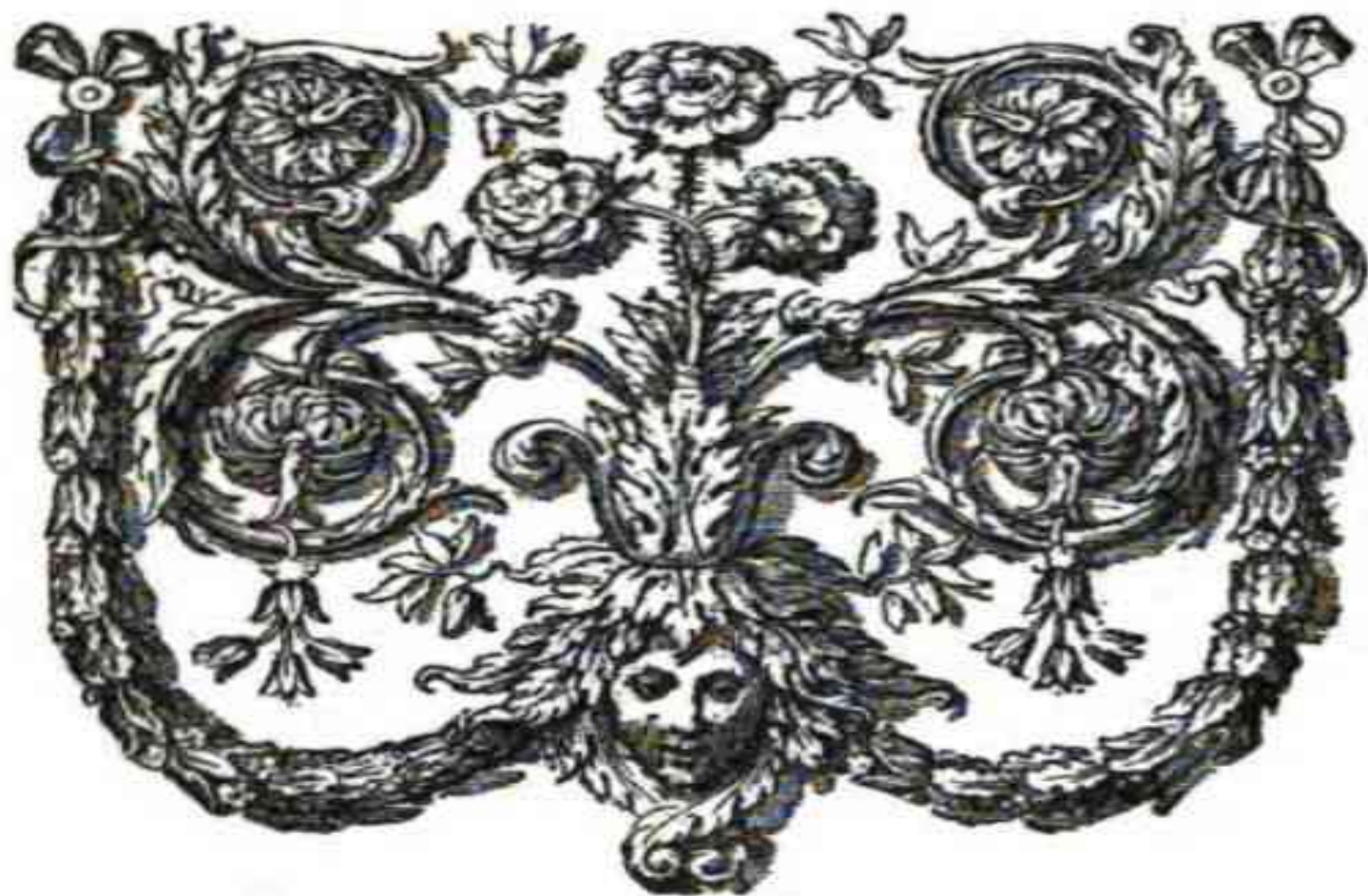


**THE SEVEN WIVES OF
BLUEBEARD & OTHER
MARVELLOUS TALES +
BY ANATOLE FRANCE**

**A TRANSLATION BY
D. B. STEWART**



**LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXX**

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Author: Anatole France

Editor: J. Lewis May

Bernard Miall

Translator: D. B. Stewart

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THE DUCHESS OF CICOGNE AND OF MONSIEUR DE BOULINGRIN

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OF CICOGNE
AND OF MONSIEUR DE
BOULINGRIN**

