

Molesworth Mrs.

The Man with the Pan- Pipes, and Other Stories



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The Man with the Pan-Pipes

CHAPTER I

When I was a little girl, which is now a good many years ago, there came to spend some time with us a cousin who had been brought up in Germany. She was almost grown-up – to me, a child of six or seven, she seemed *quite* grown-up; in reality, she was, I suppose, about fifteen or sixteen. She was a bright, kind, good-natured girl, very anxious to please and amuse her little English cousins, especially me, as I was the only girl. But she had not had much to do with small children; above all, delicate children, and she was so strong and hearty herself that she did not understand anything about nervous fears and fancies. I think I was rather delicate, at least, I was very fanciful; and as I was quiet and gave very little trouble, nobody noticed how constantly I was reading, generally in a corner by myself. I now see that I read far too many stories, for even of good and harmless things

it is possible to have too much. In those days, fortunately for me, there were not nearly so many books for children, so, as I read very fast, I was often obliged to read the same stories over and over again. This was much better for me than always getting new tales and galloping through them, as I see many children do now-a-days, but still I think I lived too much in story-book world, and it was well for me when other things forced me to become more, what is called, "practical."

My cousin Meta was full of life and activity, and after awhile she grew tired of always finding me buried in my books.

"It isn't good for you, Addie," she said. "Such a dot as you are, to be always poking about in a corner reading."

She was quite right, and when mamma's attention was drawn to it she agreed with Meta, and I was given some pretty fancy-work to do and some new dolls to dress, and, above all, I was made to play about in the garden a good deal more. It was not much of a garden, for our home was then in a town, still it was better than being indoors. And very often when kind Meta saw me looking rather forlorn, for I got quickly tired with outdoor games, she would come and sit with me in the arbour, or walk about – up and down a long gravel path there was – telling me stories.

That was her great charm for me. She was really splendid at telling stories. And as hitherto she had only done me good, and mamma knew what a sensible girl she was, Meta was left free to tell me what stories she chose. They were all nice stories, most

of them very interesting. But some were rather too exciting for such a tiny mite as I was. Meta had read and heard quantities of German fairy-tales and legends, many of which I think had not then been printed in books – certainly not in English books. For since I have been grown-up I have come across several stories of the kind which seemed new to most readers, though I remember my cousin telling them to me long, long ago.

There were wonderful tales of gnomes and kobolds, of the strange adventures of the charcoal-burners in lonely forests, of water-sprites and dwarfs. But none of all these made quite as great an impression on me as one which Meta called "The Man with the Pan-pipes," a story which, much to my surprise, I found years after in a well-known poem called "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." It was the very same story as to the facts, with just a few differences; for instance, the man in the poem is not described as playing on *pan-pipes*, but on some other kind of pipe. But though it is really the same, it seems quite, quite different from the story as I heard it long ago. In the poem there is a wonderful brightness and liveliness, and now and then even fun, which were all absent in Meta's tale. As she told it, it was strangely dark and mysterious. I shall never forget how I used to shiver when she came to the second visit of the piper, and described how the children slowly and unwillingly followed him – how he used to turn round now and then with a glance in his grim face which made the squeal of the pipes still more unearthly. There was no beauty in his music, no dancing steps were the

children's whom he dragged along by his power; "they just *had* to go," Meta would say. And when she came to the mysterious ending, my questions were always the same.

"Are they still there – shut up in the cave?" I would ask.

Meta supposed so.

"Will they never come out – never, never?" I said.

She shook her head.

"And if they ever did," I said, "would they be grown-up people, or quite old like – like that man you were telling me about. Rip – Rip – "

"Rip van Winkle," she said.

"Yes, like Rip van Winkle, or would they have *stayed* children like the boy the fairies took inside the hill to be their servant?"

Meta considered.

"I almost *think*," she said, seriously, "they would have stayed children. But, of course, it's only a story, Addie. I don't suppose it's true. You take things up so. Don't go on puzzling about it."

