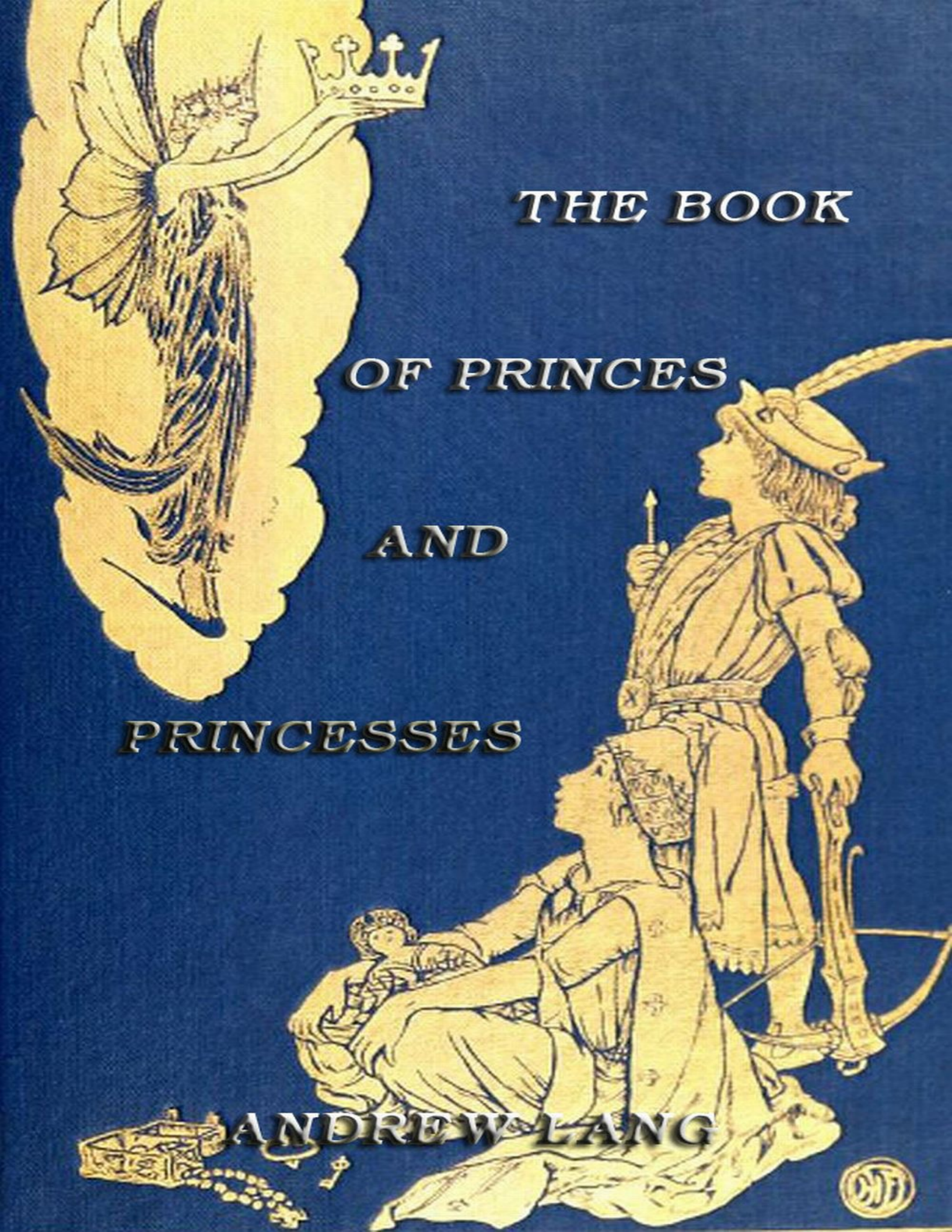
# THE BOOK OF PRINCES AND PRINCESSES



ANDREW LANG

# The Book Of Princes And Princesses

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## Contents:

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Camilla tells her tale

# ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be

unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no

cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of

course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's " Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in

poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published " Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in " Helen of Troy " Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time. Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he

thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire

structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to " repose on the bosom " of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends, who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick

and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas pêre, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricksy fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win;
For, man, I maistly had my fill
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph

being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's " yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called " Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,
Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,
They know not, poor misguided souls,
They, too, shall perish unconsoled.
I am the batsman and the bat,
I am the bowler and the ball,
The umpire, the pavilion cat,
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of " Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," " Old Friends," and " Essays in Little " will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral. genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

