

**THE PENTAMERONE:
OR, THE STORY OF
STORIES, PP. 1-217**

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GIAMBATTISTA BASILE & JOHN EDWARD TAYLOR

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THE
PENTAMERONE

OR

THE STORY OF STORIES

BY

GIAMBATTISTA BASILE

TRANSLATED FROM THE NEAPOLITAN BY
JOHN EDWARD TAYLOR

*NEW EDITION REVISED AND EDITED
BY HELEN ZIMMERN*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK

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1894

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PREFACE

IN the seventeenth century there lived and wrote at Naples a man named Gian Battista Basile, concerning whom little that is certain is known except that he travelled much throughout the length and breadth of Italy, and that his sister was a celebrated singer in her day, to whom Milton was introduced when at Rome, and whose daughter's charms the great poet has celebrated in three of his Latin epigrams, and in an Italian canzone. Basile was himself a poet. From his pen there exists a great epic poem, whose hero is Charles V., and a collection of sonnets and songs.

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The dust lies thick on these volumes, written in the extravagant and affected style of his century ; none reads them, and none would remember them had not Basile also a more solid claim to fame, in the fact that he was also the author, or more probably the compiler-author, of the *Pentamerone*, though doubtless in his day it was little thought either by himself or his readers that this, the work of his declining years, would constitute his only claim to remembrance. The *Pentamerone* is a collection of fifty fairy tales written in the Neapolitan dialect, which have become since their appearance the veritable storehouse, the inexhaustible mine from which all other authors of fairy tales have drawn their stories, notably the Frenchman, Charles Perrault, as well as Madame d'Aulnoy. The work was planned after the method of Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, and hence its title, since it consists not of a hundred but of fifty stories. They are supposed to be told by ten persons in the course of five days, each day ending with a play or a song. As

in the *Decamerone*, these are written in verse while the rest of the tales are told in prose.

There is perhaps no more difficult dialect in all Italy than the Neapolitan, which contains a large admixture of Spanish, Greek, and Arabic words, so that even Italians born can neither read it nor understand it when spoken. Translators of Basile's work into the current speech of Italy therefore soon appeared, but the gross licentious language, the impropriety intermingled with but too many of the tales, rendered them unfit for youthful readers, notwithstanding that Basile had placed as a second title on his frontispiece the words, *Amusement for the Little Ones*. A German eighteenth-century savant of the name of Fernow first drew general European attention to the work, which was afterwards translated by another German, Felix Liebrecht, to which book the learned student of Folklore, Dr. Jacob Grimm, affixed a weighty preface.

At the very same moment that Liebrecht

was thus engaged in making these tales accessible to readers outside Italy, an Englishman was occupied in the same task. He was no less a person than J. E. Taylor, a member of that great literary family to whom English readers are indebted for their first introduction to the treasure-house of German literature in the days when the knowledge of the German tongue was rare indeed among Englishmen, and they were wholly dependent on translations for an acquaintance with foreign authors. Mr. Taylor, deterred by the grossness of the language and contents, which made some of the stories quite inadmissible for English readers, translated thirty of the fifty, and even so he saw himself obliged to omit many objectionable portions, since the book was intended for the general reader, and not like Liebrecht's for students only. But even so Mr. Taylor's volume as it stands is unadapted for young readers of the present day, and I have therefore been obliged to revise many pages, omitting offensive words and expressions