

The Giant Picture-Book

(A New Style of Tableaux Vivants)

By G. B. Bartlett

From the book St. Nicholas Book of Plays and Operettas

This is Shadow Play or a Pantomime

This curious novelty can be produced with very little trouble in any parlor, by children, for the amusement of their friends, or in a public hall.

A little girl dressed in white is discovered on a couch strewn with picture-books and toys, as if she had fallen asleep at play. She is dreaming of the pictures as they are shown in the great book which leans against the wall in the center at her right. The Fairy Godmother rises from behind the couch, and stands on a cricket above and behind the child. She is dressed in red (paper-muslin or some cheap material), with long pointed waist over a black skirt. Her high, pointed hat and her shoes and stockings are red, and she wears a white ruff about her neck, and another inside her hat, which has a wide black band about a gilt buckle.

She holds in her right hand a cane with a bar across the top, and after saluting the spectators, she sings:

FAIRY GODMOTHER:

Sleep, darling, sleep!

My fairy watch I keep;

In dreamy visions I call to view

Your childhood's friends so true and true--

Sleep, darling, sleep!

The Fairy Godmother then springs down from her perch, and opens the picture-book (which will be explained hereafter), taking care to open the cover and fly-leaf together, and a life-size picture is seen; after waiting a moment she shuts the plain or fly-leaf, which she opens again as soon as the picture has been changed; and so on, until the effect produced resembles an actual exhibition of a great picture-book by turning over its leaves.

When all the pictures of one story or series have been shown, the Fairy may shut the book, which will be the signal for the curtain to be dropped, or for the folding-doors in front of the sleeping child to be closed. After all the pictures selected for the evening have been shown, the characters, still

in costume, are displayed in one group around the room, or stage, in a semicircle, which is opened in the center to allow the opened book, still containing a lovely picture, to be shown also.

After they have remained still in tableau for one moment, the Fairy Godmother, who has resumed her place upon the high cricket, waves her cane and sings to some pretty lullaby tune the following verse, in which all join; during which the little girl wakes, rubs her eyes, jumps off the couch into the center of the room, and makes a bow to each one in order; they return her civility, and all bow to the audience as the curtain falls.

FAIRY GODMOTHER:

Wake, darling, wake!

For we our leaves must take,

And go right back to our picture-book,

In which the little ones love to look.

Wake, darling, wake!

Now we must explain how the picture-book is made, as it can be used hundreds of times for all sorts of pictures. By a little change of decoration on the cover, it can serve as a history in which historical pictures can be shown, or it can be made to illustrate miscellaneous selections, or some well-known story. Place a long, solid table against the back wall in the exact center, and procure two boards one inch thick, six inches wide, and just long enough to touch the ceiling when they stand upright, leaning against the table. They must fit well, for they must be firmly fastened to the floor, as well as to each of the front corners of this table. Having found the exact height of the boards, lay them on the floor, and see that they are straight and parallel and just four and a half feet apart. Fasten upon them four strips of board six inches wide and five and a half feet long, one at each end of the boards, one at thirty inches from the bottom, and one six feet above the last-named. The strips must be fastened firmly with two-inch screws to each board, going through one into the other. Take white bleached muslin on the upper strip, and draw it tight by tacking it to the strip next below; then fasten another piece from the lowest strip to the strip which is thirty inches above it. Tack both pieces of cloth also to the outer edges of the long boards, and cover all the cloth and the boards which show with white or tinted printing-paper; after this is done you will have an opening six feet high and four and a half feet wide. Then raise the whole until it is upright, and fasten to the table by means of the second strip, which will lean against it, as most tables are about thirty inches high. If there should not be a chandelier near in front to light it sufficiently, a gas rod with ten burners in it can be placed on the inner side of the upper

bar, and fed with an elastic tube, which can be arranged by a plumber at a trifling expense; but unless a very elaborate exhibition is proposed, the ordinary light will probably answer. Shawls or curtains are hung on each side of this frame to the corners of the room, which will allow a passage for the performers, and a chair is placed at each end of the table so that they can step up and down out of the frame, behind which a curtain of dull-green cambric is tacked on the back wall. The performers are to stand in a line behind the side curtains, at the right side of the hidden table, ready to step into the frame the moment the fly-leaf is shut and the former occupants have stepped down.