**From “The Seven Wives Of Bluebeard & Other Marvellous
Tales”**

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Translated by D. B. Stewart

Edited By James Lewis May And Bernard Miall

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CHAPTER I

THE story of the Sleeping Beauty is well known; we have excellent accounts of it, both in prose and in verse. I shall not undertake to relate-it again; but, having become acquainted with several memoirs of the time which have remained unpublished, I discovered some anecdotes relating to King Cloche and Queen Satine, whose daughter it was that slept a hundred years, and also to several members of the Court who shared the Princess's sleep. I propose to communicate to the public such portions of these revelations as have seemed to me most interesting.

After several years of marriage, Queen Satine gave the King, her husband, a daughter who received the names of Paule-Marie-Aurore. The baptismal festivities were planned by the Duc des Hoisons, grand master of the ceremonies, in accordance with a formulary dating from the Emperor Honorius, which was so mildewed and so nibbled by rats that it was impossible to decipher any of it.

There were still fairies in those days, and those who had titles used to go to Court. Seven of them were invited to be god-mothers, Queen Titania, Queen Mab, the wise Vivien, trained by Merlin in the arts of enchantment, Melusina, whose history was written by Jean d'Arras, and who became a serpent every Saturday (but the baptism was on a Sunday), Urgèle, White Anna of Brittany, and Mourgue who led Ogier the Dane into the country of Avalon.

They appeared at the castle in robes of the colour of time, of the sun, of the moon, and of the nymphs, all glittering with diamonds and pearls. As all were taking their places at table an old fairy called Alcuine, who had not been invited, was seen to enter.

"Pray do not be annoyed, madame," said the King, "that you were not of those invited to this festivity; it was believed that you were either dead or enchanted."

Since the fairies grew old, there is no doubt that they used to die. They all died in time, and everybody knows that Melusina became a kitchen wench in Hell. By means of enchantment they could be imprisoned in a magic

circle, a tree, a bush, or a stone, or changed into a statue, a hind, a dove, a footstool, a ring, or a slipper. But as a fact it was not because they thought her dead or enchanted that they had not invited the fairy Alcuine; it was because her presence at the banquet had been regarded as contrary to etiquette. Madame de Maintenon was able to state without the least exaggeration that “there are no austerities in the convents like those to which Court etiquette subjects the great.” In accordance with his sovereign’s royal wish the Duc des Hoisons had not invited the fairy Alcuine, because she had one quartering of nobility too few to be admitted to Court. When the Ministers of State represented that it was of the utmost importance to humour this powerful and vindictive fairy, of whom they would make a dangerous enemy if they excluded her from the festivities, the King replied in peremptory tones that she could not be invited, as she was not qualified by birth.

This unhappy monarch, even more than his predecessors, was a slave to etiquette. His obstinacy in subordinating the greatest interests and most urgent duties to the smallest exigencies of an obsolete ceremonial, had more than once caused serious loss to the monarchy, and had involved the realm in formidable perils. Of all these perils and losses, those to which Cloche had exposed his house by refusing to stretch a point of etiquette in favour of a fairy, without birth, yet formidable and illustrious, were by no means the hardest to foresee, nor was it least urgent to avert them.

The aged Alcuine, enraged by the contempt to which she had been subjected, bestowed upon the Princess Aurore a disastrous gift. At fifteen years of age, beautiful as the day, this royal child was to die of a fatal wound, caused by a spindle, an innocent weapon in the hands of mortal women, but a terrible one when the three spinstress Sisters twist and coil thereon the thread of our destinies and the strings of our hearts.

The seven godmothers could modify, but could not annul Alcuine’s decree, and thus the fate of the Princess was determined. “Aurore will prick her hand with a spindle; she will not die of it, but will fall into a sleep of a hundred years, from which the son of a king will come to arouse her.”