# THE BOOK OF PRINCES AND PRINCESSES

## PREFACE

All the stories about Princes and Princesses in this book are true stories, and were written by Mrs. Lang, out of old books of history. There are some children who make life difficult by saying, first that stories about fairies are true, and that they like fairies; and next that they do not like true stories about real people, who lived long ago. I am quite ready to grant that there really are such things as fairies, because, though I never saw a fairy, any more than I have seen the little animals which lecturers call molecules and ions, still I have seen people who have seen fairies — truthful people. Now I never knew a lecturer who ventured to say that he had seen an ion or a molecule. It is well known, and written in a true book, that the godmother of Joan of Arc had seen fairies, and nobody can suppose that such a good woman would tell her godchild what was not true — for example, that the squire of the parish was in love with a fairy and used to meet her in the moonlight beneath a beautiful tree. In fact, if we did not believe in fairy stories, who would care to read them? Yet only too many children dislike to read true stories, because the people in them were real, and the things actually happened. Is not this very strange? And grown-ups are not much wiser. They would rather read a novel than Professor Mommsen's 'History of Rome'!

How are "we to explain this reluctance to read true stories? Is it because children are obliged, whether they like it or not, to learn lessons which, to be sure, are often dry and

disagreeable, and history books are among their lessons. Now Nature, for some wise purpose probably, made most children very greatly dislike lesson books. When I was about eight years old I was always reading a book of true stories called 'The Tales of a Grandfather': no book could be more pleasant. It was in little dumpy volumes that one could carry in his pocket. But when I was sent to school they used this book as a school book, in one large ugly volume, and at school I never read it at all, and could not answer question in it, but made guesses, which were not often right. The truth seems to be that we hate doing what we must do; and Sir Walter Scott himself, who wrote the book, particularly detested reading or writing what he was obliged to read or write, and always wanted to be doing something else.

This book about Princes and Princesses is not one which a child is obliged to read. Indeed the stories are not put in order, beginning with the princes who lived longest ago and coming down gradually to people who lived nearest our own time. The book opens with the great Napoleon Bonaparte, who died when some very old people still living were alive. Napoleon was not born a prince, far from it; his father was only a poor gentleman on a wild rough little island. But he made himself not merely a king, but the greatest of all emperors and generals in war. He is not held up as a person whom every boy should try to imitate, but it is a truth that Napoleon always remained a boy in his heart. He liked to make up stories of himself, doing wonderful things which even he was unable to do. When he was a boy he played at being a general, making snow fortresses and besieging them, just as many boys do. And when he was a man he dreamed of conquering all the East, Asia, and India, and Australia; and he tried to do all that, but it was too much even for him.

He used to think that he would write a new religious book, like Mahomet, and ride on a dromedary to conquer India, with his own book in his hand. Can anything be more like a boy's fancy? He even set out in the direction of India, but he stopped to besiege a little weak ruinous town called Acre, in the Holy Land, and the Turks and English, under Sir Sidney Smith, defeated him, and made him turn back, so that, later, he never came nearer India than Moscow, whence he was driven back to France by the snow and frost and the Russian army. After that he never had much luck, though he had won so many battles, and made himself an Emperor, and married an Emperor's daughter, like a poor young man in a fairy tale. I am sure that no fairy prince ever did such extraordinary things of all sorts as Napoleon; but another story shows how his only son was very unfortunate, and had a very short and unhappy life, always longing to be like his famous father. No doubt he might have been happy and fortunate if Napoleon — like the great boy he was — had not tried to do more than was possible even for himself. It was like a great boy to take no trouble to learn difficult languages, and to write such a bad hand that his marshals and generals could not read his notes written on the battlefield, and could not be certain what he wanted them to do. Now the Duke of Wellington, though not so wonderful a general as Napoleon, wrote a very good hand, when shot and shell were falling all round him, and there could be no mistake as to what he meant.

In fairy stories the princes and princesses are not always fortunate and happy, though they are always brave, good, beautiful, and deserving. If they were always happy and fortunate, nobody would care to read about them; the stories would be very dull. For example, Prince Meritorio was the eldest son of Meritorio III., King of Pacifica. He was born healthy, brave, and clever. At the age of twenty-one years, all of them spent serenely in learning his lessons,

including fencing and fortification. Prince Meritorio married the eldest daughter of King Benevolo, of the happy island of Crete. The two kingdoms were always at peace; on the death of Meritorio III. and Benevolo II. Prince Meritorio came to the throne of both countries. He had eleven sons, who used to play the Eleven of the island of Crete and beat them; and when Prince Meritorio died, at a great age, beloved by all his subjects, he was succeeded by his eldest son. Prince Sereno.

