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PRINCE PRIGIO

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*Prince Prigio:*

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# Andrew Lang

## Prince Prigio

### PREFACE

In compiling the following History from the Archives of Pantouflia, the Editor has incurred several obligations to the Learned. The Return of Benson (chapter xii.) is the fruit of the research of the late Mr. Allen Quatermain, while the final *wish* of Prince Prigio was suggested by the invention or erudition of a Lady.

A study of the *Firedrake* in South Africa – where he is called the *Nanaboulélé*, a difficult word – has been published in French (translated from the Basuto language) by M. Paul Sébillot, in the *Revue des Traditiones Populaires*. For the *Remora*, the Editor is indebted to the *Voyage à la Lune* of M. Cyrano de Bergérac.

# CHAPTER I

Once upon a time there reigned in Pantouflia a king and a queen. With almost everything else to make them happy, they wanted one thing: they had no children. This vexed the king even more than the queen, who was very clever and learned, and who had hated dolls when she was a child. However, she, too in spite of all the books she read and all the pictures she painted, would have been glad enough to be the mother of a little prince. The king was anxious to consult the fairies, but the queen would not hear of such a thing. She did not believe in fairies: she said that they had never existed; and that she maintained, though *The History of the Royal Family* was full of chapters about nothing else.

Well, at long and at last they had a little boy, who was generally regarded as the finest baby that had ever been seen. Even her majesty herself remarked that, though she could never believe all the courtiers told her, yet he certainly was a fine child – a very fine child.

Now, the time drew near for the christening party, and the king and queen were sitting at breakfast in their summer parlour talking over it. It was a splendid room, hung with portraits of the royal ancestors. There was Cinderella, the grandmother of the reigning monarch, with her little foot in her glass slipper thrust out before her. There was the Marquis de Carabas, who,

as everyone knows, was raised to the throne as prince consort after his marriage with the daughter of the king of the period. On the arm of the throne was seated his celebrated cat, wearing boots. There, too, was a portrait of a beautiful lady, sound asleep: this was Madame La Belle au Bois-dormant, also an ancestress of the royal family. Many other pictures of celebrated persons were hanging on the walls.

“You have asked all the right people, my dear?” said the king.

“Everyone who should be asked,” answered the queen.

“People are so touchy on these occasions,” said his majesty.

“You have not forgotten any of our aunts?”

“No; the old cats!” replied the queen; for the king’s aunts were old-fashioned, and did not approve of her, and she knew it.

“They are very kind old ladies in their way,” said the king; “and were nice to me when I was a boy.”

Then he waited a little, and remarked:

“The fairies, of course, you have invited? It has always been usual, in our family, on an occasion like this; and I think we have neglected them a little of late.”

“How *can* you be so *absurd*?” cried the queen. “How often must I tell you that there are *no* fairies? And even if there were – but, no matter; pray let us drop the subject.”

“They are very old friends of our family, my dear, that’s all,” said the king timidly. “Often and often they have been godmothers to us. One, in particular, was most kind and most serviceable to Cinderella I., my own grandmother.”

“Your grandmother!” interrupted her majesty. “Fiddle-de-dee! If anyone puts such nonsense into the head of my little Prigio –”

But here the baby was brought in by the nurse, and the queen almost devoured it with kisses. And so the fairies were not invited! It was an extraordinary thing, but none of the nobles could come to the christening party when they learned that the fairies had not been asked. Some were abroad; several were ill; a few were in prison among the Saracens; others were captives in the dens of ogres. The end of it was that the king and queen had to sit down alone, one at each end of a very long table, arrayed with plates and glasses for a hundred guests – for a hundred guests who never came!

“Any soup, my dear?” shouted the king, through a speaking-trumpet; when, suddenly, the air was filled with a sound like the rustling of the wings of birds.