I would leave off speaking about it for the time; I was so dreadfully afraid of her saying she would not tell it me again. And even though I knew it quite well, and could correct Meta if ever she made any part of it the least different, I was never tired of hearing the story. I would ask for it over and over again, and I used to have exactly the same feelings each time she told it, and always at the part where the children began to come out of their houses, some leaving their dinners, some tiny ones waking up out of their sleep, some only half-dressed, but all with the

same strange look on their faces, I used to catch hold of Meta's hand and say to her, "Hold me fast, I'm so afraid of fancying I hear him," and then she would burst out laughing at me, and I would laugh at myself. For she was far too kind a girl to think of frightening me, and, indeed, except for a curious "coincidence" – to use a very long word which means something of the same kind as another thing happening at or about the same time – I do not think the story would have really taken hold of my fancy as it did.

One of my questions Meta was not able for some time to answer to my satisfaction.

"What are Pan-pipes?" I asked. The word "pipe" was so mixed up in my mind with white clay pipes, out of which we used to blow soap bubbles, that I could not understand it having to do with any kind of music.

"Oh," said Meta, "they're made of reeds, you know, all in a row like this," and she held up her fingers to her lips, "and you play them by whistling along them, do you see? It sounds something like when you fasten tissue-paper on a comb and blow along it. And they're called 'Pan'-pipes because – oh, I forgot, of course you haven't learnt mythology yet – 'Pan' was one of the old pagan gods, a sort of fairy or wood sprite, you know, Addie, and the pictures and figures of him always show him playing on these reed pipes!"

I said "Yes," but I didn't really understand her description. It left a queer jumble in my head, and added to the strange, dreamy medley already there. But, though it was not till years afterwards

that I learnt about "Pan," before Meta left us I was able to see for myself a set of his "pipes."

CHAPTER II

IT was *just* before my merry cousin left us, to return to her own home across the sea.

One day several of us were out walking together. Meta was in front with mamma and one of my elder brothers, I was behind with Tony and Michael, the two nearer my own age. Suddenly Meta glanced round.

"Look, Addie," she called back, "there's a set of Pan-pipes; you wanted to know what they were like. They're a very doleful set, certainly; did you *ever* see such a miserable object? He must be silly in his head, poor thing, don't you think, aunty? May I give him a penny – or Jack will."

For even Meta did not seem inclined to go too near to the poor man, whom she was indeed right in calling "a miserable object."

Jack ran forward with the penny, and we all stopped for a moment, so I had a full view of the Pan-pipes. They were fastened somehow on to the man's chest, so that their top just came near his lips, and as he moved his head slowly backwards and forwards along them, they gave out the most strange kind of music, if music it could be called, which you ever heard. It was a sort of faint squeak with just now and then a *kind* of tone in it, like very doleful muffled whistling. Perhaps the sight of the piper himself added to the very "creepy" feeling it gave one. He was not only a piper, he was, or rather had been, an organ-

grinder too, for he carried in front of him, fastened by straps round his neck in the usual way, the remains of a barrel organ. It had long ago been smashed to pieces, and really was now nothing but an old broken-in wooden box, with some fragments of metal clinging to it, and the tatters of a ragged cover. But the handle was still there; perhaps it had been stuck in again on purpose; and all the time, as an accompaniment to the forlorn quaver of the reed pipes, you heard the hollow rattle of the loose boards of what had been the barrel-organ. He kept moving the handle round and round, without ever stopping, except for a moment, when Jack half threw, half reached him the penny, which brought a sort of grin on to his face, as he clutched at the dirty old tuft of shag on the top of his head, which he doubtless considered his cap.

"Poor creature," said mamma, as we turned away. "I suppose he thinks he's playing lovely music."

"I've seen him before," said Jack. "Not long after we came here." (Perhaps I should explain that my father was an officer, and we had to go about wherever his regiment was sent.) "But I've not seen him lately. There's some story about him, but I know some of the boys at school declare he's not mad a bit, that he finds it pays well to sham he is."

"Any way he doesn't need to be afraid of his organ wearing out," said Tony, gravely, at which the others couldn't help laughing.

"I shouldn't think it likely he is only pretending," said mamma. "He looks almost *too* miserable."

"And sometimes there's quite a crowd of children after him," Jack went on; "they seem to think him quite as good to run after as a proper barrel-organ man."

"I hope they don't hoot and jeer at him," said mamma.

"His Pan-pipes are nearly as bad as his organ," said Meta. "Still, Addie, you know now what they're like, though you can't fancy how pretty they sound sometimes."