No doubt Prince Meritorio was happy and fortunate, but as he never had any troubles or sorrows, as he married his first and only love with the full consent of the dear and royal parents of both, never was changed into a rabbit by a wicked magician, never had to fight a dragon or giant, never was a starving, banished man, but continually had his regular meals, why, the Life of Prince Meritorio is not worth reading. Nobody cares a penny about him, any more than they care about George II., who was a brave man, and as fortunate as a king can be, and yet we prefer to read about Prince Charlie, who was nearly as unfortunate as King George was lucky.

Even Napoleon himself, with all his wonderful victories, is more interesting because he was defeated at last, and died like an imprisoned eagle, a captive on a little island, than he would be if he had been constantly fortunate and enormously fat.

It cannot be said that the princes and princesses in this book were too happy. The Princess Jeanne was perhaps the luckiest, and she had troubles enough while still a little girl, with being nearly forced to marry a prince whom she did not want. Indeed all young princesses and princes were much to be pitied, when they were being vexed with marrying before they were out of the nursery or the school

room. They were obliged to marry first, and fall in love afterwards if they could, which is quite the wrong arrangement. Think of King Hacon's mother, too, who was obliged to prove that she was good by carrying a red-hot iron in her hands without being burned. The best little girl now alive will be wise not to try this experiment, if she is accused of breaking anything which she did not break. Then poor Marie Louise was obliged to marry a king who was little better than an idiot; and no amount of diamonds, nor all the gold of Peru, could console her for living such a strange life as hers was in a foreign country with such a very foolish king. However, he was fond of her, at least, whereas Henry VIII. was not fond of his many wives for more than a very short time, and then he cut their heads off, or sent them away. It was a wise princess who said, when he asked her to marry him, that if she had two heads he would be welcome to one of them, but as she had only one she would prefer some other monarch. The Princess Henriette, too, after all her wanderings, when she was as poor as a goose girl in a fairy tale, found a very unsatisfactory prince to marry her at last, and perhaps was not sorry to die young. Truly they all had strange adventures enough; even Henry VII., though, when once he was king, he took good care to have no more adventures.

The story of Mary, Queen of Scots, who had so much unhappiness, is not told here, because very little is known of her childhood. But there are two tales of her childhood worth remembering. When she was a very little girl in Scotland, the Governor of the country was Cardinal Beaton. He was a Catholic, and Henry VIII., being a Protestant, was always at war with Scotland, and often tried to seize Mary when she was a little child. Now she had been told a fairy tale about the Red Etin of Ireland, a kind of red ogre, who stole a king's daughter, 'the flower of fair Scotland,' and beat her every day. So when Mary, being about three years

old, first saw Cardinal Beaton in all his scarlet clothes, she thought that he was the Red Etin of Ireland, and was terribly frightened, crying, 'Kill Red Etin! Kill Red Etin!' They did kill him, presently, but not because of her command.

The other story is merely that when she was about ten years old, or not so much, she was taken across the sea with her four little friends, the four Maries, to France, to marry the king's son. They had a very stormy voyage, and she was the only one of the company who was not sea-sick. So she was very merry at the expense of all the others. No doubt a saintly little princess would have been sorry for their sufferings; still, perhaps many little girls would have laughed. Many princes have had disagreeable uncles, like Crookedback Richard; indeed one might think, like a little girl who had read history books, that 'all uncles are villains. But perhaps no prince ever had such a terrible ogre of a father as Prince Frederick of Prussia, who became the great king and general. Though his father was very particular about making Frederick clean and neat, we do not find that he ever had a bath, or did more than wash his hands and face. Indeed Frederick's father was a horrible ogre in every way, though perhaps it was not unnatural that he did not like the prince to be perpetually playing the flute, even when out hunting!

