the ledge of rock into a pool which lay beneath, glistening like silver in the moonlight ; and at the moment that they flew at him, thinking to beat out his brains, or to maim him, one vigorous leap took him above both their heads over the brow of the precipice. It was well for Rana that he had practised athletic sports in the village gymnasium and playground of the Batrachian school at Slosh, so that he was the best swimmer, leaper, and wrestler in the parish. The two stupid Owlets, blind with drunken rage and spite, tore at each other, thinking they were destroying their victim, and they heard the shrill laugh of the Froglander as he splashed into the pool far down in the glen, and left them bruised and bleeding, but looking round in wonder to see where he had hidden himself.

Unfortunately his gittern was broken in the fall ; but when he had risen to the surface of the water, and reached the bank which was close beside the road he had to travel, his voice rose loud and clear as he sung :—

Te whit ! te whoo !
 When cowards two
 Set on a single one,
 The thing to do
 Is—fight till you
 Can get a chance to run.

But if you do,
 Be sure that you
 Mind what you are about ;
 And then such fowls
 As stupid owls
 Will never find it out.





Rana has a narrow escape from the Owls.



And with a loud and derisive laugh the Troubadour went on his way.

Rana was not aware of it, but he had already gone a considerable distance on his journey by his bold leap, which had saved him a long walk by a winding road. The country in which he found himself was in fact no other than Rodentia, and a very dangerous place to travel in, since it was full of caves and holes inhabited by Robbers and Brigands, who were secretly encouraged by the Government, to which they paid a proportion of their booty.

The leader of one of the principal bands of these ruffians, who were called Ratti, had taken up his quarters in a cave under a great tree, not very far from the edge of the lake where Rana now stood, looking ruefully at his broken gittern; and as this was the high-road for travellers, he could sally out and intercept them without much trouble, since very few could afford to go with an escort of soldiers, and even if they did, the soldiers of the Government were all Ratti in disguise, and would only help to plunder them. This terrible Brigand and his band had already made several captives, and kept them imprisoned in his caves till their friends would pay a ransom for them; while he had such treasures, that it was rumoured the Government intended to make an example of him, in order that the King might take possession of his riches, after putting him to the torture to make him confess where they were hidden.

Now a great robbery had just been planned for that very night, for the Princess of the Mandibles, a nation lying in the forest land beyond Rodentia, had set out with a strong escort of her own guards to visit her aunt, the Countess Porcupine, a very sharp and rather disagreeable old lady, noted throughout the country for her pointed remarks and the way in which she delighted to hurt people's feelings.

As it was necessary to propitiate this remarkable person by a few handsome presents, the Princess conveyed a great coffer full of costly articles, and drawn by a whole team of tortoises, whose strength and size made up for the slow pace at which they travelled.

The Brigand Chief had heard from some of his spies that the Princess and her escort would reach the great high-road of Rodentia that very night, and had sent out his band to intercept them, while he and his lieutenant (a villanous-looking scoundrel, noted for his cruelty and treachery) remained to prepare the secret cave for the reception of the booty.

This cave was in the side of a hill just above the bank where Rana had come out of the water, and as he stood for a moment, he could hear the voices of the two robbers inside the mouth of their den, for they had begun to quarrel about their share of the spoil, and were using very bad language and talked in a loud tone.

Rana had heard something about the Ratti robbers from the Oozly bird, and he at once guessed who they were; so he crept gently towards the cave, and was

not much astonished to find that the brigands were inside. But he *was* astonished to see the collection of valuables that that cave contained: golden cups and leaves of frosted silver lay about the floor, precious stones sparkled on the walls, great acorn tubs and cob barrels held enough provision for an army; while in caskets of walnut and chests of beech, were stored fine webs and silken stuffs, and the maiden's hair which had been cut off by the ruffians to sell to the court wig-makers.

"Learn to know thy place, or thou shalt be taught,—beast," said the Ratti Captain to his lieutenant, as they went out together; "and now follow me to the road, where we will wait together for the Princess."

"I am no beast that thou art not as great a beast. I know the proverb; 'one beast makes many,'" retorted the lieutenant, furiously, "and I will not know thy secrets for nothing. Either I will have the Princess herself for my share of the spoil, or thou shalt swing."

"I tell thee, no!" roared the Captain, gnashing the teeth which had made him the terror of all Rodentia, and had gained him the nickname of Snaggio. "Die, traitor!" and he drew his sword to rush upon the other.

They had reached the road in front of the cave, and in their blind fury had not seen that two of the Princess's escort, in the shining scale armour worn by the Mandibles, were looking down over the edge of the heights above. They had not seen either that Rana

had bounded swiftly but silently after them, grasping his broken gittern in his hand.

They were in the full heat of conflict, shrieking at each other, and fully occupied with cutting and thrusting, when amidst the din the Froglander sprang forward, and with one vigorous blow sent the broken gittern crashing full upon the Lieutenant's skull.

Snaggio was surprised, and reeled for a moment before this sudden attack; but as he saw his late antagonist go down, he was aware of a still more formidable foe; for while he held on to a tree to steady himself and plied his sword with great skill, Rana sprang round him, watching for an opportunity to strike at him with his strange weapon.

Never was there a more artful villain than Snaggio the Rattus, and it might have gone hard with Rana, if the Mandibles had not come down to look after the dead Robber, and, watching an opportunity, seized the Captain by the leg with one of their bill-hooks.

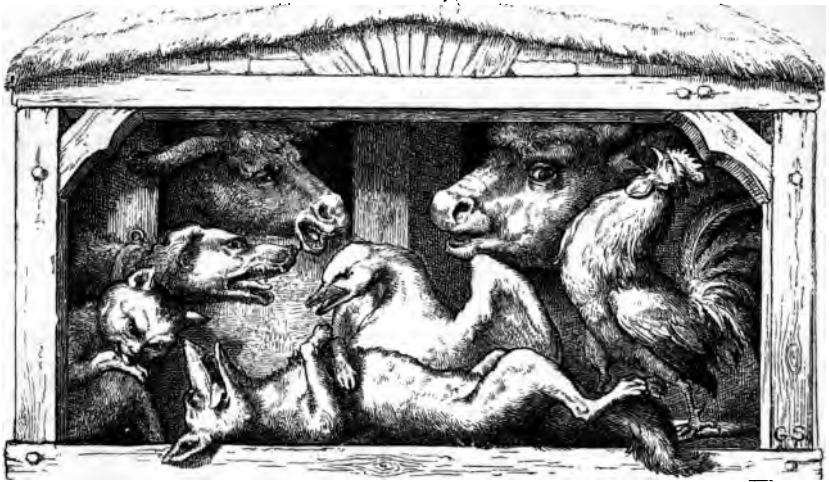
His attention was thus diverted for a moment, and with another crashing blow he was laid beside his Lieutenant.

You may be sure that the Princess, who, having come another way in consequence of the warnings of a friendly spy sent out by the Gadfly police, escaped this great peril, was full of gratitude to the Froglander for his timely aid; and she would have rewarded him, but that with all the pride of a Troubadour, he declined to receive any of her gifts except a bright keen sword

which had once belonged to a King of the Mandibles, and which he hid under his clothes.

Then the Princess and her escort went on their way ; and Rana, who dreaded the return of the band or the arrival of the soldiery, went back to the cave, and after having pulled down the earth and rocks before its mouth, leaving only a white stone, that he might know where to find it again, also pursued his journey ; but he left the high-road and lost himself in trying to find his way through the woods.





CHAPTER V.

How the Froglander meets with Master Mus in the Woods, and, while he mends his Mandolin, listens to the story of the Fox.

A GREAT many years ago, before the time referred to in this story, and a long while before you and I and Mr. Tupper, were born, there lived a wise man who wrote a book of wise sayings called Proverbs. One of these proverbs says, that the man who can conquer himself is greater than he who takes a city in battle, and no doubt you have found it very hard work to fight against yourself many a time, and to beat down your angry temper, or kick out your greedy wishes, or to box the ears of your troublesome idleness.

Now, Rana, when he pulled down the earth and stones before the brigand's cave, had thought for a moment : "If I could only get back with all these treasures I should be as well off as some of the best people in Slosh, and who knows whether Master Frosch might not consent to my marriage with Sauriana."