The fly-leaf must be made by covering a light wooden frame with muslin, on which printing-paper is pasted. It must be as high as the ceiling, and five and half feet wide, and it is hung on common hinges at the right outer edge of the upright board which forms one side of the frame. Behind these hinges a long strip of board, two inches thick and the height from the floor to the ceiling, is securely nailed, to hold the hinges of the cover, so that it can swing freely apart from the fly-leaf without interfering with its motion; for although the fly-leaf is often opened with the cover, it is closed by itself when the pictures are changing, as the cover is only shut when one set of pictures is ended. The cover is like the fly-leaf, only that it is decorated with pictures or ornaments at the corners and margin, and if in a large room it might have the title of the story to be shown. These titles can be made on strips of paper eight inches wide and three feet long, with black or colored chalk crayons, and can be changed whenever the curtain is shut. If for the entertainment of little children, the Fairy Godmother can tell the stories (which are too well known to require any description here), or she can read any of the stories aloud if she has no gift at story-telling. In the sketches of pictures introduced here the very effective costumes and properties can be furnished in almost any house with very little trouble or expense, and the skill and taste used in preparing them will add much to the enjoyment.

Wigs can be made of black and white curled hair, sewed upon a skull-cap made of four conical pieces. Beards can be contrived by fastening the same articles, or white llama-fringe, on a wire frame, which goes under the chin to each ear, around which it is fastened.

Series No. 1. CINDERELLA

In the first picture, Cinderella is crouching in the left corner; her head is bowed, and her face is hid in her hands, as if crying at her disappointment in having to stay at home from the ball. The Fairy Godmother is bending over the prostrate girl, as if about to arouse her from her sad reverie, and is pointing up with her stick, which she holds in her right hand. Cinderella wears a loose brown robe, under which is concealed a white muslin dress, richly trimmed with stars and fringe of gold-paper.

The second picture contains the same characters as in the first; same positions, excepting that the Godmother and Cinderella have changed sides. The loose robe has been pulled off, and Cinderella stands proudly in the center, in a dancing attitude, contemplating with delight her beautiful ball-dress. The Godmother is lifting up a large yellow pumpkin, as if showing Cinderella that her carriage will soon be ready; and a box lies at her feet, to represent the trap in which the horses are stabled, ready for the trip. Cinderella should be a blond young lady, with small hands and feet, and a graceful, slight figure.

In the third picture, the Prince and Cinderella stand as if about to lead the dance, in the attitude of old-fashioned minuet; his right hand holds hers high, as she holds her dress with the left. Their left feet are extended, and their heads turned toward each other. The dress of the Prince can be made of light-blue sateen, trimmed with puffs of pink on the shoulders and at the sides; he has loose trunks of pink, with light-blue puffs and pink stockings. Two ladies, in court-dresses, may be introduced to represent other dancers.

In the fourth picture, Cinderella, in terror, is flying from the ball, her old ragged dress on, and a dingy handkerchief tied loosely over her head.

In the fifth picture, Cinderella is meekly asking the Prince to let her try on the glass slipper, which he holds, standing in the center. At the left, her angry sisters turn away in disgust because they could not succeed in wearing the slipper. The sisters are dressed very showily, but Cinderella still wears her old brown costume, as she stands at the right of the Prince, with downcast eyes and extended hand.

In the sixth picture, Cinderella sits in the center. The enraptured Prince kneels before her, with the foot wearing the glass slipper resting on a foot-stool; the companion glass slipper she has just drawn from her pocket. The Godmother stands over them, having changed the old brown robe into a ball-dress by her mystic power, and she seems to be waving her stick in triumph; and after this picture has been shown for one minute, the book is closed.

Series No. 2. JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK

First Picture: A small boy stands looking up into his mother's face in terror; her right hand is raised above him in anger, as if she intended punishing him for selling the cow to so poor advantage. She wears a black dress with very high pannier over a gray underskirt, a white kerchief over her shoulders, and a high, pointed white cap.

Jack wears red stockings, yellow trunks, a loose red jacket trimmed with yellow points. He holds

in his left hand a round red cap, which is partly filled with beans, some of which, being strung separately on fine black silk, seem to be falling out of the cap.