After all, when, a child thinks of his own father and mother, and his excellent uncles and aunts, he may be glad that he was not born to be a prince, and be hidden from his enemies in a bundle of hay, like Duke Richard, or dressed as a little boy, when she is a little girl; or locked up for a year in a cold sanctuary; or be smothered in the Tower; or run all the many uncomfortable risks of all these poor royal children. The greater a man or woman is, the more terrible are the falls from greatness, as in the case of the most

unhappy of all queens, Marie Antoinette. To be a good king a man must be far better and wiser than other men, far more clever too; if he is not, he does more mischief, and probably has to bear more misfortunes, like Richard II., than any ordinary person. When we read about kings like Charles II., who only lived to amuse himself; or Charles VII. of France, who was little better — and not nearly so amusing — and think how many people far fitter to be kings died for these unworthy princes, we begin to wonder at kingship, at making a man king merely because he is his father's son. However, to consider thus is to consider too curiously, and certainly the lives of princes and princesses have been full of great adventures, and are rather more interesting to read about than the lives of the sons and daughters of the Presidents of Republics. Nobody tries to run away with them; they have not to be dressed up as beggar boys, or hidden in bundles of hay, and their fathers never burn their books, break their flutes, shut them up in prison, and threaten to cut their heads off.

Thus we learn that there is a good side to everything, if we know where to look for it, which is a very comforting reflection. But only a truly sagacious person knows where to look for it, if the misfortune happens to himself.

Meanwhile let British children remember that their forefathers were loyal even to kings not of the best — " at least, as far as they were able" — and that we have in our time been blessed with the best Queen who ever lived. So, as the old song says:

Here's a health unto his Majesty! And he who will not drink his health, We wish him neither wit nor wealth, But only a rope to hang himself!

# NAPOLEON

If you look out of your window in a clear dawn on the French Riviera you may, if you are fortunate, see, far away to the south, a faint mountain range hanging on the sea, and if you do see it, it is a sight so beautiful that you will never forget it. The mountain range belongs to Corsica, and under its shadow was born the most wonderful man the world has ever seen — Napoleon.

In the year 1769 two babies were born in widely distant places, both destined to spend the best years of their lives in a life and death struggle with each other. The birthday of Arthur Wellesley, afterwards Duke of Wellington, was on May 1, and his home was an Irish castle; while Napoleon Bonaparte saw the light in a small house in the little town of Ajaccio, in Corsica. Napoleon's ancestors came over from Tuscany early in the sixteenth century, and found in the island a large number of colonists like themselves, some Italian and some Greek, but all of them seeking refuge from the foreign armies which for fifty years had been trying to parcel out Italy among themselves. Though distant only a few hours' sail from its coasts, the inhabitants of the island were as different from those of the mainland as if the whole world lay between them. In Italy men were lazy, yet impulsive, lovers of beauty, of art, of literature, and of luxury; in Corsica they were gloomy, silent, watchful, living hardly, careless of everything which had not to do with their daily lives.

Their hatreds were not only deep and strong, but lasting. As in old Rome, it was the rule that he 'who slew the slayer' should himself be slain, and these blood feuds never died out. No wonder that a traveler was struck with the sight of

nearly the whole population wearing mourning. Almost everyone was related to the rest, and in almost every family one of its members had recently fallen a victim to a vendetta — what we call a 'blood feud.' Periods of mourning were long, too, often lasting for ten years, sometimes for life. So the country was dismal to look at, with the high bare mountains shadowing all. While in Italy things moved fast, and new customs seemed best, in Corsica they seldom altered. The father was in some ways as absolute over his wife and children as in ancient Rome. He gave his orders and they were obeyed, no matter how hard they might be or how much disliked. His wife was not expected or wished to be a companion to her husband or a teacher to her children. Even if a lady by birth, like the mother of Napoleon, she worked as hard as any servant, for there was little money in Corsica, and people cultivated their ground so that they might have produce to exchange with their neighbours — olive oil for wine, chestnuts for corn, fish for garments woven by the women, from the hair of the mountain sheep or goats.

The life led by both boys and girls in Corsica made them grow old early, and Charles Bonaparte, Napoleon's father, married at eighteen the beautiful Laetitia Ramolino, four years younger than himself. Charles had studied law in the University of Pisa, and, unlike his fellow-countrymen, was able to talk French, so that his friends looked up to him with awe, and often consulted him about their affairs, which greatly pleased him, as he loved to think himself a person of importance. He was both restless and ambitious, and in the disturbed state of the island he saw his chance for advancement. The Corsicans had lately risen against the rule of Genoa, under the leadership of Paoli, who wished to form a Republic. But his party was not powerful enough of itself to drive out the Genoese did not tell him what would be the consequence of this step. The French

arrived, and by their aid the islanders got the upper hand, but when the Genoese had sailed away the newcomers refused to follow their example. Charles Bonaparte had at first been one of the strongest partisans of Paoli, but he was not proof against the offer of the title of ' Conseiller du Roi,' and of some small legal appointments that were given him by the French governor. He forsook his former leader and took service with the French. Henceforward he was no longer 'Bonaparte,' after the Italian manner, but 'Bonaparte.'