But then he thought again and said to himself : "But this booty is no more mine than it was the robber's. I may find some of the rightful owners, and if not, it is my duty to give the larger part of it to the poor. Whether or not, I came out, not to seek wealth, but to do noble deeds and to hate meanness and oppression and deceit and lies, as a Troubadour should ; so here goes." And then he set to work and pulled down all the stones and earth before the cave's mouth, and worked till he was quite tired.

This is mentioned to show what a good thing it is always to remember what you really intend to do, and to act accordingly : to set yourself to accomplish a noble task and never to let anything turn you from it.

His determination had such a rapid effect on Rana that when he resumed his journey he was quite a different person from the humble Parish Clerk who had set out from Slosh only two days before ; and though he found himself alone in the vast solitudes of a forest, he had no fear, for he knew that he had tried to do his duty. There must be a way out of the woods somewhere, and the young Batrachian had always been so temperate that he could manage to live on such food as he could find in

the glades : wild midges and other game, and the simple fruits and salads in the bushes and rainpools.

It was a wonderful place too, that forest, and had so many beauties that the Froglander, who had seen very little beyond the marshland round Slosh and the island of Toppititti, was lost in wonder and delight.

There were great tall trees hung with leaves of bright enamel and bearing fruit like burnished bronze ; others threw out great fan-shaped leaves, and cones and cups of gold drooped from the branches ; in the pools were set great bells of silver standing on salvers of shining green enamel ; the banks were covered with waving plumes and sprays of ebony and bronze and gold, and through the bushes peeped bright fruits which shone as though they had been cut from solid amber, coral, and jet. Here and there smooth open carpets of velvet grass were laid all spangled with pearly stars and buttons of ivory, tipped with edges of amethyst and ruby.

Rana rested under the root of a gigantic tree from which he could look out at one of these open spaces, for he wanted to see the moon shine on the beautiful gems ; and as he sat watching and admiring, he suddenly saw the green velvet carpet move a little not far from him, and there came up, quite gradually, a ring of little one-legged stools that shone as if they had been made of silver. There were twelve or fourteen of these stools, and what was Rana's surprise to see three people whom he knew very well come slowly along a bank at a little distance, and after staring about them, gravely take

a seat, one on each of three stools, and there go to sleep.

They were in fact distant relations of the Rana family, and claimed to be Batrachians, and their name was Bufo; but they were such ugly spiteful, Toads, and so lazy and greedy, that our Troubadour knew nothing of them, and had never even inquired where they lived. He ventured, however, to call to one of them just as he was about to close his second eye, and said: "Hallo! Master Bufo, what brings you here? are you on a journey?" Upon this the elder Bufo, who was uncle to the other two, waddled off his stool, and croaked out in a disagreeable sleepy overfed sort of way: "We don't want company, Master Rana, and advise you to go your way, for we've only provisions enough for three, and no Froglander can sit on a toad's stool."

"Where are you going, then?" said Rana.

"To Tedbury," said old Bufo, waddling on to his seat again. "Good night, and good riddance!" and he went to sleep in a moment.

Then Rana laughed loud and long till he couldn't go to sleep for his merriment, though he shut his eyes up quite tightly.

Now, when you wish to go to sleep, and find that you are too wakeful to get a wink, there are two good plans for sending yourself into the land of dreams: one is, to get up, brush your hair, and drink a glass of nice cool fresh water; and the other is, to imagine you are counting sheep as they go one by one through a gate.

Rana tried the latter, but instead of sheep he thought of all kinds of people of his acquaintance, and some that he had only heard of from the Oozly bird, Madame Nightingale, and other great travellers.

The consequence was that he found himself making up that very funny list which young folks repeat as a game at forfeits, beginning :

“ One Old Ox opening oysters.”

If Rana was not the author of it, I don't know who was; but as it is one of his earliest compositions, and as nobody else claims it now, I may as well tell you what it was about. This was it then :—

“ One Old Ox opening oysters.

Two Tigers tickling Trout.

Three Toads totally tired trying to trot to Tedbury.

Four fine flashing Fireflies flittering over the Fens.

Five fuliginous Fish fascinatingly fanciful.

Six Sycophants significantly sick.

Seven Severn Salmon set in several sorts.

Eight Elegant Elephants.

Nine Niggling Nuthatches nibbling nourishing Nuts.

Ten twiddling Tom Tits tootling twice-told Tales.”

By the time he had said this over eleven times backwards he was asleep like a top.

It was late the next morning before Rana awoke, and peeping out from his nest saw that the three Bufos had gone on their journey: upon which he made a hasty toilet in the dew, and with just a glance at the toads' stools which had grown quite dull, and were fast decay-

ing in the morning sun, went his way, singing merrily. His song woke a hundred echoes in the forest, and he made acquaintance with a great many of the folks who lived there; particularly with Master Woodpecker, the Carpenter, who was already at work hammering away at an elm-tree: but neither he nor the rest of them could tell him the way out of the wood by the path, and it was mid-day before he sat down to rest without having got into the open country.

As he lay beneath a tree, singing to himself, he began to mend his broken Mandolin, for he already felt quite dull without its music. He had climbed a branch for a nut to make the body of it; and had found some of the same melodious fibres as those that grew near Slosh to twist into strings, so that he only required the old neck which remained unbroken, and soon became quite absorbed in his employment, humming a tune to himself.

What was his surprise to hear the tune he was singing repeated in a little shrill melodious voice at the other side of the tree, and on peeping round the corner to see what could be the meaning of it, there was a Mouse-lander sitting upon a bag of meal.

"Good morning," said the stranger, lifting his tail and gracefully curling it towards the Batrachian; "I never could help staying to hear good music."

"Indeed," said Rana, "I never thought that there were minstrels in your country, but I now hear that I was mistaken."

"Well, the truth is, there are only a few of us left, and

we are not exactly minstrels; but singing runs in my family. Which way are you going?"

"I've been trying to find the road out of the forest, but I've met with no one who can tell me at present; except some relatives of mine—three disagreeable old Toads, who wanted none of my company."

"Well, I shall be glad to have you as a companion, for I'm going on to a village just beyond here, to a great feast. My name is Mus, and some of my family are pretty well off, settled in a farm in this part of the country, which you know borders upon Mouseland. There is to be a grand wedding to-morrow, between a rich old fellow, who keeps a cheese store, and one of my cousins, Miss Jerboa. But I say, friend, it was honest of your relatives, the old Toads, to tell you they didn't want you, wasn't it? I like people to say what they mean, though I don't always do so myself. Why even the Fox was a better fellow, till he heard people tell the truth after they had flattered him with lies."