Second Picture: Jack is climbing up the bean-stalk, which is made of a rake-handle or long pole, one end being fixed in the table, and the other out of sight in the picture; a cross-stick on which he stands is made of an old broom-handle, two feet from the bottom of the picture; another cross-stick, five feet higher, he clings to with his hands; and all the sticks are covered with dark-green cambric.

Third Picture: The Giant is seated at a table; before him is the celebrated hen, and behind her several golden eggs lie on the table. These are easily made by covering china eggs, or real ones, with gilt paper, while the hen is easily cut out in profile, as only one side is seen, on which feathers are drawn with crayon or stuck with glue. The Giant is partly concealed by the table, upon which he really kneels, and a large cloak covered with red calico and stuffed with pillows makes him very large; and his head is made by covering a bushel basket with unbleached muslin, on which a face is drawn, red carpet-yarn being sewed on the back to represent hair.

Fourth Picture: Jack and his mother sit one at each side of a table, contemplating with wonder the hen and the two bags of gold. The table used in all these scenes is only a board ten inches wide, covered with a white cloth and furnished with rough legs which do not show.

Fifth Picture: Jack is raising his hatchet to cut down the bean-stalk, and by his side is an enormous golden harp, which is made of pasteboard in profile, covered with gilt paper.

Series No. 3. BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

First Picture: The merchant is taking leave of his daughters; Beauty is in the center, winding a scarf around the neck of her father, while her proud sisters stand one at each side, with extended hands, as if urging their father to bring them rich and costly attire. Beauty looks down, as if too modest to ask for any gift but a rose.

The sisters wear silk dresses of as brilliant color as they can find, with long trains and square necks--which are easily contrived by sewing a square of white muslin upon the dress-waists of their mothers' dresses, the skirts of which will do for court trains.

Their hair is rolled over a cushion, powdered, and dressed with feathers or flowers, which can be borrowed from bonnets. Beauty wears a plain loose waist of white muslin over a plain black skirt. Her hair falls loosely.

The father has a square-cut suit--to arrange which, fold the skirts of a sack-coat away in front to form square corners, which, with the lapels, must be faced with white paper-muslin. The vest is

covered, and also lengthened a quarter of a yard in front, with the same, and large flap pockets are added.

Pantaloons rolled to the knee do very well for breeches, with long stockings and low shoes, and a felt hat can be pinned into a chapeau by turning up one side and fastening the other corner into a point.

Second Picture: The father is plucking the rose from a bush which stands in the center, covered with paper roses. The Beast, with uplifted club, seems about to destroy the old man, who stands with knees together and hands down, in a comic attitude of despair.

The Beast wears a fur cloak or mat over his shoulders, pinned around his waist and reaching to his knees below the tops of long pink stockings. His arms may be bare, and he wears over his face a mask, which may be bought at a toy-shop, or made of brown paper.

Third Picture: The father introduces his daughter to the Beast, who stands as if bowing low at the right. Beauty is at the left, drawing back and making a courtesy. She is dressed as before, with the addition of a shawl pinned over her shoulders, and a red handkerchief over her head.

Fourth Picture: Beauty's return home, in which scene she is embracing her old father, who seems in raptures; they are in the center, while the proud sisters stand one at each side, one looking off in anger, and the other gazing with envy at the happy pair. Beauty has a rich silk dress of a style similar to that shown in the first picture.

Fifth Picture: Beauty is asleep in her chair in the center, while her sisters bend over her in triumph, one holding a vial containing the sleeping-draught, of which they have administered a dose in order to make her overstay her time and break her promise to the Beast.

Sixth Picture: Beauty stands weeping over the body of the poor Beast, which is represented by a roll of dark shawls, around which the robe of the Beast is wrapped, as his head and feet would be concealed by the sides of the frame; her face is covered with her hands and she seems overwhelmed with grief.

Seventh Picture: A handsome prince is kneeling at the feet of Beauty, who is overjoyed to find him her faithful Beast, restored to his form and rank through her fidelity and truth. His dress can be arranged with a lady's velvet basque, with an opera cape across the shoulders, a pair of white satin breeches made of paper-muslin, long white hose, and low shoes with large bows; a sash may cross from the left shoulder to the waist, in case the basque is too small to meet neatly in front.