So Napoleon, who was born a few months after this event, was a Frenchman. He was the fourth child of his parents, but only Joseph, a year older than himself, was living; and though by-and-by Napoleon completely ruled his elder brother, for a long while the two stood apart from the younger children, Joseph sharing Napoleon's affections with Marianna, his next sister, who died at the age of five. The others who lived were all much younger, Lucien, the next, being born in 1775. Madame Bonaparte was so much occupied after Napoleon's birth with trying to put things straight which had been upset by the war that she was forced to get a nurse for him. This woman, Camilla Ilari, was the wife of a man who picked up a living on the seashore, and all her life was devoted to her nursling, whom she always addressed as 'my son.'

Napoleon, on his part, fully returned her affection, and was never too great or too busy to give her proofs of it. Thirty-five years later, when the world was at his feet, she sent to say that she wished to be present at his coronation in Notre Dame. 'There is no one who will be more welcome,' was his reply, and when she had made the journey and braved the perils of the sea, and weary days of travel that seem so strange and so long when you do not understand a word of what is being said around you — when all this was over,

and the Tuileries was reached, she found Meneval, the Emperor's own secretary, awaiting her, saying that he was to place himself at her orders and to show her everything she wished to see. Oh, how happy that old woman was, and what stories she had to tell when she got back to Corsica! She had long talks with 'Madame Mere,' as the Emperor's mother was now called, and with all her children, one by one. Even Marianna — or Elise, to give her the new name she thought more elegant — and Caroline, the youngest, forgot for a few minutes how grand they had become, and laughed as Camilla reminded them of the old days and the scoldings she had given them, while Paulette, who gave herself no airs, but only wanted admiration and petting, asked fifty questions all at once, and never waited for the answers!

Of course, Camilla had no intention of going home without seeing the wife of 'mon fils,' and Napoleon's wife, Josephine, sent for her into her rooms, and, though she could not make out a word that Camilla said, smiled and nodded in reply, and presented her with two beautiful diamonds. Most wonderful of all, His Holiness Pope Pius VII. announced that he wished to give her an audience! Camilla was the proudest woman in the world when she received that message, but at the same time she was rather frightened. Why, she had never spoken to a bishop, and how was she to behave to a Pope? However, M. Meneval, who was the messenger, suggested that obedience was her first duty, so Camilla rose up and followed him meekly into the apartments of His Holiness.

'Be seated, my daughter,' said a gentle voice; and Camilla, who had knelt down at the threshold, got up slowly, and sat very upright in the chair which Meneval placed for her. For an hour and a half the audience lasted, the Pope putting to her all sorts of questions as to Napoleon's infancy and

childhood. To begin with she only answered in as few words as possible, but gradually she ceased to remember where she was and to whom she was speaking, and poured forth a torrent of recollections about the nursling whom she loved better than her own son.

'Ah, the Signora Laetitia was a grand lady, and beautiful as an angel! Yes, there were many children to be sure, and much work needing to be done for them, but the Signora Laetitia saw to their manners and never suffered them to lie, or be greedy or rude to each other. Punished? Oh yes, they were punished; in Corsica punishments were many, but the children loved their mother none the less for that; and had not her Napoleon told her only last night how much he had all his life owed to the advice of his mother? How the poor darling had suffered when he had gone, at five, for a few months to a girls' school, and how the horrid little creatures had laughed at him because his stockings would not keep up! Did they make him cry? Napoleon? She could count on one hand the tears he had shed since he was born! Well, it was true she had heard he had wept a little when Joseph, whom he loved better than anyone in the world, was separated from him at that French school where they were together; but then, as everyone knew, one tear of Napoleon's was worth bucketsful of Joseph's! What friends they were, those two, though they did quarrel sometimes! And how, big and little, they did love water! If ever you missed them, you might be certain they were bathing in one of the streams that came down from the mountains, and even when they were being driven in state to see their noble relations the boys would be sure to wriggle out of the carriage and jump into the river with their clothes on!'