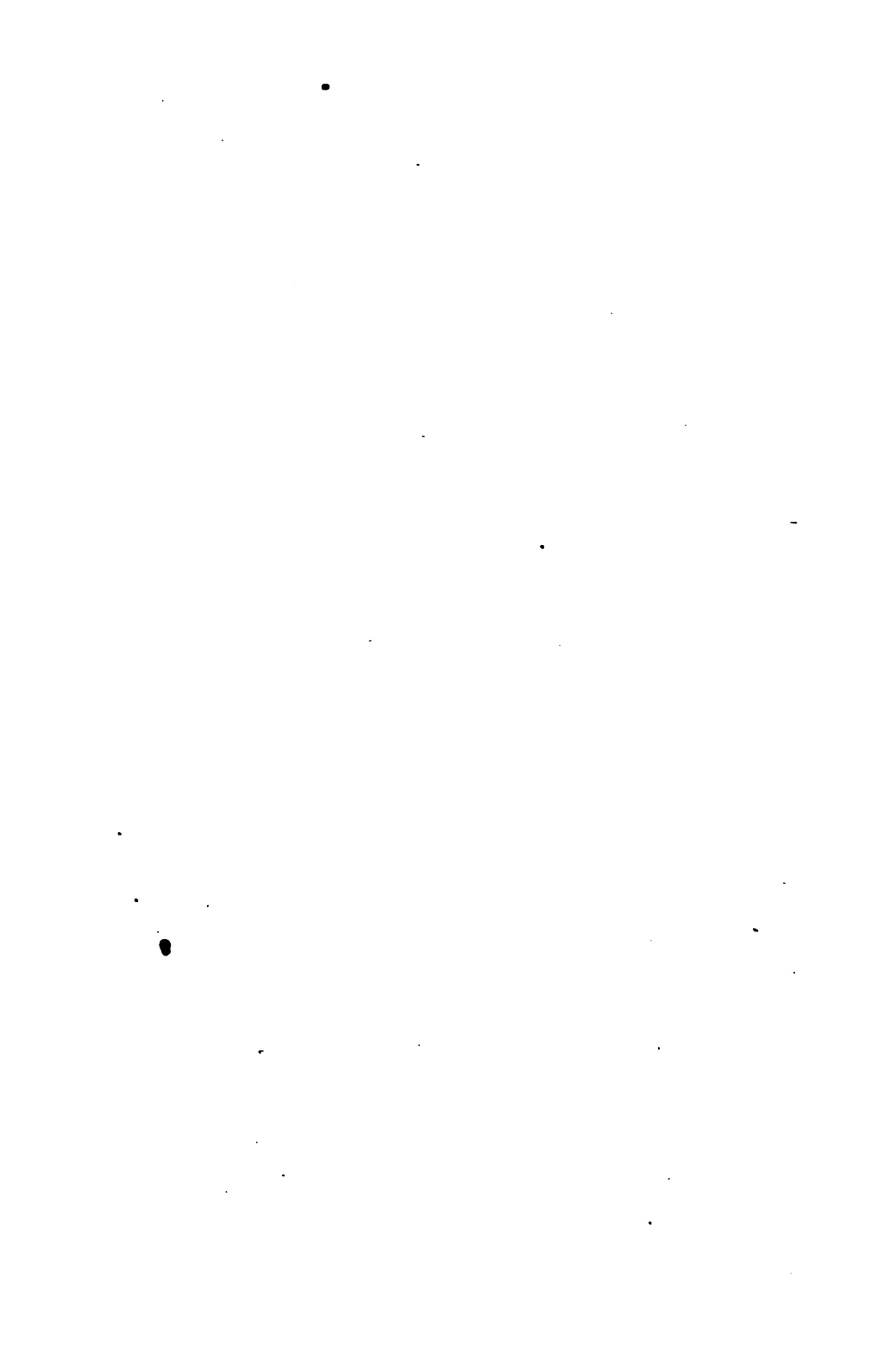
"How was that?" said Rana; "I thought nobody was so artful as the Fox."

"Well, the Fox is artful enough," said Master Mus, "but he's not half so false as the Goose, and not such a lying braggart as the Cock. As for the Cat—look here, Master, do you know the Cat?"

There were no Cats in Batrachia, Rana told him.

"Well, then, she's the most false and the cruelest wretch in the world; a sneaking, soft-spoken thief and murderess, who is worse than that bold and bloodthirsty







Master Mus showing Rana the way out of the Wood.

buccaneer the Hawk ; worse even than the Owl family, and they are a set of pretentious villains, who break the laws."

"Well, I can tell you something about the Owls, too," said Rana ; "but first let me hear the story of the Fox, and how he became worse from hearing the truth."

"Well," said Master Mus, "it was more from not having heard the truth at first ; but you must know that, some years ago, a Fox was often in and out the Farm-yard in a part of the country where he was very little known, and as he looked like a person of some distinction, in consequence of his fine furs and the beautiful long-tailed coat that he wore, nobody refused to speak to him. The Ass thought he should be taken for a person of fashion by being intimate with such a fine gentleman. The Ox liked him because his company cost nothing ; and as the Fox didn't eat hay and turnips, and his conversation amused the stupid fat old brute in the long winter evenings, he was quite civil in his clumsy way. The Cock was so afraid of him that he never ventured to crow when the visitor came in, but pretended to chuckle at all his jokes, and got away to the hen-roost as soon as possible, where he declared that he had vanquished the Fox in argument. The Goose thought that he came on purpose to see her, and used to boast of the conquest she had made in having so fine a lover. The Cat knew that he was a thief, and that for all his fine clothes and soft genteel manner he was, like herself, living on what he could pick up here and

there, and only satisfied to be sleek and quiet and friendly while he was well fed and made much of; so she pretended to the rest that he was an old friend of hers, and whenever he came to see them, she made great eyes at him, and purred, and mewed, and talked, as though they had known each other years before in much higher society. Only the Dog, who I will say was a very honest fellow, though he was no friend of my family, spoke out plainly, and he declared, bluntly, that he disliked the new comer, and that if ever he met him, he would pick a quarrel. But the Fox was so courteous, and used to behave so gently, that the rest of them said they would not hear of such ill-temper; and, in fact, whenever the Dog came in, Mr. Foxey contrived to slip away, especially after the time that he was nearly caught by his enemy, in consequence of the tail of his coat being shut in a door.

“Well, the Fox was never quite imposed upon by all this, but he thought there might be some truth in it; and one night he told his friends that he had fallen very ill, and must leave them for a time to recruit his health. They all professed the greatest anxiety, and there was such a cackling and braying and mewing and hissing, that anybody would have thought he was the dearest friend of them all, and that he was going to die.

“He looked very ill certainly, and even while they were talking he was taken so much worse that he actually *did* die; or at least there was every appearance of his having done so, for his eyes were quite glassy and his tongue

lobbed out at the side of his jaws, where his friends all trembled to see the fangs of teeth; and at last he fell back with his arms crossed upon his breast, and gave a final struggle; after which all was still.

“‘Poor beggar!’ said the Ox. ‘He was an amusing sort of fellow at times; but I’m afraid only a low adventurer. It was a good thing he never tried to borrow anything of me; and, on the whole, things are as well as they are, for these sort of people get very troublesome at times.’

“‘Haw! hee! Haw! yes,’ said the Ass, with a fashionable air. ‘Haw hee haw; but don’t you think it’s very—hee haw—impertinent for him to take the—hee haw—liberty to come here to—hee haw—die? I always thought he was a—hee a haw—low fellow, and a—hee haw—snob.’

“‘He was wanting in tok-a-rok-a-tok-tok spirit, and was very deficient in rok took argument; and I think he was a coward. I tok-a-roo-doo-do indeed,’ crowed the Cock.

“‘I must sss-say I sssaw he was-sss deceitful at first, and sss-so I disliked him. Though I was sss-so sss-civil, I only consulted my own sss-safety, because he was sss-so sss-silly as to come as my sss-suitor,’ hissed the Goose.

“‘How, now, the least you can do is to say nothing: he knew what I thought of him, and I don’t mind crying now he’s gone, poor mew-ow mia-ow mol-row fellow,’ said the Cat, who was as artful as the Fox, and had seen a twinkle in his eye by which she knew he was not dead.

“‘Hough! Stuff!’ growled the Dog, who came in at the

moment. 'Dead is he? Well there's no need to say how—how—how, I disliked him; but if he's dead I shan't have to fight him, that's all.'

"The party soon left the dead Fox quite alone and went about their affairs; all except the Cat, who watched him from the top of the barn where she hid behind a tile.

"The very next night the Goose was found, all torn and mangled and with her head off, in the next field; then the Cock was stripped of half his tail feathers; the Ox was bitten and scored all down his fat ribs till he roared again; and the Donkey was found kicking and yelling with half an ear off, and a prickly bush under his tail.

"One night the Fox came in and thought he saw that the Dog was chained up to his house; but he wasn't, for he had been told what to do by the Cat, who could hardly persuade him to be guilty of a deception, he was so honest. However, when he saw the Fox, and knew that he had done so much mischief, he sprung out a little too soon, and caught him by the long tail of his coat.

"'I said I'd kill you,' said the Dog, 'and so now fight;' but Foxey was too artful for that; he actually turned round and snipped his own tail off with his white teeth, leaving it in his enemy's jaws, while he fled across the fields. I saw him long afterwards, when he was a notorious robber and bandit, but he never wore a coat with a tail again: he kept to jackets ever afterwards, and was a disgrace to his family."



CHAPTER VI.

How the Minstrel was bidden to the Wedding, and what happened there.

He meets with a Companion, and they defeat the King of the Vampyres.