*Flitter, flitter, flutter*, went the noise; and when the queen looked up, lo and behold! on every seat was a lovely fairy, dressed in green, each with a *most interesting-looking parcel* in her hand. Don't you like opening parcels? The king did, and he was most friendly and polite to the fairies. But the queen, though she saw them distinctly, took no notice of them. You see, she did not believe in fairies, nor in her own eyes, when she saw them. So she talked across the fairies to the king, just as if they had not been there; but the king behaved as politely as if they were *real*– which, of course, they were.

When dinner was over, and when the nurse had brought in the baby, all the fairies gave him the most magnificent presents. One offered a purse which could never be empty; and one a pair of seven-leagued boots; and another a cap of darkness, that nobody might see the prince when he put it on; and another a wishing-cap; and another a carpet, on which, when he sat, he was carried wherever he wished to find himself. Another made him beautiful for ever; and another, brave; and another, lucky: but the last fairy of all, a cross old thing, crept up and said, "My child, you shall be *too* clever!"

This fairy's gift would have pleased the queen, if she had believed in it, more than anything else, because she was so clever herself. But she took no notice at all; and the fairies went each to her own country, and none of them stayed there at the palace, where nobody believed in them, except the king, a little. But the queen tossed all their nice boots and caps, carpets, purses, swords, and all, away into a dark lumber-room; for, of course, she thought that they were *all nonsense*, and merely old rubbish out of books, or pantomime "properties."

## CHAPTER II

Well, the little prince grew up. I think I've told you that his name was Prigio – did I not? Well, that *was* his name. You cannot think how clever he was. He argued with his nurse as soon as he could speak, which was very soon. He argued that he did not like to be washed, because the soap got into his eyes. However, when he was told all about the *pores of the skin*, and how they could not be healthy if he was not washed, he at once ceased to resist, for he was very reasonable. He argued with his father that he did not see why there should be kings who were rich, while beggars were poor; and why the king – who was a little greedy – should have poached eggs and plum-cake at afternoon tea, while many other persons went without dinner. The king was so surprised and hurt at these remarks that he boxed the prince's ears, saying, "I'll teach you to be too clever, my lad." Then he remembered the awful curse of the oldest fairy, and was sorry for the rudeness of the queen. And when the prince, after having his ears boxed, said that "force was no argument," the king went away in a rage.

Indeed, I cannot tell you how the prince was hated by all! He would go down into the kitchen, and show the cook how to make soup. He would visit the poor people's cottage, and teach them how to make the beds, and how to make plum-pudding out of turnip-tops, and venison cutlets out of rusty bacon. He showed the fencing-master how to fence, and the professional

cricketer how to bowl, and instructed the rat-catcher in breeding terriers. He set sums to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and assured the Astronomer Royal that the sun does not go round the earth – which, for my part, I believe it does. The young ladies of the Court disliked dancing with him, in spite of his good looks, because he was always asking, “Have you read this?” and “Have you read that?” – and when they said they hadn’t, he sneered; and when they said they *had*, he found them out.

He found out all his tutors and masters in the same horrid way; correcting the accent of his French teacher, and trying to get his German tutor not to eat peas with his knife. He also endeavoured to teach the queen-dowager, his grandmother, an art with which she had long been perfectly familiar! In fact, he knew everything better than anybody else; and the worst of it was that he *did*: and he was never in the wrong, and he always said, “Didn’t I tell you so?” And, what was more, he *had*!

As time went on, Prince Prigio had two younger brothers, whom everybody liked. They were not a bit clever, but jolly. Prince Alphonso, the third son, was round, fat, good-humoured, and as brave as a lion. Prince Enrico, the second, was tall, thin, and a little sad, but *never* too clever. Both were in love with two of their own cousins (with the approval of their dear parents); and all the world said, “What nice, unaffected princes they are!” But Prigio nearly got the country into several wars by being too clever for the foreign ambassadors. Now, as Pantouflia was a rich, lazy country, which hated fighting, this was very unpleasant, and did

not make people love Prince Prigio any better.