Not since he was a boy himself had the Pope been so well amused, but all kinds of important people were waiting to

see him, and very unwillingly he must put a stop to Camilla's interesting talk. So, reaching some chaplets and rosaries from a table beside him, he held them out to her, and signing her to kneel before him, he gave her his blessing. A few days after the great ceremony Camilla returned to Corsica laden with gifts, and richer by a pension and many vineyards from 'Napoleon.'

Like other Corsican ladies Laetitia Bonaparte knew nothing of books, probably not even as much as her friend, the mother of Madame Junot, who had only read one in her whole life, and that was the 'Adventures of Telemaque,' which perhaps accounts for her never wishing to read another! She wrote very badly, and could not speak even her own language, which was Italian, without making many mistakes, and in this Napoleon resembled her. In spite of all his wars, of his reading, of the people he came in contact with, he never succeeded in learning either German or English, and was forced to speak Spanish through an interpreter.

It was this inability to 'pick up' languages which made him feel so dreadfully lonely when, in 1778, he and Joseph were taken by their father to France, and placed at school at Autun, Neither of them knew a word of French, but Joseph soon managed to learn enough to make himself understood, while Napoleon was tongue-tied. For five months they were left together, and then the younger boy, who was nine, was removed to the great military school of Brienne, in Champagne, for which the King had given his father a nomination. It was on this occasion that he shed the 'few tears' of which Camilla had told the Pope. Poor little boy! he had no one he could speak to, and hated games unless they had to do with soldiers. His schoolfellows did not like him, and thought him sulky because he spent most of his time by himself. Occasionally he wrote home, but letters to

Corsica cost nineteen sous apiece, and he knew that there was not much money to spare for postage.

Now and then he sent a letter to Joseph, in which he begs him to do his work and not be lazy; and once he writes to his uncle pointing out that it would be a pity to make Joseph into a soldier, for he would be no good in a fight. And as to this Napoleon could speak with certainty, for in all their boyish quarrels Joseph was never known to return a blow. One friend he did have, Bourrienne, in after-years his military secretary, who entered Brienne only a month after he did, and has written memoirs of his own life. But the rest of the boys stood aloof, though Napoleon seems to have got on better with the masters. When he had been at Brienne four years, his father again returned to France to place Marianna, who was six, at school at St. Cyr, near Paris, and Lucien, who was eight, at Brienne. Napoleon was glad to see his father, who died about fifteen months later; but he and Lucien were, of course, far apart in the school, and, what was more important, they never got on together, so that Napoleon was not much less lonely than before. Besides, he was fourteen now, and would soon be going to the military school in Paris.

That winter it was very cold, and snow fell heavily in Champagne. In England it would have been welcomed heartily by the boys, who would have spent hours in snowballing each other; but the masters at Brienne never thought of this, and gave orders that exercise was to be taken in the big hall of the college. Now the hall, which only had a fire at one end, looked very dreary, and nobody felt inclined to play. The older boys stood round the chimney and the younger ones peered disconsolately out of the windows, hoping in vain to catch a glimpse of blue sky. Suddenly young Bonaparte left the fireplace where he had been leaning, and touched Bourrienne on the shoulder.

'I am not going to stay here,' he said. 'Let us go and make a snow castle, and besiege it. Who will come? '

'I,' and 'I,' and 'I,' they all shouted, and in a moment they were all gathered round Napoleon in the courtyard, begging him to tell them what to do.

' Get as many shovels as you can find in the tool house, and we will make a castle,' he answered. 'A proper castle with a keep, and a donjon and battlements. Then we must dig some trenches for cover. When we have finished we must garrison the castle, and I will lead the attacking party.' Unfortunately, the spades and shovels left by the gardeners only numbered about one to every fifteen or twenty boys, so they had to take them in turns, the others using any tools they could find, or even their own hands. All the afternoon they worked without a moment's pause, and at sunset, just before the bell for lessons sounded, the castle was finished. That night, when the lights were put out in their cold dormitory, they asked each other anxiously, before they went to sleep, if they were quite sure that it did not feel any warmer. It would be dreadful to wake up and to find that their beautiful castle had crumbled away! Never before had there been so little difficulty in getting out of bed as when the boys woke up the next morning. No, it was certainly not warmer; in fact, it was a good deal colder, and their fingers were so frozen that they could hardly fasten the buttons of their uniforms, but their faces were rosy and smiling as they trooped down the stairs. At the classes they were more attentive than usual, and no pranks were played; nothing must be done which could earn them a punishment, or risk their being deprived of that glorious sport. So when the hour of recreation came the whole school filled the courtyard.