108 (125K)

CHAPTER II

ANXIOUSLY the King and Queen consulted, in respect of the decree pronounced upon the Princess in her cradle, all persons of learning and judgment, notably Monsieur Gerberoy, perpetual secretary of the Academy of Sciences, and Dr. Gastinel, the Queen's accoucheur. "Monsieur Gerberoy," Satine inquired, "can one really sleep a hundred years?" "Madame," answered the Academician, "we have examples of sleep, more or less prolonged, some of which I can relate to Your Majesty. Epimenides of Cnossos was born of the loves of a mortal and a nymph. While yet a child he was sent by Dosiades, his father, to watch the flocks in the mountains. When the warmth of midday enveloped the earth, he laid himself down in a cool, dark cave, and there he fell into a slumber which lasted for fifty-seven years. He studied the virtues of the plants, and died, according to some, at the age of a hundred and fifty-four years; according to others at the age of two hundred and ninety-eight.

"The story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus is related by Theodore and Rufinus, in a manuscript sealed with two silver seals. Briefly expounded, these are the principal facts. In the year 25 of our Lord, seven of the officers of the Emperor Decius, who had embraced the Christian religion, distributed their goods to the poor, retired to Mount Celion, and there all seven fell asleep in a cave. During the reign of Theodore the Bishop of Ephesus found them there, blooming like roses. They had slept for one hundred and forty-four years.

"Frederick Barbarossa is still asleep. In the crypt beneath a ruined castle, in the midst of a dense forest, he is seated before a table round which his beard has twisted seven times. He will awake to drive away the crows which croak around the mountain.

"These, madame, are the greatest sleepers of whom History has kept a record."

"They are all exceptions," answered the Queen. "You, Monsieur Gastinel, who practise medicine, have you ever seen people sleep a hundred years?"

“No, madame,” replied the accoucheur, “I have not exactly seen any such, nor do I ever expect to do so; but I have seen some curious cases of lethargy, which, if you desire, I will bring to Your Majesty’s notice.

“Ten years ago a demoiselle Jeanne Caillou, being admitted to the Hôtel-Dieu, there slept for six consecutive years. I myself observed the girl Léonide Montauciel, who fell asleep on Easter Day in the year ‘61, and did not awake until Easter Day of the following year.”

“Monsieur Gastinel,” demanded the King, “can the point of a spindle cause a wound which will send one to sleep for a hundred years?”

“Sire, it is not probable,” answered Monsieur Gastinel, “but in the domain of pathology, we can never say with certainty, ‘This will or will not happen.’”

“One might mention Brunhild,” said Monsieur Gerberoy, “who was pricked by a thorn, fell asleep, and was awakened by Sigurd.”

“There was also Guenillon,” said the Duchess of Cicogne, first lady-in-waiting to the Queen. And she hummed:

She was sent to the wood
To gather some nuts,
The bush was too high,
The maid was too small.

The bush was too high,
The maid was too small,
She pricked her poor hand
With a very sharp thorn.

She pricked her poor hand
With a very sharp thorn,
From the pain in her finger
The maid fell asleep.

“What are you thinking of, Cicogne?” said the Queen. “You are singing.”

“Your Majesty will forgive me,” replied the Duchess. “It was to ward off the bad luck.”

The King issued an edict, whereby all persons were forbidden under pain of death to spin with spindles, or even to have spindles in their possession. All obeyed. They still used to say in the country districts: “The spindles must follow the mattock,” but it was only by force of habit. The spindles had disappeared.

112 (122K)

CHAPTER III

MONSIEUR DE LA ROCHECOUPÉE, the Prime Minister who, under the feeble King Cloche, governed the kingdom, respected popular beliefs, as all great statesmen respect them. Caesar was Pontifex Maximus, and Napoleon had himself crowned by the Pope. Monsieur de La Rochecoupée admitted the power of the fairies. He was by no means sceptical, by no means incredulous. He did not suggest that the prediction of the seven godmothers was false. But, being helpless, he did not allow it to disturb him. His temperament was such that he did not worry about evils which he was impotent to remedy. In any case, so far as could be judged, the occurrence foretold was not imminent. Monsieur de La Rochecoupée viewed events as a statesman, and statesmen never look beyond the present moment. I am speaking of the shrewdest and most far-sighted. After all, supposing one day the King's daughter did fall asleep for a hundred years, it was, in his eyes, purely a family matter, seeing that women were excluded from the throne by the Salic Law.