OUR Troubadour had finished the mending of his Mandolin before Master Mus got to the end of his story, and after each of the travellers had taken a handy staff from the tree, to help him on his way, they went along the Forest road in company, laughing and talking as they walked.

You may be sure, therefore, that Rana was rather surprised to see his friend suddenly step back, check himself in the middle of a chuckle, and scramble into a hole by the road-side, dragging his sack of meal after him.

The Froglander could see nothing, but presently following the direction of Master Mus's bright eyes, which were twinkling from behind the meal-bag, he looked across a little stream, just on the edge of the Wood, to which they had come, and there saw a tremendous-looking person with green eyes, a furry, particoloured coat, and with such a fierce expression that, added to his gigantic size, he was enough to frighten even the Troubadour himself.

"Who in the world is that brigand-looking fellow?" said Rana, following to the mouth of the hole, and whispering to his companion; "he will have to cross the stream, whoever he is, and so we have time to get ready either to fight or run, or perhaps both, for you know:—

'He who fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day.'

"Don't make a jest of it," said poor little Mus; "that is our enemy, the chief of the Feline tribe, who have come down to make a raid upon us and our country; in fact he is the brother of that very Cat, who was the friend of the Fox, and his presence here means no good to us."

"Stay you here," said Rana, "and I will go across the stream, and listen under the bank, for, I see, he has a companion with him, and they are talking together."

"Be sure you keep in the water, then," said Mus, "for none of the Cat family like to wet their feet. I never

knew but one who would touch the water, and he was a miller, who lived on fish out of the weir."

So Rana went, and crept softly down the bank, and thence he swam quietly across to a willow tree, from under the root of which he heard all that the two Cats were saying.

It was evident that they had heard of the wedding party, and though Rana could not make out whether they intended to attack the village that night, he heard enough to show him that the Feline Chief would be about the brewhouse watching the guests at the feast, and ready for an onslaught.

When the pair of Robbers had gone away, the Froglander went back, and told Master Mus what he suspected, and they both agreed to say nothing about it, except to a few of his friends, who would see that the place where the party was to be held was properly fastened.

They had no sooner entered the village, where great preparations were going on in a large farm-yard near the brewhouse, than several stout Mouselanders came out to them, and as they were laughing and talking, and making a great noise, they seemed to have begun to attack the strong ale, and the rest of the good cheer provided for the wedding, before the proper time.

However, Master Mus took two or three of the steady ones aside, and they all went to inspect the brewhouse which they found all well secured, only one entrance being left open for the admission of the party, and that

such a small one that no Feline could get in without being immediately observed.

The Mouselanders made Rana so welcome, when they heard that he was an enemy of the Owls, that had he not been a very sober fellow, as became a Troubadour, and accustomed to drink nothing but water, he might soon have been tipsy.

He tasted their strong ale, but didn't like it, and the cheese which they had provided to eat with it, was too musty for his taste ; but there was plenty else to be had, for the whole company had just assembled, and the feast was already prepared :—meal, and honey, and fruit, and bacon, cooked in oil, being the most substantial dishes, while cake and sweets were also there in profusion for the benefit of the ladies. When the Bride and Bridegroom came, the entire party formed in procession, and went silently in at the low doorway, afterwards taking up their position in a ring round the happy pair.

There were a great number of distinguished people there from the principal families in Rodentia. Of course, there were the Jerboas, brothers of the bride ; and then there were some of the Dors, who wore gilt tails to their coats ; and one or two of the high nobility, such as the Arvicoles and the Mulots, while the agricultural interests were represented by the Harvests and the Fields, in their ball dresses of brown coats, grey trousers, and mustard-coloured waistcoats.

Everybody having paid their respects to the newly-married couple, and to old Dun Jerboa, the father of the

Bride, who was the Village Magistrate and the giver of the feast, the merriment began.

Rana, who had already tuned his Mandolin, struck a few grand chords, and then commenced that wonderful wedding song, which he had learned in Batrachia, and which you may sometimes hear indifferently performed at Exeter Hall by modern musicians. It runs like this:—

Happy, Happy, Happy, Happy,
Happy, Hap—*pi* pair,
None but the brave, none but the brave,
None but the bra-a-ave deserve
The Fair.

And then all the company joined in, led by a party of singing Mouselanders, conducted by Rana, who beat time with one hand, playing his Mandolin with the other:—

Happy, Happy pair,
Happy—happy—hap, hap, happi,
Hap-pap-pappi pair,
None but the brave,
None but the brave,
None, oh none, oh, no, no, none,
None but the brave, none but the bra-ave,
None but the bra-ha-have
Deserve the Fair.

Oh! it was glorious.

All went “merry as a marriage bell,” as the poet observes, and the old folks hob-a-nobbed with their glasses, and the young people struck up a dance, and a select party of the Town Council got into an argument

about the village pump, and used very vulgar language, just as some other Town Councils, and Members of City Corporations do now, until they were called to order by old Dun Jerboa, who was Mayor. It was a grand feast, and everybody was intent on enjoying it as much as possible.

The Batrachian surpassed himself, and sang and played to the admiration of the whole company; none of them had ever heard such a minstrel. The native singers were not bad performers, but they were nothing to Rana, who opened his mouth, and shouted, and beat time with his hand, and nodded his head, and trilled, and made his Mandolin speak, till everybody was in raptures; and the High Chamberlain's first cousin, who was present, asked him to go to Court, to teach the Royal Family of Rodentia the whole art of singing on the Tonic Sol-Fa principle.

This request reminded the Troubadour that it was time he retired, since he must be afoot early the next morning, and it would be shame to him to neglect his great mission for private amusements, or even for the sake of his art.

He begged the company to excuse him, therefore; but they cried out: "One more song before you go! Don't leave us: we shall be so dull!"

Rana complied with their request to sing one more song; and to remind them that he must proceed on his journey, as well as to show what proficiency he had attained in music, he instantly composed and sang the

following plaintive, but scientific refrain accompanying it by a succession of octave seconds. You will see what an accurate knowledge he had of *pronunciation*.

You ask me what my art can DO,
Upon your company to throw,
Another bright and cheering RE,
Before I go my lonely way.
Let those who fain would learn of MI,
And sing in wand'ring minstrelsy,
Prepare to travel near and FA,
Their company the light guitar,
The Minstrel never should be SOL-
itary, but on some green knoll
May lightly sing, Tra-la-la- LA,
And answer with his light guitar.
By this, the Minstrel life you SI,
Is good for you and best for me ;
For I can sing where'er I go,
Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si, DO.

The last notes had just died away, and the minstrel had raised his fine eyes to the ceiling, as all great singers do when they come to an effective passage, when he suddenly saw another pair of eyes, fierce green ones, glaring down from a trap-door which had been left partly open in the roof of the brewhouse.

Some of the soberest of the guests had seen them too, and were already making their escape, when they heard Rana's loud warning cry.

He had only time to spring on to the edge of a huge ale-vat, filled with water, when the trap above gave way, and the Chief of the Felines, who had been watching

the assembly, came crashing through the roof with a howl of fear and rage.

He was so stunned by the fall, that before he could regain his feet the Mouselanders had time to make a rush for the door, whence they all scampered helter-skelter across the fields, amidst the screams of the ladies, of which those of the bride were the most audible.

They would never have had time to get away, but for the bravery of the Minstrel ; who, leaping down from the edge of the tub, gave the enemy a smart blow upon the nose.

With a fierce growl of pain he sprang at him, showing such fangs as reminded Rana of the brigand Snaggio ; but the active Batrachian darted behind the tub, and then bounded back again, completely over it, at a single spring.

The Cat, who thought he was resting on the top of the vat, and did not know that it was open, in the attempt to leap upon him plumped into the water, where he lay wallowing and choking long after the Minstrel had slipped out at the door and made his way to the stream on the other side of the high road.

But Rana's adventures were not yet over for the night.

He had no sooner dropped over the bank than a long lean hand came out of a hole and caught him by the wrist, while a voice in the language of Batrachia said,—

“Hold, Froglander. Help a fellow-countryman.”

“Who is here ?” said the Troubadour, feeling for his







The Froglander goes to the Wedding Feast.



sword with the other hand. "For which king, Batrachian? Speak, or die."