## CHAPTER III

*About the Firedrake.*

Of all the people who did not like Prigio, his own dear papa, King Grogno, disliked him most. For the king knew he was not clever, himself. When he was in the counting-house, counting out his money, and when he happened to say, "Sixteen shillings and fourteen and twopence are three pounds, fifteen," it made him wild to hear Prigio whisper, "One pound, ten and twopence" – which, of course, it *is*. And the king was afraid that Prigio would conspire, and get made king himself – which was the last thing Prigio really wanted. He much preferred to idle about, and know everything without seeming to take any trouble.

Well, the king thought and thought. How was he to get Prigio out of the way, and make Enrico or Alphonso his successor? He read in books about it; and all the books showed that, if a king sent his three sons to do anything, it was always the youngest who did it, and got the crown. And he wished he had the chance. Well, it arrived at last.

There was a very hot summer! It began to be hot in March. All the rivers were dried up. The grass did not grow. The corn did not grow. The thermometers exploded with heat. The barometers stood at Set Fair. The people were much distressed, and came and broke the palace windows – as they usually do when things go wrong in Pantouflia.

The king consulted the learned men about the Court, who told him that probably a

## Firedrake

was in the neighbourhood.

Now, the Firedrake is a beast, or bird, about the bigness of an elephant. Its body is made of iron, and it is always red-hot. A more terrible and cruel beast cannot be imagined; for, if you go near it, you are at once broiled by the Firedrake.

But the king was not ill-pleased: “for,” thought he, “of course my three sons must go after the brute, the eldest first; and, as usual, it will kill the first two, and be beaten by the youngest. It is a little hard on Enrico, poor boy; but *anything* to get rid of that Prigio!”

Then the king went to Prigio, and said that his country was in danger, and that he was determined to leave the crown to whichever of them would bring him the horns (for it has horns) and tail of the Firedrake.

“It is an awkward brute to tackle,” the king said, “but you are the oldest, my lad; go where glory waits you! Put on your armour, and be off with you!”

This the king said, hoping that either the Firedrake would roast Prince Prigio alive (which he could easily do, as I have said; for he is all over as hot as a red-hot poker), or that, if the prince succeeded, at least his country would be freed from the monster.

But the prince, who was lying on the sofa doing sums in compound division for fun, said in the politest way:

“Thanks to the education your majesty has given me, I have learned that the Firedrake, like the siren, the fairy, and so forth, is a fabulous animal which does not exist. But even granting, for the sake of argument, that there is a Firedrake, your majesty is well aware that there is no kind of use in sending *me*. It is always the eldest son who goes out first and comes to grief on these occasions, and it is always the third son that succeeds. Send Alphonso” (this was the youngest brother), “and *he* will do the trick at once. At least, if he fails, it will be most unusual, and Enrico can try his luck.”

Then he went back to his arithmetic and his slate, and the king had to send for Prince Alphonso and Prince Enrico. They both came in very warm; for they had been whipping tops, and the day was unusually hot.

“Look here,” said the king, “just you two younger ones look at Prigio! You see how hot it is, and how coolly he takes it, and the country suffering; and all on account of a Firedrake, you know, which has apparently built his nest not far off. Well, I have asked that lout of a brother of yours to kill it, and he says – ”

“That he does not believe in Firedrakes,” interrupted Prigio. “The weather’s warm enough without going out hunting!”

“Not believe in Firedrakes!” cried Alphonso. “I wonder what you *do* believe in! Just let me get at the creature!” for he was as brave as a lion. “Hi! Page, my chain-armour, helmet, lance, and

buckler! *A Molinda! A Molinda!*” which was his *war-cry*.

The page ran to get the armour; but it was so *uncommonly hot* that he dropped it, and put his fingers in his mouth, crying!

“You had better put on flannels, Alphonso, for this kind of work,” said Prigio. “And if I were you, I’d take a light garden-engine, full of water, to squirt at the enemy.”

