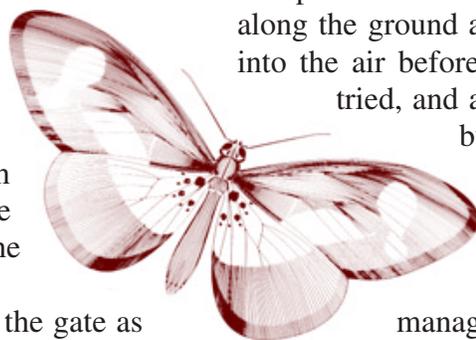


Rex and Zendah in



THE GATE OF THE TWINS was so delicate and airy, almost as thin as a cobweb, that it seemed as if you could walk through it, but it barred your way just the same. The most bewildering thing about it was that it moved slightly all the time, so that you did not know at which part you were looking.

Right in the middle of the gate was a winged ? surrounded by butterflies, whose wings were so wonderfully enamelled, that they almost looked like real ones, yet they were only metal. The pillars of this gate were odd, one was dark and capped with the head of a frowning child, and the other was golden, capped with the head of a child with a smiling face.



Rex and Zendah peeped through the gate as well as they could because of its constant movement, and wondered how this was to be entered. They were very anxious to get in, for it seemed, even from the outside, such a merry land.

“I cannot see anything to use here,” said Rex, “so we had better look at the book of Hermes again.”

They opened the scroll, and by the symbol of the Land of the Twins they found written, “Look on the right-hand side of the gate and you will find a silver pipe; on the left-hand side you will find a golden bowl full of a liquid. Rex must blow a perfect bubble, and Zendah must waft it with her breath to a point just above the question mark on the gate; then the Wardens will see the sign and demand the password.”

“What fun!” exclaimed Rex. “We have to blow bubbles, that is easy.”

“I don’t expect it is quite as easy as it sounds,” replied Zendah, shaking her head.

They soon found the silver pipe and the golden bowl and Rex sat down on the ground near the gate, while Zendah stood near to try and blow the bubble in the right direction as soon as Rex was ready. It was not easy. At first none of the bubbles was perfect and then when Rex did get one, it ran along the ground and they could not get it to rise into the air before it burst. Time after time they tried, and at last a beauty flew swiftly up;

but it only rose to the left side of the gate. A second perfect one wafted suddenly to the right side of the gate, but it was not until the third one that Zendah managed to blow straight in the right direction. Up and up it went, shining with all the colors of the rainbow, both children watching anxiously until it reached the point above the question mark where it burst with a bang-bang. Immediately a laugh was heard and two voices cried, “Tell us the names of this gate.”

“Joy and Swiftness,” replied the children.

“Enter Zendah with joy and Rex with swiftness,” cried the voices.

The gate divided in the middle and flew open with a sudden swing. A crowd of boys and girls rushed at them and pulled them inside, all talking at once.

“Come with me.” “Where have you come from?” “What are your names?” “Let me show you our

school.” “No, let me take them to ours,” said another child. And they were pulled first one way and then another until they really did not know which way to go. Certainly none of these children was shy!

At last a tall, thin youth with a merry twinkle in his eye pushed the others on one side, and taking Rex and Zendah by the hands, cried, “For shame, children, you will bewilder our visitors and give them the impression that we do not know our own minds at all. Though it is true that anyone in this land does have some difficulty in making up his mind.”

Turning to Rex and Zendah he said, “Have you your wings yet?”

They shook their heads, “Which wings?”

“Oh I expect then you will have to wait until you see Hermes,” replied the youth, “but meantime I will get the butterflies to lend you some until you do see him.”

He held in his hand a hazel twig, and this he waved twice round his head, and at once hundreds of yellow and blue butterflies and dragonflies surrounded them. The largest of them all, as big as a bird, held in its mouth two spare pairs of dragonflies’ wings. The youth took these and fastened them somehow on to their feet. “Now you will be able to travel in the Land of the Twins and as fast backward as forward. What do you wish to know first?” he asked, for he could see that they both were greatly desiring to ask questions.

“Why, there do not seem to be any old people here,” said Rex.

The boy laughed. “For one reason, we do not worry, and are all so merry that we always remain young, but also because everyone who comes to live here, even for a short time, bathes in the pool of the waters of youth. Come and see.

Swiftly through the air they went, passing beautiful forests where bluebells and cowslips grew, and over them all hovered thousands of butterflies of all colors. At last they came to a thicket of hazel trees, within which was a pool of some liquid that shone like silver. It was moving slowly backward and forward in heavy ripples, though there was no breeze here. The air was perfectly still within the hazel thicket yet everywhere else there had been a



wind all the time.

The guide motioned them to sit down and watch. Presently two children flew up with an old woman, who had no wings on her feet, and put her gently down at the side of the pool, and held her hands as she stepped in. Then, to their great surprise, the further she went in the younger she became, until when she reached the other side she was old no longer and wings had grown on her feet. When she realized what had happened, she rose in the air with a cry of joy, and joined the other young people who were waiting for her on the farther side of the pool.

“There are no really old people here,” said their guide as he arose and they started forward on their travels. “All inhabitants pass through the pool of youth, and so long as they live here, they are always young. Only they often forget when they go to live in other lands.”

From the forest they flew to the City of Hermes, where they saw the inhabitants occupied in different ways, always busy with their brains or their

hands. As in the Land of the Water Carrier, they found some who were clever sculptors; many were painting pictures or playing with skill on musical instruments. There were others writing, or illuminating manuscripts, or engraving on copper. But whichever thing they were doing, they all seemed able to leave their own work to go and do someone else's work as well as their own. Everywhere different work was being done.