"Come out into the moonlight, my Minstrel," said the stranger, "and then if you are a true Batrachian you may know me; for I am the Keeper of the King's Conscience, and am playing the Rebel in order to save the throne."

When they had climbed up the bank again, and stood in the light, Rana saw that he had spoken truly as to his being the Keeper of the King's Conscience; for he had not long before passed through Slosh on the Royal Birthday, when he went on a tour for raising the taxes.

"And who may you be?" said the nobleman, as the Minstrel bowed in token of recognition.

"I am Rana, the Troubadour."

"Rana, Rana? What! are you the young man about whom the Sloshians have a foolish song, which few people believe?"

"I am. The song is the work of my enemies; but I shall return when my work is accomplished."

You see that Rana had already adopted that brief and noble manner of speech which none but the great can keep up for any length of time.

His whole bearing was so remarkably dignified that the Keeper of the King's Conscience looked at him for a moment in silent admiration.

"Youthful individual," he said at length, in his grand manner, "it may interest you to know that the fair

Sauriana is yet unwed. Her father, the corpulent and asthmatic Mayor, has petitioned the King for a patent of nobility, and for a Royal decree that his daughter shall marry one of the Secretaries of State; but the King has refused, in these remarkable words: 'No; let her be off with the old love before she is on with the new. I speak I-rana-cally.' Now you know that when his Majesty makes a joke there is always a meaning in it, though it often happens that nobody can discover it, because it is so skilfully concealed. You may depend upon it, that a certain exalted personage—you will excuse any more definite allusion—has received information of a private and confidential nature."

"From the Oozly bird?" said Rana.

"What!" ejaculated the Noble, "do you know that most wonderful creature? Ah! why is she not at Court? It is by her advice that I am here. I have dissembled till the Rebels trust me, and believe that I am a traitor. My mission here is to receive Stork the usurper and conduct him to Batrachia previous to the execution of the King; and I have a body guard of Batrachians, all of whom I have won over to my confidence."

"Where do you seek this villain Stork, then?" said Rana, with deep interest.

"He is expected in the town a league hence in three days from this time, and as he will make the journey by night will be escorted by a guard of Owls, with whom he has been living in an old tower on this side of the mountain that divides Rodentia from the Frogland."

Rana laughed loud and long. "Do you seek his destruction, then?" said he.

"Even so," said the Keeper of the King's Conscience gloomily; "but I would first expose his falsehood to my followers."

"I will enable you to do both," cried the Minstrel, and with a lofty look of defiance he swept the strings of his gittern, and trolled in a loud clear voice,—

"Storkey! Gawkey, Lankey, Hum,—
Every finger and every thumb,
Will take a sight to see you come,
As King of Batrachian Islands."

"Hush On your life, peace," said the Noble in some alarm; "there is other work to do yet. One of my troop has seen a party of the Vampyres on the road, and brought the news into our camp only this afternoon. Depend upon it that they mean mischief, and I am in hiding here to watch for their coming, that I may warn my people not to stroll along by the hedges after nightfall."

"Who, then, are these Vampyres, for I never heard of them?" said Rana.

"They are a tribe of savages, fierce and bloodthirsty like the Ratti robbers, but not so numerous; and belonging to the negro race, so that they are not easily discovered when they sally forth on a black night, wrapped in their tough leathern cloaks, which will turn the edge of a sword, they are so hard. These Vampyres are so savage that it is believed they drink the blood of their

victims as some other cannibals do, and it is quite certain that they attack the enemy with their teeth, and suck the blood while they tear him with their claws. But, hush! down with you, Rana. I hear one coming now, by the rustle of his leathern cloak against the hedges."

"Do they take to the water as the Ratti do?" asked Rana, as they crept under the bank.

"No: I believe that, like the Felines, they dislike to wet their feet; and they are a blind, short-sighted race, as I have heard."

"Then I will have at him, if I die for it," said the Minstrel, leaping to the ground again: "we have swords, and we are two to one; but if he be like the Felines, I have another weapon. Fill your mouth with water as I do, and follow me."

They bounded over the hedge, and were in the path in a moment, but not before the Vampyre had heard them; for he came on with a rushing noise, and before the Keeper of the King's Conscience could spring aside caught him by the leg with one of his long supple feet, at the same time drawing his sword, and baring his hideous teeth that he might fasten them in the Batrachian's throat.

Another moment, and he would have clasped him in his leathern cloak, and have borne him to the ground; but Rana, quick as lightning, seized his extended hand, and before he could disengage it spurted a deluge of water into his ugly black face.

Confused, blinded, and mad with rage, the savage made a few wild passes with his weapon, and floundered hither and thither across the path ; but the Troubadour's sword had already passed through his body, and he fell with a last gasp of fierce despair.

"You have saved my life," said the Noble to the Minstrel ; "henceforth it is for you to lead, and for me to follow."

"While they were looking to see whether their adversary had really been slain, they heard footsteps on the road, and presently there came by a procession of the Mouselanders, amongst whom was the wedding party, which had escaped from the Feline chieftain ; for the procession had been formed to carry home the newly wedded pair."

When they saw Rana they all embraced him, and sang such praises of his valour and honour, that he was quite ashamed ; for, like all great heroes, he was particularly modest : so he called their attention to the body of the Vampire, and asked if they knew what was his rank. All the party shrank back at sight of the corpse, and there was a great screaming of the females, several of the Jerboa family fainting outright.

"I shall soon have to ask you to show your friendship for me," said Rana ; "and if any of you have friends among the Ratti, bring them with you, and meet me here three days hence : till then, farewell !"



CHAPTER VII.

How Rana heard that the Batrachians wanted a King. The true Story of King Log and King Stork, with some private particulars of what really happened.

FOR three days Rana dwelt with the Batrachians, who were the followers of the Lord Keeper of the King's Conscience, and all of whom were loyal to the throne, though they declared that the insurgents, by the direction of their leader, had set up a log of wood as king, and followed laws which the Rebel Chief had drawn up.

The revolution was at its height when they left, and the Court was in great danger from the mob, which

paraded every day in front of the palace, demanding the abdication of his Majesty, and carrying the block that they called King Log in a sort of sedan chair.

Nobody paid any taxes, and altogether the monarch was in a bad way, and the throne of Batrachia was likely soon to be vacant, for the King was dangerously ill.

They were very despondent as to what could be done in the event of the King's death ; but Rana told them that wise men did one thing at a time, and that their present business was to circumvent the Stork.

The Batrachians made much of the Troubadour, to whom their leader paid so great honour that he made him share his lodging in the forked root of a great alder tree, and had him served at his own table.

On the third evening, when Rana set out to meet the Mouselanders, a dozen Batrachians would have gone with him as a body guard ; but he took only his mandolin, and, putting his sword in his belt, went forth alone. Now he had only just reached a turn in the road, and had sat down on a bank to tune his gittern, that he might lighten the way with a song, when he heard a sound of talking in a part of the wood where a stump of an old tree was almost hidden in a thicket of leaves and flowers by the margin of a little pool. It was not yet dark, and a couple of thrushes were carolling a woodland ditty on a green bough that grew out of the old trunk. It was the sudden ceasing of their song that first drew Rana's attention to the cackling of voices far more discordant.

He could have sworn that he had heard that harsh disagreeable talk before, and as there was no other way of seeing who was there than by creeping quietly into the pool, he waded as far as he could by the help of his staff, and looked up from beneath the dark shadow of the leaves and weeds.

There could be no mistake about it ; there was Madam Duck, with her sly old eye turned up as though she was the most innocent and moral of mortals, talking to a tall long-legged stranger, with a sharp beak and a short tail, in whom Rana at once recognized that military Stork of whom the Oozly bird had spoken to him. He was a fierce-looking, lanky, swaggering fellow, but rather shabbily dressed, and with his short tail and his long legs, looked about as ungraceful one way as Madam Duck did the other. It seemed, by the by, that Madam had recently married ; for a corpulent Drake, in a short silk spencer and silver waistcoat, stood by her side waiting for an opportunity to join in the conversation ; but Madam never gave him the chance of saying a word, she cackled so fast and so loud, while it was evident that both she and her husband were flattered by the attention of such a fashionable military swaggerer as this notorious cadet of the Stork family.

