

**THE BLUE RIBBONS,
A STORY OF THE
LAST CENTURY**

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The Blue Ribbons, a Story of the Last Century by Anna Harriet Drury

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BY
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THE BLUE RIBBONS.

CHAPTER I.

HE most earnest wish of little Alexis Nollet's heart, since he could remember having begun to wish at all, was that he might see a fairy. How the idea first took root in his mind, his friends could not tell; but most likely from the stories related on winter evenings by his old grandmother, as she sat spinning by the stove: fairy stories, not like those of the present day, full of allegory and instruction on the one hand, and of burlesque and satire on the other,—but fairy stories of the good ancient stamp, such as were most popular seventy years ago: in which decrepid

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old ladies stepped into ditches, for the express purpose of making your fortune for pulling them out; and knights with charmed swords, and golden talismans, rode over impossible bridges, cut off the monster's countless heads, and carried off the beautiful princess, who was always being left in pawn for her royal father's necessities. Wands that turned poverty into wealth; boots that beat the express train—unknown in those primitive days; apples that made your nose grow dreadfully, and pears that pulled it in again, though quite in a friendly way; oracular horses, with the key of the portmanteau always ready in their right ear; cheerful birds, full of conversation and anecdote, quick at pointing out the wicked sisters, and rescuing the injured sultana from that worst of punishments, which must have been originally devised in America; chariots drawn by griffins; boats harnessed to swans;

purses, best of all fairy gifts, with ten pieces of gold always snug at the bottom ; all these, and more, enriched the storehouse of the old grandmother's memory, and were listened to by Alexis, with delight that never wearied, and belief that never failed. And when, as he grew older and bigger, his poor granny became almost childish, and her storytelling powers flagged, and the plots grew confused, and the prince was apt to marry the wrong person, or get unexpectedly eaten up by the monster, talisman and all,—which, the first time it happened, gave a shock to the feelings of Alexis he was some time in recovering: then, when if ever there was a chance of his losing an interest in these wonderful transactions, a good-natured friend gave him a book full of fairy tales from all parts of the world, with pictures setting them forth in full and accurate costume: the knights and princes in armour and white

plumes and crimson cloaks ; the princesses always with crowns of gold (except when dragged by the hair of the head into forests by giants and robbers, which was constantly happening), and the good fairies always in white, looking beautiful ; and the bad fairies always in black, and decidedly plain.

Now books in those days were not so plentiful as they are now, especially children's books : and little peasant boys of France, in the reign of Louis XVI, could not always read them, even when they were to be had ; but the parents of Alexis had been respectable people, and had taken pleasure in teaching him all they could ; and he was by no means a bad reader for his age. His pride in this volume was intense. He did not believe there could be such another in the world ; he had never seen one like it, neither had his sister Clemence, nor his little friend and