

**TALES FROM
"BLACKWOOD"; BEING THE
MOST FAMOUS SERIES OF
STORIES EVER PUBLISHED**

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Tales from "Blackwood"; being the most famous series of stories ever published by H. Chalmers Roberts

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H. CHALMERS ROBERTS

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"BLACKWOOD"

Being the most Famous Series
of Stories ever Published
Especially Selected from that
Celebrated English Publication

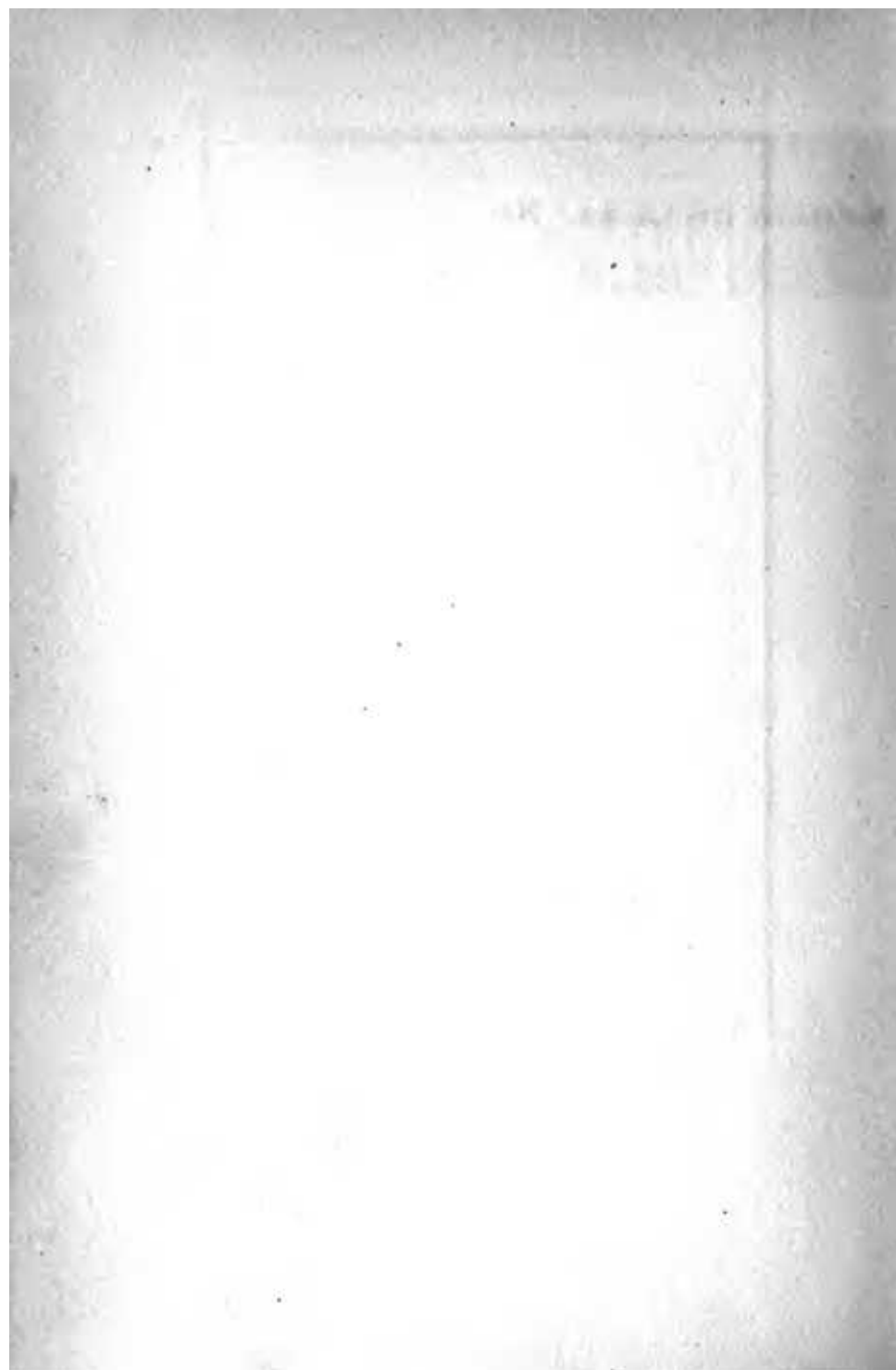
Selected by

H. CHALMERS ROBERTS



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TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

LEFT-HANDED ELSA.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

I.