The intelligence which the pair had come all the way from Batrachia to bring was, that the King was dead, that the Court was all in disorder, and that the insurgents only waited his coming to proclaim him King, after they had shut up or even assassinated the Crown Prince.

The three conspirators chuckled as they talked of the retribution which would fall on the misguided Batrachians, who were impatient to exchange their legitimate monarch for a King Log, and to abolish King Log for King Stork, who would swallow up their land, eat their substance, and mortgage their territory to repair his own fortune, which had been squandered in gambling and riotous living. But there was something of still greater interest to Rana ; for presently, in the midst of their laughing and chuckling, he heard his own name mentioned.

“My friends, the Owls, tell me that a minstrel fellow out of Batrachia fell into their hands a few days ago,” said the Stork ; “and that they gave him a severe mauling, after which he fell over a precipice, and was, most likely, dashed in pieces.”

“That must have been Rana, the Parish Clerk,” said Madam Duck. “Everybody in Batrachia believes him to be dead, except Sauriana and a few people in Slosh ; but it matters very little what *she* thinks, for my old friend the Spider, who is as false a villain as I would wish to have for my enemy, has laid a spell upon her, and there she lies in the Mayor’s house beyond Top-pititti ; and, what is more, she isn’t likely to get out in a hurry, for there has been a landslip, and the water is all out, so that she is in the middle of an island *in* an island, and nobody pays much attention to her or her stupid old father in these troublous times.”

“Ah, well ! I’ll look the old fellow up when I come,”

said the Stork. "These Sandboys are a rich set, I'm told, and I'll pay him the compliment of inviting his daughter to Court and borrowing some money of him."

"Court, indeed," said Madam Duck, mightily offended, "if that's how you're going to begin, I'd advise you not to come to Batrachia."

The Stork gave her a fierce look, but presently laughed and said he was only joking. Then apologizing for having no house in that part of the country to which he could invite the pair, he bade them good bye, saying,—

"I shall be at Toppititti in three weeks, and I go to meet the Batrachian deputation to-night."

"I will be there too," cackled Madam Duck in a low tone, as he strode away.

"And so will I," said Rana, as he bounded to the bank, and regained the road.

He had first, however, to meet the Mouselanders, and when he reached the spot he found a large number of them assembled together with a small band of the Ratti, who swore that they would stand his friend for ridding them of the Feline, who it appears died of the cold water which he had taken into his stomach in the vat.

Rana mistrusted the whole Ratti race, but he knew they could do just the sort of work he wanted, and he had the satisfaction of seeing them start off, with a large number of efficient Mouselanders, led by Master Mus himself, on an expedition which pleased them mightily,

and of which you will learn some particulars by and by.

Having arranged this matter, the Minstrel hastened back to the Batrachian camp, where he arrived some time before the Stork made his appearance : so that he was able to make all his plans known to the entire company before the usurper was announced.

Rana himself, with his mandolin across his shoulder and his sword upon his thigh, was seated on a sort of dais beneath a canopy of lily-leaves, and the Keeper of the late King's Conscience, who was now weeping for the death of his Master, sat by his side. The Minstrel could see the deceitful, turned-up eye of Madam Duck amongst the leaves a little way off ; but of that he took no notice, except to throw a handful of sand in that direction with such an accurate aim, that he heard a dismal croak as her head was moved to the other side.

The Stork came unattended, which he explained by saying that the Owls had gone forward to prepare his temporary residence at the next city, where he intended to lodge with them in the tower of the church, to which he was attached before he joined the army.

He was received with grave politeness ; but, in answer to all his inquiries, was told that the deputation could do nothing at present, but would wait on him at his own quarters in two days. As this decision was made known to him by Rana, he asked what authority the Minstrel held amongst them, and approached with such a bold and truculent air that the Batrachians set up a shout,

and said : "Whoever does harm to Rana the Troubadour, shall never be our King."

Madam Duck was heard to give a loud croak of surprise ; but the Stork, who saw he had gone too far, said he hoped he should see the celebrated Rana at his quarters with the rest of the Deputation ; for the Stork Family had ever loved minstrels ; and his friends the Owls had heard of the great Batrachian who was known as the *Dutch Nightingale*.

Rana only bowed in reply, for he was too indignant at the Stork's treachery to speak ; but the rest of the Batrachians burst into peals of laughter the moment their guest was out of hearing, and long after he had gone on his way sounds of suppressed merriment arose from the pool into which they had sprung to hide their unseemly mirth.

Now Rana had seen among the Batrachians one of his old pupils to whom he used to give lessons at Slosh. He was a very accomplished singer, this pupil, and a well-grown fellow enough, with some wit, and a good deal of discretion ; and our Troubadour took him apart the day after their meeting with the Stork, and devoted the whole morning to teaching him a tune upon the mandolin ; for he had determined to send him back to Batrachia as a minstrel, that he might sing a song to the people in the streets, and so rouse the popular feeling against the Stork and his allies.

Somebody once said : "Let me make the songs for a nation and I care not who makes the laws," by which

he meant that a good stirring ballad set to a catching tune, and sold for a penny, is likely to have more effect than an Act of Parliament for which people don't care twopence.

Now Rana had composed a grandly political and grossly personal ballad, and set it to a new tune, which has since become well known, and he sent out his former pupil to sing it in the streets at Toppititti, and other parts of Frogland. This is that portion of the ballad which has been preserved, although it is stated by the learned Popo Lorum Fizz in his learned work on the Archæology of Batrachia that several pungent stanzas have been entirely lost.

I'll tell you a story without any talk,
About an adventurer called Master Stork,
Who ate all his meals without platter or fork,
And thought he'd improve 'em by taking a walk
To the land of Ba-tra-chi-a.

It was said that he followed the soldiering trade,
But nobody knew in what reg'ment or grade,
For he wore shabby clothes that were all ready-made,
And the pop of a gun made him sorely afraid,
When it happened to come in his way.

But he'd heard that Batrachians wanted a King,
So he flatter'd himself that he'd be just the thing,
With a very short tail and a very long wing,
Which would serve his new subjects to order to bring,
When he reigned in Ba-tra-chi-a.

Now some people who lived in the land of the Frog,
Had suffered their wits to be lost in a fog,
By hearing the talk of a mad demagogue,
Who persuaded them all to bow down to a Log,
As the King of Ba-tra-chi-a.



CHAPTER VIII.

*How Rana asked the Mandibles to help him to save the Prince of Batrachia,
and how he helped them in return.*

THIS song, which was very soon sung and played all over Batrachia, and was afterwards set upon the barrel organs, and brought out at concerts and music halls, had an enormous effect; such an effect, indeed, that the minstrel to whom Rana had taught it, and who went everywhere about the kingdom singing and playing, made a very handsome fortune by selling copies of the words; and soon had so many pupils to learn the mandolin that he set up a fashionable pumpkin carriage, with a sleek pair of thorough-bred moles to take him

from one house to another, that he might give morning lessons. It was equally popular, too, with the lower orders; and by the time it had got to the barrel organs, the Republican leader was compelled to shut himself up in his house, away from the fury of his own mob; while the whole nation declared, that though they would have a Regent or a new King, and not the Crown Prince or a Queen, their choice should be neither Log nor Stork.

At last the mob caught the Republican leader, while he was out after nightfall looking for something for his supper, and having bound him to the Log, sent them both floating down the stream together; and some of the Batrachian nobles having addressed the people, won about half of them over to the side of the Court again. But the other half were still influenced by democratic principles, and would hear of nothing short of a New Charter, all nine points of which they swore were necessary to the public safety.

The Queen Regent and the infant Prince were therefore in great danger; and when the disloyal mob paraded in front of the Royal Palace, they were immediately attacked by the loyal mob, so that a civil war began, of which no Batrachian could see the end.

Now all this time Rana and the Batrachians under the command of the Lord Keeper of his late Majesty's Conscience were busily devising a scheme, which afterwards turned out completely successful in restoring peace to the wretched country of the Froglanders. In the first place, there was an end of the Stork, and you

shall hear how that had been managed, by the help of the Rodentians and the followers of Master Mus.