“Happy thought!” said Alphonso. “I will!” And off he went, kissed his dear Molinda, bade her keep a lot of dances for him (there was to be a dance when he had killed the Firedrake), and then he rushed to the field!

But he never came back any more!

Everyone wept bitterly – everyone but Prince Prigio; for he thought it was a practical joke, and said that Alphonso had taken the opportunity to start off on his travels and see the world.

“There is some dreadful mistake, sir,” said Prigio to the king. “You know as well as I do that the youngest son has always succeeded, up to now. But I entertain great hopes of Enrico!”

And he grinned; for he fancied it was all *nonsense*, and that there were no Firedrakes.

Enrico was present when Prigio was consoling the king in this unfeeling way.

“Enrico, my boy,” said his majesty, “the task awaits you, and the honour. When *you* come back with the horns and tail of the Firedrake, you shall be crown prince; and Prigio shall be made an usher at the Grammar School – it is all he is fit for.”

Enrico was not quite so confident as Alphonso had been. He

insisted on making his will; and he wrote a poem about the pleasures and advantages of dying young. This is part of it:

The violet is a blossom sweet,  
That droops before the day is done—  
Slain by thine overpowering heat,  
O Sun!

And I, like that sweet purple flower,  
May roast, or boil, or broil, or bake,  
If burned by thy terrific power,  
Firedrake!

This poem comforted Enrico more or less, and he showed it to Prigio. But the prince only laughed, and said that the second line of the last verse was not very good; for violets do not “roast, or boil, or broil, or bake.”

Enrico tried to improve it, but could not. So he read it to his cousin, Lady Kathleena, just as it was; and she cried over it (though I don't think she understood it); and Enrico cried a little, too.

However, next day he started, with a spear, a patent refrigerator, and a lot of the bottles people throw at fires to put them out.

But *he* never came back again!

After shedding torrents of tears, the king summoned Prince Prigio to his presence.

“Dastard!” he said. “Poltroon! *Your* turn, which should have come first, has arrived at last. *You* must fetch me the horns and the tail of the Firedrake. Probably you will be grilled, thank goodness; but who will give me back Enrico and Alphonso?”

“Indeed, your majesty,” said Prigio, “you must permit me to correct your policy. Your only reason for dispatching your sons in pursuit of this dangerous but I believe *fabulous* animal, was to ascertain which of us would most worthily succeed to your throne, at the date – long may it be deferred! – of your lamented decease. Now, there can be no further question about the matter. I, unworthy as I am, represent the sole hope of the royal family. Therefore to send me after the Firedrake were<sup>1</sup> both dangerous and unnecessary. Dangerous, because, if he treats me as you say he did my brothers – my unhappy brothers, – the throne of Pantouflia will want an heir. But, if I do come back alive – why, I cannot be more the true heir than I am at present; now *can* I? Ask the Lord Chief Justice, if you don’t believe *me*.”

These arguments were so clearly and undeniably correct that the king, unable to answer them, withdrew into a solitary place where he could express himself with freedom, and give rein to his expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Subjunctive mood! He was a great grammarian!

## CHAPTER IV

*How Prince Prigio was Deserted by Everybody.*

Meanwhile, Prince Prigio had to suffer many unpleasant things. Though he was the crown prince (and though his arguments were unanswerable), everybody shunned him for a coward. The queen, who did not believe in Firedrakes, alone took his side. He was not only avoided by all, but he had most disagreeable scenes with his own cousins, Lady Molinda and Lady Kathleena. In the garden Lady Molinda met him walking alone, and did not bow to him.

“Dear Molly,” said the prince, who liked her, “how have I been so unfortunate as to offend you?”

“My name, sir, is Lady Molinda,” she said, very proudly; “and you have sent your own brother to his grave!”