"PATIENCE!" said Elsa.

She was carrying a whole armful of white crockery from the cupboard to the table. But before the word had fairly left her lips, down smashed the whole load upon the brick floor.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, "this is too dreadful! The things are bewitched, I think, for all the Herr Pastor may say: only last Sunday the sugar-basin, and the water-jug on Friday; that's the worst of breaking anything on a Friday, it never comes to an end. But those were nothing to this—it's all gone now! Oh Max, it must be true what father

says, and I've got two left hands instead of one; what a scolding I'm in for!"

Max was soon busy among the pieces. Elsa was between laughing over her own awkwardness and crying over her domestic trouble—the humble room looked like one in which the breaking of a coffee-cup might be more serious than the loss of a porcelain vase elsewhere. The table and the few chairs were of the plainest and commonest kind, the stove made no attempt to disguise its natural ugliness, the atmosphere derived its aroma from soap and glue, the tools of a wood-carver lay about, and the only ornaments were a few flowers in the window, two or three sketches nailed against the plaster wall, and the girl herself—Elsa. She was little and dark, and pretty enough, as German girls go—which is not very far—in spite of her poor clothes and the exceedingly hideous style in which she had combed and tied back her thick brown hair. Her style of coiffure had one advantage, however: it left a pair of ear-rings in full sight of all beholders. On the third finger of her left hand she wore a real gold ring. For the rest, and taking her altogether, she was of an age when a girl must be plain indeed not to look more than pretty enough in some man's eyes: and in addition to the beauty of girlhood, she wore that of bright brown eyes and a ready smile.

Perhaps, too, Max may be considered as not wholly unornamental. If not, why should Elsa

have been minding him instead of the crockery? He, too, was young, and though his features were by no means distinguished, his eyes were as dark and as bright as hers, and more intelligent—the eyes of a man who sees with his mind. He need not be further described, because he was considered—at least by Elsa—to be a remarkably handsome young man, and the English reader might not altogether agree with the judgment of a German *bourgeoise*. Let us accept her verdict in a matter that, after all, concerns her more than anybody else in the world. It is enough for us that he looked an honest, straightforward, and good-hearted young fellow, with something inside his skull that was active enough to look out at window and to see something more than a pretty girl. At present, however, there was a cloud upon his brow.

“Yes, Elsa,” he said, when he had industriously picked up the last fragment of the last saucer and had placed it on the deal table,—“yes, Elsa: it is all very well to preach Patience, but I *have* been patient—for two whole years. And then, you see, Impatience is apt to take its turn. Never mind the cups and saucers—I’ll make that all right with the father; and he is no model of Patience, any way.”

“There, then—it’s no good crying over spilt milk-jugs. There’s one comfort—now there’s nothing left to break, I can’t break anything more. But

don't go spending your money in buying new things like you did last time—do you hear? That isn't the way to get rich; and you shan't say, Oh, if I had only thought twice before I betrothed myself to a clumsy girl with two left hands! You promise? Then I don't care any more. And you *must* be patient, Max—you *must* indeed. Why, I'm not nineteen, and you're not twenty-four: before I'm twenty and you're twenty-five you'll have painted your grand picture; and then—and then—if you're not too great and grand to care about Elsa any more, why, we shall have lots of time to get old enough to keep our golden wedding."

"My darling, how can you say such things? If I were an emperor—if I were a Titian—you would be my wife and empress, always and always. Don't you know yet how I love you, Elsa? But it's just that, it is my great love, that makes me impatient, and—afraid."

"Afraid, Max! What of? I assure you *I* don't mean to run away."

"Ah, Elsa, my own darling, you are the dearest girl—but you don't understand these things. If I were a workman like your father; if I lived in one of the great cities where a man has daily chances; if—if—a thousand things,—I should be able to make even your father see that he might give you to me at once without fear. But I can't give up my art, Elsa; that is my nature: it would be like