In one hall a young man was speaking about his travels all over the stars. The children were told this was a land of many lecturers and everyone wanted to be able to speak well, though people from the other lands sometimes said they talked too much.

Everywhere they went they noticed hundreds of tiny bubbles floating about in the air. In the lecture hall they saw colored lights and queer-shaped forms, some, triangles, some, cubes, and their guide explained that these were thoughts and that they were easier to see here than in other places because everything here was so swift, and the air so clear.

At last they came to the palace of Hermes. It was indeed well that they had some special wings on their feet, for otherwise they could never have reached it. It consisted of two circular towers, very tall and narrow, joined by a wonderful span-bridge which swayed with every breeze that blew. In the middle of the bridge was built the main hall.

The whole castle was poised on a sea of quicksilver and was moving about this sea incessantly. Only at exactly midday and exactly midnight was it where one would expect it to be—in the middle, and that was the only time you could fly up to the entrance. Never could you walk there.

"Now," said their guide, "watch carefully, and follow me the moment the castle is in the centre, otherwise you will not be able to see Hermes while you are in this land."

A peal was heard from bells that hung in the top of the left-hand tower, to be answered at its finish by two deep notes from the bells in the right-hand tower; and the moment had arrived.

They had to fly to the entrance with the quickness of thought, and were quite out of breath as they reached the steps. The castle had started mov-

ing again; but from where they stood on the steps, it seemed as if the country was moving and not the castle.

On the porch two pages drew back the curtains—a boy and a girl, so much alike that the children exclaimed, "Why you must be twins!" They looked at each other and smiled.

"Only twins are employed in the Quicksilver Palace."

Everything was in pairs, even the walls were hung with mirrors so that if you stood still for a moment, you saw two of yourself.

Passing over the swaying bridge and climbing to the top of one of the towers, they entered the throne room, which was hung with yellow curtains attached to rods high up on the walls. The pages told them that these curtains were constantly changed, and had a different design for each day, for who in this land would want to see the same thing all the time? In between, there were mirrors, as in the corridors, and statues of running or flying men. Above hung rows and rows of silvery bells.

At the end of the hall were two raised platforms and a throne on each, a yellow and a purple one.

Hermes was seated on the yellow one. He smiled and greeted them.

"You wonder, I suppose, why I have two thrones. When everyone in this land does the right thing, I use this yellow throne, but when I have to find fault, which I must sometimes do, then I use the purple throne.

"Ring the joy bells of welcome," he cried, raising his wand in the air, and the bells above rang a merry tune.

"Everything here is youth, activity, and pleasure, but there is a lesson to be learned too."

He took them into a small room at the side of the hall, where they saw a casket on a table surrounded by curious instruments. On the walls themselves were painted the words,

"Speak no slander, no, nor listen to it."

"The casket is Pandora's. Long ago the gods gave a casket to men, which they told them would bring luck so long as it never was opened. But Pandora was too curious and opened it, when out came all the troubles and illnesses that the gods had shut

up in the box, and only hope was left behind.

“So when my children get too restless, or too curious, or too talkative, as they do sometimes, they come here to be reminded of the old story.

See these instruments? Men made these on Earth to cover up people’s mouths when they talked too much. We keep copies here also, as a warning against too much talking.”

Back again in the hall, pages were constantly coming to Hermes with letters and messages, so it was difficult to understand how he ever managed to attend to them all.

At last a page brought two beautiful pairs of wings such as Hermes himself wore on his feet, and he gave these to the children instead of the wings of the dragonflies that they were wearing.

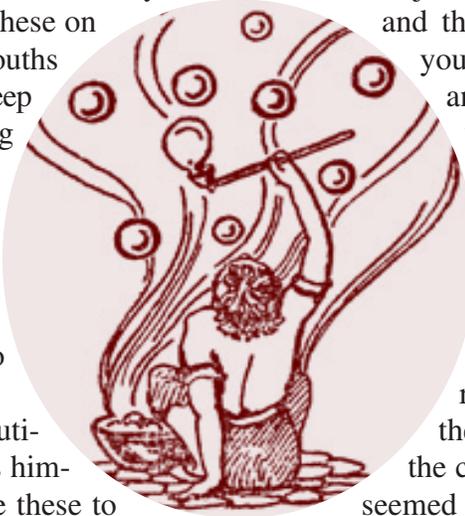
“Now, you have the shoes of swiftness. They will answer many purposes as you will find out, but always use them in the service of other people.

The butterflies’ wings would be of no use for hard work, though many of my children think they are enough, and then they find they cannot fly far.

“The jewel I give to you is the chalcedony; and this and the password will remind you to be true messengers of the gods and take hope and joy everywhere you go. At the last gate I shall meet you and take you home, but now I cannot wait any longer, for our Lord the Sun has sent for me.”

Over the swinging bridge, by way of the quicksilver lake, they returned to the entrance, and past the City of Hermes where some of the children were on their way to what seemed to be their schools. Through the butterfly woods, past the pool of youth, and so to the entrance gate, the same group of children saw them off, shouting to them as the gates closed, “Don’t forget how to blow Joy bubbles.” □

—Esme Swainson



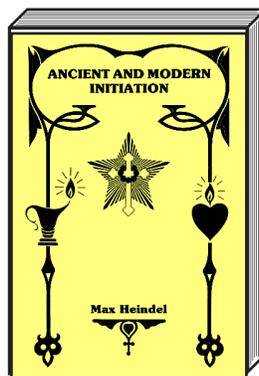
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