He had, as he said, plenty of other fish to fry. Bankruptcy, hideous bankruptcy was ever present, threatening to consume the wealth and the honour of the nation. Famine was raging in the kingdom, and millions of unfortunate wretches were eating plaster instead of bread. That year the opera ball was more brilliant and the masques finer than ever.

The peasantry, artisans, and shopkeepers, and the girls of the theatre, vied with one another in grieving over the fatal curse inflicted by Alcuine upon the innocent Princess. The lords of the Court, on the contrary, and the princes of the blood royal, appeared very indifferent to it. And there were on all hands men of business and students of science who did not believe in the award of the fairies, for the very good reason that they did not believe in fairies.

Such a one was Monsieur Boulingrin, Secretary of State for the Treasury. Those who ask how it was possible that he should not believe in them since he had seen them are unaware of the lengths to which scepticism can go in an argumentative mind. Nourished on Lucretius, imbued with the doctrines

of Epicurus and Gassendi, he often provoked Monsieur de La Rochecoupée by the display of a cold disbelief in fairies.

The Prime Minister would say to him: "If not for your own sake, be a believer for that of the public. Seriously, my dear Boulingrin, that there are moments when I wonder which of us two is the more credulous in respect of fairies. I never think of them, and you are always talking of them."

Monsieur de Boulingrin dearly loved the Duchess of Cicogne, wife of the ambassador to Vienna, first lady-in-waiting to the Queen, who belonged to the highest aristocracy of the realm; a witty woman, somewhat lean, and a trifle close, who was losing her income, her estates, and her very chemise at faro. She showed much kindness to Monsieur de Boulingrin, lending herself to an intercourse for which she had no temperamental inclination, but which she thought suitable to her rank, and useful to her interests. Their intrigue was conducted with an art which revealed their good taste, and the elegance of the prevailing morality; the connection was openly avowed, and thereby stripped of all base hypocrisy; but it was at the same time so reserved in appearance that even the severest critics saw no cause for censure in it.

During the time which the Duchess yearly spent on her estate, Monsieur de Boulingrin used to stay in an old pigeon-house, separated from his friend's château by a sunken road, which skirted a marsh, where by night the frogs among the reeds tuned their diligent voices.

Now, one evening when the last rays of the setting sun were dying the stagnant water with the hue of blood, the Secretary of State for the Treasury saw at the cross-roads three young fairies who were dancing in a circle and singing:

"Trois filles dedans un pré
Mon coeur vole
Mon coeur vole
Mon coeur vole à votre gré."

They enclosed him within their circle, and their light and airy forms sped swiftly about him. Their faces, in the twilight, were dim and transparent; their tresses shone like the will-o'-the-wisp. They repeated:

"Trois filles dedans un pré!" until, dazed and ready to fall, he begged for mercy.

Then said the most beautiful, opening the circle:

"Sisters, give leave to Monsieur de Boulingrin to pass, that he may go to the castle, and kiss his ladylove."

He went on without having recognized the fairies, the mistresses of men's destinies, and a little farther on he met three old beggar women, who were walking bowed low over their sticks; their faces were like three apples roasted in the cinders. From their rags protruded bones which had more dirt than flesh upon them. Their naked feet ended in fleshless toes of immoderate length, like the bones of an ox-tail.

As soon as they saw him approaching they smiled upon him and threw him kisses; they stopped him on his way, calling him their darling, their love, their pet, and covered him with caresses which he was powerless to evade, for the moment he made a movement to escape, they dug into his flesh the sharp claws at the tips of their fingers.

"Isn't he handsome? Isn't he lovely?" they sighed.

For some time they raved on, begging him to love them. Then, seeing they could not rouse his senses, which were frozen with horror, they covered him with abuse, hammered him with their staves, threw him on the ground and trod him underfoot. Then, when he was crushed, broken, aching, and crippled in every limb, the youngest, who was at least eighty years of age, squatted upon him and treated him in a manner too infamous to describe. He was almost suffocated; immediately afterwards the other two, taking the place of the first, treated the unfortunate gentleman in the same way.

Finally all three made off, saluting him with: "Good night, Endymion!" "To our next meeting, Adonis!" "Good-bye, beautiful Narcissus!" and left him swooning.

When he came back to his senses, a toad near him was whistling deliciously like a flute, and a cloud of mosquitoes were dancing before the moon. He rose with great difficulty and limpingly pursued his journey.