It did not need her words to remind me of the story. My head was full of it, and I think what Jack said about the crowds of children that sometimes ran after the strange musician, added very much to the feelings and fancies already in my mind. And unfortunately Meta left us the very next morning, so there was no one for me to talk to about it, for my brothers were all day at school and did not know anything about our story-tellings. I do remember saying to Meta that evening, that I hoped we should never meet that ugly man again, and Meta could not think what I meant, till I said something about Pan-pipes. Then she seemed to remember.

"Oh, he didn't play them at all nicely," she said. "One of the boys at home had a set, and he really made them sound lovely. When you come to Germany, Addie," for that was a favourite castle in the air of ours – a castle that never was built – that I should one day pay a long visit to my cousins in their quaint old house, "Fritz will play to you, and you will then understand the story better."

I daresay I should have told her the reason why I so hoped I

should never meet the poor man again, if I had had time. But even to her I was rather shy of talking about my own feelings, and it was also not easy to explain them, when they were so mixed up and confused.

It was only a few days after Meta left, that we met the man with the Pan-pipes again. This time I was out walking with our nurse and the baby, as we still called him, though he was three years old. I don't think nurse noticed the man, or perhaps she had seen him before, but I heard the queer squeal of his pipes and the rattle of his broken box some way off, and when I saw him coming in the distance I asked her if we might turn down a side street and go round another way.

She said she did not mind, but though she was kind, she was not very noticing, and did not ask my reason, so for that day it was got over without my needing to explain. But for some time after that, we seemed to be always meeting the poor "silly" organ-man, and every time I saw him, I grew more and more frightened, till at last the fear of seeing him came quite to spoil the pleasure of my walks, even when I was out with mamma herself. Now I dare say all sensible children who read this will say, "Why didn't Addie tell her nurse, or, any way, her mother, all about it?" and if they do say so, they are quite right. Indeed, it is partly to show this very thing – how much better it is to tell some kind wiser person all about any childish fear or fancy, than to go on bearing it out of dread of being laughed at or called babyish – that I am relating this simple little story. I really cannot quite explain why I did not

tell about it to mamma – I think it was partly that being the only girl, I had a particularly great fear of being thought cowardly – for she was always very kind; and I think, too, it was partly that from having read so many story-books *to myself*, I had got into the habit of being too much inside my own thoughts and fancies. I think story-books would often do much more good, and give really much more lasting pleasure if children were more in the habit of reading aloud to each other. And if this calls for some unselfishness, why, what then? is it not all the better?

But to return to my own story. There came a day when my dread of the man with the pipes got quite beyond my control – happily so for me.

CHAPTER III

Hitherto, every time I had seen the man, it had been either in some large public street where a crowd would not have been allowed to collect, or in one of the quieter roads of private houses, where we generally walked, and where poor children seldom were to be seen.

But one day mamma sent Baby and me with nurse to carry some little comfort to one of the soldier's wives, who was so ill that she had been moved to the house of relations of hers in the town. They were very respectable people, but they lived in quite a tiny house in a poor street. Baby and I had never been there before, and we were much interested in watching several small people, about our own size, playing about. They were clean, tidy-looking children, so nurse, after throwing a glance at them, told us we might watch them from the door of the house while she went in to see the sick woman.

We had not stood there more than a minute or two when a strange, well-known sound caught my ears, squeak, squeal, rattle, rattle, rattle. Oh, dear! I felt myself beginning to tremble; I am sure I grew pale. The children we were watching started up, and ran some paces down the street to a corner, when in another moment appeared what I already knew was coming – the man with the Pan-pipes! But never had the sight of him so terrified me. For he was surrounded by a crowd of children, a regular

troop of them following him through the poor part of the town where we were. If I had kept my wits, and looked on quietly, I would have soon seen that the children were not the least afraid, they were chattering and laughing; some, I fear, mocking and hooting at the poor imbecile. But just at that moment the last touch was added to my terror by my little brother pulling his hand out of mine.

"Baby wants to see too," he said, and off he trotted down the street.

My senses seemed quite to go.

"He's piping them away," I screamed, and then I am ashamed to say I turned and fled, leaving Baby to his fate. Why I did not run into the house and call nurse, I do not know; if I thought about it at all, I suppose I had a hazy feeling that it would be no good, that even nurse could not save us. And I saw that the crowd was coming my way, in another minute the squeaking piping would be close beside me in the street. I thought of nothing except flight, and terrified that I too should be bewitched by the sound, I thrust my fingers into my ears, and dashed down the street in the opposite direction from the approaching crowd. That was my only thought. I ran and ran. I wonder the people I passed did not try to stop me, for I am sure I must have looked quite as crazy as my imaginary wizard! But at last my breath got so short that I had to pull up, and to my great relief I found I was quite out of hearing of the faint whistle of the terrible pipes.