“Oh, excuse me,” said the prince, “I am certain he has merely gone off on his travels. He’ll come back when he’s tired: there *are* no Firedrakes; a French writer says they are ‘purement fabuleux,’ purely fabulous, you know.”

“Prince Alphonso has gone on his travels, and will come back when he is tired! And was he then – tired – of *me*?” cried poor Molinda, bursting into tears, and forgetting her dignity.

“Oh! I beg your pardon, I never noticed; I’m sure I am very sorry,” cried the prince, who, never having been in love himself, never thought of other people. And he tried to take Molinda’s

hand, but she snatched it from him and ran away through the garden to the palace, leaving Prince Prigio to feel foolish, for once, and ashamed.

As for Lady Kathleena, she swept past him like a queen, without a word. So the prince, for all his cleverness, was not happy.

After several days had gone by, the king returned from the solitary place where he had been speaking his mind. He now felt calmer and better; and so at last he came back to the palace. But on seeing Prince Prigio, who was lolling in a hammock, translating Egyptian hieroglyphs into French poetry for his mother, the king broke out afresh, and made use of the most cruel and impolite expressions.

At last, he gave orders that all the Court should pack up and move to a distant city; and that Prince Prigio should be left alone in the palace by himself. For he was quite unendurable, the king said, and he could not trust his own temper when he thought of him. And he grew so fierce, that even the queen was afraid of him now.

The poor queen cried a good deal; Prigio being her favourite son, on account of his acknowledged ability and talent. But the rest of the courtiers were delighted at leaving Prince Prigio behind. For his part, he, very good-naturedly, showed them the best and shortest road to Falkenstein, the city where they were going; and easily proved that neither the chief secretary for geography, nor the general of the army, knew anything about the

matter – which, indeed, they did not.

The ungrateful courtiers left Prigio with hoots and yells, for they disliked him so much that they forgot he would be king one day. He therefore reminded them of this little fact in future history, which made them feel uncomfortable enough, and then lay down in his hammock and went to sleep.

When he wakened, the air was cold and the day was beginning to grow dark. Prince Prigio thought he would go down and dine at a tavern in the town, for no servants had been left with him. But what was his annoyance when he found that his boots, his sword, his cap, his cloak – all his clothes, in fact, except those he wore, – had been taken away by the courtiers, merely to spite him! His wardrobe had been ransacked, and everything that had not been carried off had been cut up, burned, and destroyed. Never was such a spectacle of wicked mischief. It was as if hay had been made of everything he possessed. What was worse, he had not a penny in his pocket to buy new things; and his father had stopped his allowance of fifty thousand pounds a month.

Can you imagine anything more cruel and *unjust* than this conduct? for it was not the prince's fault that he was so clever. The cruel fairy had made him so. But, even if the prince had been born clever (as may have happened to you), was he to be blamed for that? The other people were just as much in fault for being born so stupid; but the world, my dear children, can never be induced to remember this. If you are clever, you will find it best not to let people know it – if you want them to like you.

Well, here was the prince in a pretty plight. Not a pound in his pocket, not a pair of boots to wear, not even a cap to cover his head from the rain; nothing but cold meat to eat, and never a servant to answer the bell.

# CHAPTER V

*What Prince Prigio found in the Garret.*

The prince walked from room to room of the palace; but, unless he wrapped himself up in a curtain, there was nothing for him to wear when he went out in the rain. At last he climbed up a turret-stair in the very oldest part of the castle, where he had never been before; and at the very top was a little round room, a kind of garret. The prince pushed in the door with some difficulty – not that it was locked, but the handle was rusty, and the wood had swollen with the damp. The room was very dark; only the last grey light of the rainy evening came through a slit of a window, one of those narrow windows that they used to fire arrows out of in old times.

But in the dusk the prince saw a heap of all sorts of things lying on the floor and on the table. There were two caps; he put one on – an old, grey, ugly cap it was, made of felt. There was a pair of boots; and he kicked off his slippers, and got into *them*

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