Once again Monsieur de Boulingrin had failed to recognize the fairies, mistresses of the destinies of men.

The Duchess of Cicogne awaited him impatiently.

"You come very late, my friend," she said.

He answered, as he kissed her fingers, that it was very kind of her to reproach him. His excuse was that he had been somewhat unwell.

"Boulingrin," she said, "sit down there."

And she confided to him that she would be very happy to accept from the royal treasury a present of two thousand crowns, as a fitting compensation for the unkindness of fate, faro having for the last six months been terribly against her.

Informed that the matter was urgent, Boulingrin wrote immediately to Monsieur de La Rochecoupée to ask for the necessary sum of money.

“La Rochecoupée will be delighted to obtain it for you,” he said. “He is a helpful person and takes pleasure in serving his friends. I may add that in him one perceives greater talents than are commonly seen in the favourites of Princes. He has taste, and a head for business; but he is lacking in philosophy. He believes in fairies, relying on his senses——”

“Boulingrin,” said the Duchess, “you stink like a tom-cat.”

CHAPTER IV

SEVENTEEN years, day by day, had elapsed since the fairies' decree. The Princess was as beautiful as a star. The King, Queen, and Court were in residence at the rural palace of Eaux-Perdues. Need I relate what happened then? It is well known how the Princess Aurore, wandering one day through the castle, came to the top of a keep, where, in a garret, she found a dear old woman, all alone, plying her distaff. She had never heard of the King's regulations, forbidding the use of spindles.

"What are you doing, my good woman?" asked the Princess.

"I am spinning, my dear child," replied the old woman, who did not recognize her.

"Ah, how pretty it looks," replied the Princess. "How do you do it? Give it to me, that I may see if I can do it as well."

No sooner had she picked up the spindle, than she pricked her hand with it, and fell swooning.* King Cloche, when he heard that the fairies' decree had been accomplished, ordered that the sleeping Princess should be placed in the Blue Chamber, on a bed of azure embroidered with silver. Shocked, and full of consternation, the courtiers made ready to weep, practised sighing, and assumed an expression of deep affliction. Intrigues were formed in every direction; it was reported that the King had discharged his Ministers. The blackest calumnies were hatched. It was said that the Duc de La Rochecoupée had concocted a draught to send the Princess to sleep, and that Monsieur de Boulingrin was his accomplice.

* Contes de Perrault, édition Aadré Lefevre, p. 86-108

The Duchess of Cicogne climbed the secret staircase to the chambers of her old friend, whom she found in his night-cap, smiling, for he was reading *La Fiancée du roi de Garbe*.

Cicogne told him the news, and how the Princess was lying on a blue bed in a state of lethargy.

The Secretary of State listened attentively.

"You do not believe, I hope, my dear friend, that the fairies have anything to do with it?" he said.

For he did not believe in fairies, although three of them, ancient and venerable, had overpowered him with their love and their staves, and had drenched him to the skin in a disgusting liquid, in order to prove their existence to him. The defect of the experimental method pursued by these ladies is that the experiment was addressed to the senses, whose testimony one can always challenge.

“The fairies have had everything to do with it!” cried the Duchess. “The Princess’s accident may have the most unfortunate results for you and for me. People will not fail to attribute it to the incapacity of the Ministers, and possibly to their malevolence. Can one tell how far calumny may reach? You are already accused of niggardliness. According to what is being said, you refused, on my advice, to pay for warders for the young and unfortunate Princess. Worse than that, there are rumours of black magic, of casting spells. The storm has got to be faced. Show yourself, or you are lost!”

“Calumny,” said Boulingrin, “is the curse of this world. It has killed the greatest of men. Whoever honestly serves his King must make up his mind to pay tribute to that crawling, flying horror.”

“Boulingrin,” said Cicogne, “get dressed.” And she snatched off his night-cap, and threw it down by the bed-side.

A few minutes later they were in the antechamber of the apartment in which Aurore was sleeping, and seating themselves on a bench they waited to be introduced.