You have been told how Rana had an interview with a number of his friends amongst the Mouselanders and a band of the Ratti, on the evening that the Stork had waited on the Batrachians, and how the Troubadour had given his friends instructions what to do, saying that he would meet them in two days from that time at an appointed place. You have been told, also, what the Stork had for answer to his demands,—namely, that the Batrachians would wait upon him at his quarters with the Owls, at the town of Cricketty, two days hence.

The two days had nearly passed; the minstrel instructed by Rana had departed for Toppititti, and a long file of Batrachians, headed by their noble leader and the nobler Troubadour, were marching in order through the main street of the town, towards the tower where the Stork had taken up his lodging.

Now this tower was an old, ruined, dilapidated place, belonging to an ancient, disused church, not far from the Town Hall, and as Rana had heard all about it from one of the Mouselanders, who came from that part of the country, he led the way through the High Street. The stone piers and buttresses of the church had so crumbled away that nothing but the great arms of ivy and creeping plants had kept them together for years past, and the tower itself was held up only by one single beam of timber, and that not very thick.

At the moment that the procession of Batrachians

approached, a detachment of Ratti came running from under the rotten old gateway, and they were followed presently by all the rest of the party—Mouselanders as well as other Rodentians.

“Is it done?” said Rana, in a whisper, to the leader of the Ratti.

“It is done!” replied the other.

And then the whole company held their fingers to their noses, and waited in silence.

It was very impressive.

Another minute, and the Stork was seen swaggering along the street, with his pouch full of offal from the market,—for what Rana had written of him was, of course, strictly true—and when he came beneath the tower he called out to the Owls, who were still snoring above: “Come, wake up, you tipsy old fools, and look out for the Froglanders. You may split a skull or two if you mind what you are about, and may sup off a minstrel’s heart for what I care. Whoo-ooo-ooop! and he flew up above the tower, where he poised himself for a moment on his long legs, ready to swoop down and dig at the Owls with his talons.

The tower rocked with his weight, and he missed his footing. Before he could recover himself, he and the Owls went crashing down together in common destruction; and as the Batrachians saw him hanging amidst the ivy by his long legs, his awkward body swinging in the wind, and his head battered in by a stone, they gave a great shout. Of course you guess what had taken

place? The Rodentians had gnawed and jagged and sawn through the beam, and the tower had broken down with the weight of their enemies.

There was a grand supper at the camp of the Batrachians that night; but Rana was away early next day, for he had work to do that could not be delayed.

For while he was at supper, and the revel of the Batrachians with their friends from Rodentia was in full flow, he heard the notes of a sweet song sounding in a grove of trees, just beyond the place in which they were all assembled. It was an old, familiar tune which the singer had chosen, and Rana knew the voice in a moment as that of his old friend Madame Nightingale, so that he took the first opportunity of slipping away from the feast and taking the nearest path to the great tree from whose branches he could hear the songstress trilling her lay,—in which he had no sooner joined than she came down to meet him.

There were strange doings in Batrachia, she told him, and she had come thence to seek him, for a minstrel who had turned the tide of the revolution by a ballad which he went about singing, had told her where the band of Batrachians who had gone out to meet the Stork might be found. As she was in such close connection with the Court, she, of course, knew that the Keeper of the late King's Conscience was loyal at heart, and had come to see whether some means could not be devised for removing the Crown Prince, whose life was in danger from the disaffected Batrachians, bands of whom

were stationed on all the roads to the royal residence, to intercept any assistance that might be attempted.

Rana, who admired her devotion, at once hit upon a scheme, which they determined to carry out; and, leaving the Court Songstress to take up her lodging in the tree (for she was an old campaigner, she said, and didn't mind it a bit), away he went to try and find the Princess of the Mandibles, at the country residence of the Countess Porcupine.

As he had to go through a part of Rodentia, he was accompanied by the band of the Ratti, who had done him such signal service; and as he was compelled to report himself to the authorities on the frontier, he at once sought an audience of the King himself, who being sadly out of funds, and thinking that the stranger might be induced to lend him a trifle—his own relations and the neighbouring monarchs having refused to grant further loans—received him very graciously.

Never was a visit better timed, for the crown jewels were in pawn, and the royal servants were grumbling because their wages were in arrear, and the whole of his Majesty's household were on short commons—meat twice a week, and the rest of the meals made up of stale bread-and-scrape, and stickjaw dumplings.

Then the wily Rana, who had grown from Parish Clerk to Troubadour, and from Troubadour to Statesman, remembered the treasures in the Robber's cave, and by careful inquiry at the Royal Record Office, found that nothing was known of the real owners. He

therefore came to an agreement with the King, that a third should go to the royal treasury, a third to the poor of Rodentia, and that he should keep the remaining third himself ; an arrangement which was so satisfactory to all parties that his Majesty gave him a bodyguard of two hundred Ratti, amongst whom were his old friends, to whom he distributed such liberal presents that they agreed to stick to him as long as he had anything left.

Taking some of the more valuable articles as a present to the old Countess Porcupine, they set out on their journey ; and Rana, leaving the Ratti encamped in the hills till his return, waited on her highness, who received him very graciously, but in great state, wearing a dress so elaborately quilled that it was a wonder how she ever got into it. She had heard of the minstrel's prowess, and also of the doings of "those horrid Radicals" the insurgents ; for the old lady was a true Conservative, and her arguments were so extremely pointed that very few people liked to attack her. For a whole day the Princess, the Countess, and the Minstrel, assisted by Madame Nightingale, who had a pretty taste, and had flown over to help them, were busy making an elegant basket-work cradle, woven of parti-coloured grass and rushes, lined with moss and wool, and decorated with flags and flowers. In this cradle, supported by long tendrils and ribands of bark, which left it to swing gently to and fro, Rana seated himself on the following morning, and then a company of Mandible guards, in

shining armour, lifted him into the air, and, led by Madame Nightingale, transported him swiftly towards Batrachia; whence, in the same cradle, the Crown Prince and his nurse were to be conveyed to a place of safety on the estate of the Countess Porcupine.

Can you imagine the overwhelming joy and delight which transported the whole Court when Madame Nightingale flew to impart the news of the arrival of Rana the minstrel, and the reason for his coming? Words would fail to describe the uproarious greeting which saluted him as he bounded from the cradle right into the arms of Ka Foozlum, the Prime Minister. The Court trumpeters struck up such a blast on their whelkophones and whigmaleeries that Echo itself was too much startled to make any reply; and while the infant Prince was held aloft amidst the acclamations of the nobles, the Minister of Finance, who had nothing else to do, and so had practised ground and lofty tumbling, stood on his head at the very foot of the Throne,—an indiscretion unnoticed by the Queen - Mother, whose eyes were filled with tears.

The Crown Prince and his nurse were quickly on their journey under the escort of the faithful Mandibles, and some old Toads who still retained places at Court actually took the jewels from their own heads to send as presents to the Princess. As to Rana he knew well enough how to get back again, and before midnight on the second day, dressed in Minstrel garb, and singing





The Mandibles help Rana to remove the Crown Prince of Batrachia.

his own song of the "Stork," he passed through the insurgent lines, and was back again in Rodentia.

It was there that he heard how the King of the Mandibles had passed through on his way to the house of the Countess Porcupine, because his kingdom had been attacked by his old enemies the locusts, who had made a visit to the Grasshoppers a pretext for ravaging the country.

There was no time to be lost. Rana, who had by this time become not only Statesman but General, sought the King, and in three days having beaten up recruits, was at the head of an army of Ratti, led by his own band of faithful Batrachians, and the King himself with his Mandibles.

Of the fierce and decisive battle that ensued, and how after having distinguished himself by conducting a brilliant charge at the decisive moment, Rana defeated the Enemy and received the thanks of the King upon the field, nothing need be said here, since, if you don't find it in the Annals of Rana the Batrachian compiled by the learned Anurous and deposited in twenty volumes in the library of Toppititti, I am afraid that the records of the event are altogether lost. For the same reason there is no need to enter into full particulars of the manner in which the Minstrel who had begun by being a Parish Clerk, and by virtue of truth, honesty, and a taste for music, had become Troubadour, Statesman, General, and Chieftain; organised a great army of Batrachians, Mandibles, and Ratti; marched upon

Batrachia, drove in the insurgent outposts, slew the ringleaders, pardoned the people, and restored law and order. Enough that he did it; and that having reinstated public justice, he made his friend the Keeper of the Conscience temporary Governor, while he went to seek Sauriana and her father, the Mayor of Slosh.





