

THE "ENCHANTED WHEAT", A TALE

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The "enchanted wheat", a tale by Mona B. Bickerstaffe & S. B. P.

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MONA B. BICKERSTAFFE & S. B. P.

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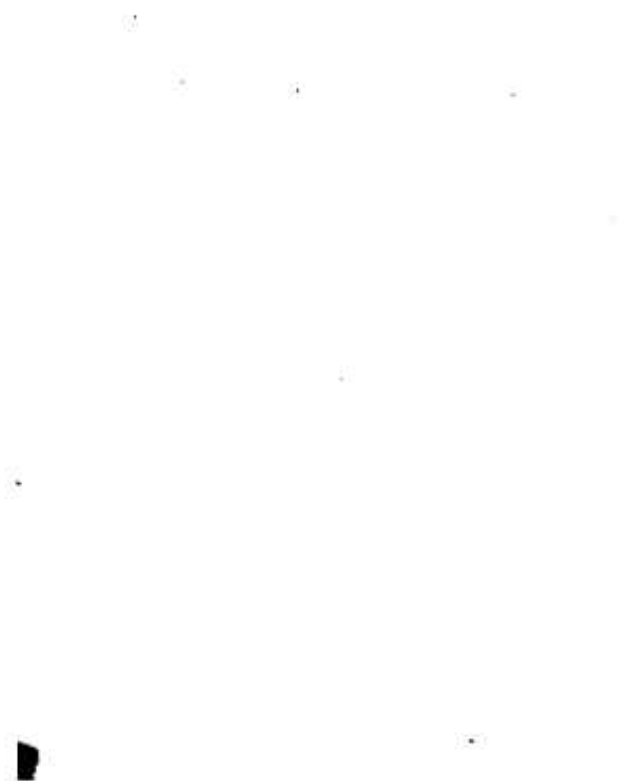
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A TALE.

BY TWO AUTHORS,
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AND
S. B. P.



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The Enchanted Wheat.

A FAIRY TALE.

CHAPTER I.

FAR away in the West, off the coast of Ireland, is a little lonely Isle, so barren and rocky that it affords neither food nor shelter for the human race, so the wild sea-birds have it all to themselves, to rest and roost, and lay their eggs upon the bare ledges, and in the deep crevices of the rocky cliffs ; thus in the day-time the lonely isle is the scene of active life and noisy clamour, while at night, when the feathered tribe are all asleep, when not a sound is to be heard save the plashing of the waves upon the rocks below, then upon the grassy plain far above the heights, hosts of the

fairy folk are wont to assemble, and the silvery moonlight that glistens upon the dancing waves gives light to the fairy revels. Now these fairies of the rocky isle have certain time-honoured customs peculiarly their own, and these customs being well known to the fairy tribe in general, on certain high days the "good people" of the earth, together with the wee sprites of the sea and air, including all those of the main-land, wend their way with much ceremony to pay their homage to the Fairy Queen of the island. Of all the red-letter days in their calendar, none is so honoured by the fairies of the Isle as the birthday of their Queen; for on that great day it is her especial pleasure, not indeed to receive gifts from her subjects, but to bestow favours upon them. According to this custom presents are prepared for all who may arrive; but, before receiving them, each one is required to relate some service which he or she may have rendered to the Queen, and the fairy community in general, since their last meeting on her majesty's birthday, it being always understood that two special prizes shall be given to those two fairies

whose services are judged to be most valuable to her majesty. The fairies entitled to these prizes do not, like the others, receive any gift, but instead of that they are allowed to have the great privilege of asking their Queen for anything they desire to have, and she is bound by the laws of her realm to grant their request, whatever it may be. Now as it is considered a great honour to be the recipient of the special prizes, they are very eagerly contended for by all the fairy folk, who evince the greatest curiosity as to what may be chosen by the successful candidates on these occasions.

It was in the year—I can't say when—(seeing that fairyreckoning of time is to mortals somewhat puzzling) just at the season when our farmers have ploughed their fields and made everything ready to sow their corn, when the Queen of the rocky isle sent out invitations for the celebration of her birthday. Hosts of fairies assembled on this occasion. Some came trooping up from the earth, others on gauzy wings flying down through the air, while the water-fairies, dressed in shining robes of purple and rose and green, came

floating over the waves in little boats of pearly shell that were quite beautiful to see. Of course there was a great variety in such a very mixed assembly ; and among the lovely forms and sweet faces of the good fairies, many an ill-looking Leprehaun might be seen casting dark lowering glances round him. Among the latter none were more conspicuous than a wicked old fellow known in fairy-land as "Thinky-Winky." He had earned the first part of his name from his manner of always appearing to be wrapped in thought, though from the evil expression of his ugly little face, his thoughts could never have been good or pleasant ; indeed, it was well known that the wicked old goblin had such a hatred to mankind, that he was always thinking how he might injure or annoy any of the human race. So much for the first part of his name. As for the latter, he was so called, because being blind of one eye, he had a trick of winking with the other in a manner that was quite frightful to behold. Well, there he was, hideous little elf, trying to force his way past everyone, so that he might reach the front rank of

the fairy throng, and by giving a pinch here, and a scratch there, now treading on some poor little fairy's toes, now cruelly nipping some other little fairy's elbows, he very soon succeeded in squeezing his way through them all, and obtaining a conspicuous position just before the Queen. I suppose her majesty was rather frightened at his appearance, for she started when she saw him so close to her, his wicked eye leering horribly, and his one long tooth shining like the tusk of a hungry wild beast whenever he made an attempt at smiling.

“Who is that?” said her majesty to her ladies in waiting; “how can such a malignant-looking monster have rendered good service to me or anyone else?”

Now, old Thinky-Winky had indeed served the Queen, though in doing so he was actuated not by any good motive, but rather with a view to further his own wicked devices,—for he rightly judged that if he could obtain a prize, and so be entitled to ask for anything he might wish for, he could do more injury to the human race than he had ever been able to do before.