Now at the news that the decree of the Fates had been accomplished, the fairy Vivien, one of the Princess’s godmothers, repaired in great haste to Eaux-Perdues, and in order that when she awoke her god-daughter should have a Court she touched every one in the castle with her ring. “Governesses, maids of honour, women of the bedchamber, noblemen, officers, grooms of the chamber, cooks, scullions, messengers, guards, beadles, pages, and footmen; she also touched the horses in the stables, the grooms, the great mastiffs in the yard, and little Pouffe, the Princess’s lap-dog, which lay near her upon her bed. The very spits in front of the fire, loaded with pheasants and partridges, went to sleep.” {*}

* Contes de Perrault, édition Aadré Lefevre, p. 87

Meanwhile, Cicogne and Boulingrin waited side by side upon their bench.

“Boulingrin,” whispered the Duchess in her old friend’s ear, “does it not seem to you that there is something suspicious in this business? Don’t you suspect an intrigue on the part of the King’s brothers to get the poor man to abdicate? He is well known as a good father. They may well have wished to throw him into despair.”

“It is possible,” answered the Secretary of State. “In any case the fairies have nothing whatever to do with the matter. Only old countrywomen can still believe these cock-and-bull stories.”

“Be quiet, Boulingrin,” said the Duchess. “There is nothing so hateful as a sceptic. He is an impertinent person who laughs at our simplicity. I detest strong-minded people; I believe what I ought to believe; but in this particular case, I suspect a dark intrigue.”

At the moment when Cicogne spoke these words, the fairy Vivien touched them both with her ring, and sent them to sleep like the rest.

CHAPTER V

IN a quarter of an hour there grew all round about the park such an immense quantity of trees, large and small, with thorns and briars interlaced,-that neither man nor beast could pass; so that only the tops of the castle towers could be seen, and these only from a long way off.* Once, twice, thrice, fifty, sixty, eighty, ninety, and a hundred times did Urania close the circle of Time: the Sleeping Beauty and her Court, with Boulingrin beside the Duchess on the bench in the antechamber, still slept on.

* Contes de Perrault, pp. 87-88.

Whether one regard Time as a mode of the unique substance, whether it be defined as one of the forms of the conscious ego, or an abstract phase of the immediate externality, or whether one regard it purely as a law, a relation resulting from the progression of Reality, we can affirm that one hundred years is a certain space of time.

CHAPTER VI

EVERY one knows the end of the enchantment, and how, after a hundred terrestrial cycles, a prince favoured by the fairies penetrated the enchanted wood, and reached the bed where slept the Princess. He was a little German princeling, with a pretty moustache, and rounded hips. As soon as she woke up, she fell, or rather rose so much in love, that she followed him to his little principality in such a hurry that she never said a word to the people of her household, who had slept with her for a hundred years.

Her first lady-in-waiting was quite touched thereby, and exclaimed with admiration: "I recognize the blood of my kings." Boulingrin woke up beside the Duchess de Cicogne at the same time as the Princess and all her household. As he rubbed his eyes, his mistress said: "Boulingrin, you have been asleep." "Not at all, dear lady, not at all." He spoke in good faith. Having slept without dreaming for a hundred years, he did not know that he had been asleep.

"I have been so little asleep," he said, "that I can repeat what you said a minute ago."

"Well, what did I say?"

"You said, 'I suspect a dark intrigue.'"

As soon as it awoke, the whole of the little Court was discharged; every one had to fend for himself as best he could.

Boulingrin and Cicogne hired from the castle steward an old seventeenth-century trap drawn by an animal which was already very aged before it went to sleep for a hundred years, and drove to the station of Eaux-Perdues, where they caught a train which, in two hours, deposited them in the capital of the country. Great was their surprise at all that they saw and heard. But by the end of a quarter of an hour they had exhausted their astonishment, and nothing surprised them any more. As for themselves, nobody took the slightest interest in them. Their story was perfectly incomprehensible, and awakened no curiosity, for our minds are not interested in anything that is too obvious, or too difficult to follow.

As one may well believe, Boulingrin had not the remotest idea what had happened to him. But when the Duchess said that it was not natural, he answered:

“Dear lady, allow me to observe that you have been badly trained in physics. Nothing exists which is not according to Nature.”

There remained to them neither friends, relations, nor property. They could not identify the position of their house. With the little money they had they bought a guitar, and sang in the streets. By this means they gained sufficient to support themselves. At night Cicogne staked at manille, in the inns, the coppers that had been thrown her during the day, while Boulingrin, with a bowl of warm wine in front of him, explained to the company that it was ridiculous to believe in fairies.

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