CHAPTER IX.

How Rana rescued Sauriana from the Spider's spell, and how the Mayor gave his consent to the Frogs' Wedding.

NOW one of the three Toads, who tried to trot to Tedbury, had come back so totally tired that he determined never to take any more long walks, and so he drove a good sleek strong mole in a light waggon, and went into business as a carrier, sitting in front of his vehicle, and smoking his short pipe as happy as the day was long.

Having taken to a pleasant and useful occupation he had grown so much better tempered that he was the jolliest old Toad in all the country, and wasn't even

envious of Rana's great fortune ; having been heard to say at "The Sun," where he put up, that Master Rana was always a smart fellow, and taking some credit to himself for being related to the great Batrachian.

As our Troubadour was going through the main street one day he saw Master Bufo—which you will remember was the Toad's name—saluting him with his whip as all drivers do, and went up to speak to him.

Judge of his surprise when he learned that the old fellow knew all about Sauriana, and where she was hidden, and told him also that his old enemy the Duck had quarrelled with her husband, and had since died of a surfeit of sage and onion.

The very next day Rana bade the Court farewell, and took his departure for Toppititti in a mail cart driven by the Toad, while all the distinguished people of the Royal Circle crowded round him ; the gentlemen struggling which should be first to have the honour of packing his boxes and baggage on the mail cart ; the Queen-Mother herself in tears upon the breast of her brave preserver, and the whole Court weeping and imploring him to take care of his precious health.

It was deeply affecting ; but the heart of the great General, Statesman, Troubadour, Chieftain, and Leader, still clung to its first love. He must rescue Sauriana or perish in the attempt.

And first he went to see his old friend the Oozly bird, who had changed her residence to the streams



Rana bids the Court farewell, but promises to return.

beyond Slosh, for a great flood had come down from the mountains in the very centre of Toppititti, where there was neither land nor city ; and this flood was supposed to have been caused by the continual removing of the earth and stones from the base of the hills by the people, who persisted in the absurd custom of digging up potatoes with two-pronged forks.

This torrent had rushed down in a rapid stream to that point of the island where the Mayor's house stood on a rock ; and there it had burst into a cataract, surrounding the whole place with a furious rush of water, so that the whole household were imprisoned in this small space, and the house itself was threatened with destruction.

This had all come about through the malice of the Spider, who finding that Sauriana would have nothing to say to his suit, cast a spell upon her father, in which she was also involved ; and having woven a web around the door of the house, which neither the Mayor nor his daughter could pass, had gone about his business just before the floods came.

Now this web, which the Spider had woven, could not, by the laws of *Batrachia*, be broken by any but a native born, who must be of princely rank. Even the Queen Mother had no power over it, and the Governor whom Rana had appointed dared not touch it, though he had been Keeper of the King's Conscience. So that, although the old Toad said that he knew of a place where a strong swimmer might hope to cross the rapids,

and had often heard the Oozly bird, and other friends of poor old Frosch and his daughter, denounce the law, nobody had yet been bold enough to attempt it.

Now this was very hard for poor Rana to bear. He had saved the throne, delivered the nation, was General, Statesman, Chieftain, but could do nothing for her he loved because he was not Prince. Should he brave everything, and break the laws and constitution of Batrachia? He could put himself at the head of an army and defend his right to the last.

"No," said the noble Froglander. "No ; how can I be true to Sauriana if I am false to my country?" And so he sat down with a jug of water, a loaf of bread, and his mandolin, and began to sing and play so plaintively that Sauriana herself heard him, and came out upon the balcony to join in the song, and kiss her hands to a lover so constant and true.

He was still playing, and finishing a beautiful vocal quaver, which made the very rocks resound, when the Toad came waddling up, quite out of breath. "Make haste," he said, "and never mind me ; cut round to Toppittitti road like a good one. All Batrachia is coming that way, with flags flying, and Mandibles in armour, and Water Bailiffs, and Effigies on Caterpillars, and a magnificent cavalcade like twenty Lord Mayor's Shows in one. It must surely be a coronation or something, and everybody is calling out for Rana. Bless me I never ran so fast in my life."

Rana sprang along the road, wondering what it could

all mean, when as soon as the great multitude of Batrachians caught sight of him they raised a shout which could be heard far and near, and a detachment of brilliant Chameleon guards, in their many-coloured suits, came towards him. Following these was the Queen Mother, and then came the great nobles bearing a cushion, on which rested the lily and turquoise crown of Batrachia. "Rana shall be King; the Troubadour shall make new laws," shouted the people; and then the Queen Mother and all the Court told him how the Crown Prince, who had always been sickly, had died, and that they besought him to take the Crown and to save the country.

There and then they crowned him, and he, after seeing that the people were in earnest, sprang to the top of a neighbouring hill, and delivered an address which lasted three hours, and only came to an end when somebody in the crowd shouted, "Bravo! Now give us a song." He would not comply, for he told them that he would sing no more until he had rescued her who should be his Queen; and then he asked them to wait his return, for he must go alone.

With rapid strides, and a heart beating high with love and ambition, he dived into the flood at the place which the Toad had pointed out, and swam, with long, powerful strokes, to the edge of the rock beneath the Mayor's house, where he clung to regain his breath. Then, with a few well-directed blows, he cut away the web from before the door, leaped to the balcony, and had Sau-

riana in his arms. She had grown so slender with grief and imprisonment that she was no very heavy weight, and Rana took her safely to the shore, and would have rejoined his friends, but that she implored him to save her father, who was already standing at the door of his house, singing out, "Bravo, Rana! bravo, my lad! I'll reward you! I'll reward you!"

Rana was so disgusted that he had, for a moment, a great mind to leave him there; but he remembered that he was a King, and therefore more was expected of him than of others, and so he plunged in again.

He had a hard tussle to make his way back again; for though Master Frosch had been cut off from a good deal of his high living, he was still a rare size, and no little weight to carry; but he managed to land him at last, to the joy of Sauriana, and the gratitude of the stupid, gluttonous old Sandboy himself, who said: "That's right, Rana, that's right, my boy! we'll see, we'll see! But I must get you a better berth than that of Parish Clerk you know, eh? eh?"

The old fellow had heard nothing of recent events, and Sauriana was so full of joy to find her lover really alive, that she asked no questions at present.

"Will you consent to our union?" said the Minstrel to the Mayor, as he took Sauriana's hand.

The old fellow was not such a bad one after all, and he couldn't refuse anything to him who had just saved their lives, so he said, "Well, eh? yes; hang it, I will! and we'll have a jolly wedding dinner; and you shall

have a place in the Custom House. My daughter mustn't be the wife of a Parish Clerk you know, eh?"

"I've a much higher place for her," said Rana.

"You have, eh? Well I'm glad to hear it; what is it?"

"Come and see," said the Minstrel, as he took Sauriana on his arm and left the Mayor to follow.

When he overtook them, he saw Rana sitting in the midst of his Court, with the Crown of Batrachia on his head, and Sauriana by his side; while all the people shouted, "Long live the King!"

You will not want to be told how, after the mourning for the young Prince was over, Rana and Sauriana were married; nor how many royal guests came to the Frog's wedding.

A curious event happened on that occasion. Rana was called upon for a song, and when he had tuned his mandolin, and sung a verse or two, he broke down. He could never make out how it was, and whether he had caught cold, or his newly-acquired dignity was too heavy for his voice, or what was the reason nobody found out; but when the courtiers discovered that the King was so hoarse that he could only croak, croaking became the fashion in Batrachia, and since that time no Froglander has ever been heard to sing.

The Spider fell a victim to his own craft, for having tried to eject a family of Ants from a house that they had built under a hill, he began to weave a web at the

door, when the house itself fell down, and stifled him in the ruins.

The fate of the leader of the insurgents was still more terrible. You have heard how he was sent floating down the river on a Log. From that Log he was taken prisoner by an eminent naturalist, who happened to be out on the search for scientific objects.

For some time afterwards he was kept in a glass box, and the circulation of his blood was shown by means of a gas microscope at the Polytechnic Institution.