Still I was not completely reassured. I had not come very far

after all. So I set off again, though not quite at such a rate. I hurried down one street and up another, with the one idea of getting further and further away. But by degrees my wits began to recover themselves.

"I wish I could find our home," I thought. "I can't go on running for always. Perhaps if I told mamma all about it, she'd find some way of keeping me and Baby safe."

But with the thought of Baby came back my terrors. Was it too late to save him? Certainly there were no rocks or caves to be seen such as Meta had described in her story. But she had said outside the town – perhaps the piper was leading all the children, poor darling Baby among them, away into the country, to shut them up for ever as had been done in Hamelin town. And with the dreadful thought, all my terrors revived, and off I set again, but this time with the more worthy intention of saving Baby. I must go home and tell mamma so that she would send after him. I fancied I was in a street not far from where we lived, and I hurried on. But, alas! when I got to the end it was all quite strange. I found myself among small houses again, and nearly dead with fatigue and exhaustion, I stopped in front of one where an old woman was sweeping the steps of her door.

"Oh, please," I gasped, "please tell me where Clarence Terrace is."

The old woman stopped sweeping, and looked at me. She was a very clean old woman, though so small that she was almost a dwarf, and with a slight hump on her shoulders. At another time I

might have been so silly as to be frightened of her, so full was my head of fanciful ideas. But now I was too completely in despair to think of it. Besides her face was kind and her voice pleasant.

"Clarence Terrace," she squeaked. "'Tis a good bit from here. Have you lost your way, Missy?"

"I don't know," I said, "I – " but then a giddy feeling came over me, and I almost fell. The old woman caught me, and the next thing I knew was that she had carried me into her neat little kitchen, and was holding a glass of water to my lips, while she spoke very kindly. Her voice somehow brought things to a point, and I burst into tears. She soothed me, and petted me, and at last in answer to her repeated, "What's ado, then, lovey?" I was able to explain to her some part of my troubles. Not all of course, for even upset as I was, I had sense to know she would have thought *me* not "right in my head," if I had told her my cousin's strange fantastic story of the piper in the old German town.

"Frightened of old Davey," she said, when I stopped. "Dear dear, there's no call to be afeared of the poor old silly. Not but what I've said myself he was scarce fit to be about the streets for the look of him, though he'd not hurt a fly, wouldn't silly Davey."

"Then do you know him?" I asked, with a feeling of great relief. All the queer nightmare fears seemed to melt away, when I heard the poor crazy piper spoken of in a matter-of-fact way.

"Know him," repeated my new friend, "I should think we did. Bless you he comes every Saturday to us for his dinner, as reg'lar as the clock strikes, and has done for many a day. Twelve year,

or so, it must be, since he was runned over by a bus, and his poor head smashed in, and his organ busted, and his pipes broke to bits. He was took to the 'orspital and patched up, but bein' a furriner was against him, no doubt," and the old woman shook her head sagely. "He couldn't talk proper before, and since, he can say nothink as any one can make head or tail of. But as long as he's free to go about with his rattlin' old box as was onst a 'orGIN, he's quite happy. They give 'im new pipes at the 'orspital, but he can't play them right. And a bit ago some well-intending ladies had 'im took off to a 'sylum, sayin' as he wasn't fit to be about. But he nearly died of the bein' shut up, he did. So now he's about again, he has a little room in a street near here, that is paid for, and he gets a many pennies, does Davey, and the neighbours sees to him, and he's quite content, and he does no harm, and all the town knows silly Davey."

"But don't naughty children mock at him and tease him sometimes?" I asked.

"Not so often as you'd think, and they're pretty sure to be put down if they do. All the perlice knows Davey. So now, my dear, you'll never be afeared of the poor thing no more, will you? And I'll step round with you to your 'ome, I will, and welcome."

So she did, and on the way, to my unspeakable delight, we came across nurse and Baby, nearly out of their wits with terror at having lost me. For Baby had only followed the piper a very short way, and did not find him interesting.

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