



The Hidden Servants and Other Very Old Stories

Francesca Alexander

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This is a collection of stories suitable for people of all ages. From the intro:

"With regard to this present collection of ballads, I can tell its history in a few words. When I was a young girl many old and curious books fell into my hands and became my favourite reading (next to the Bible, and, perhaps, the Divina Commedia), as I found in them the strong faith and simple modes of thought which were what I liked and wanted. Afterwards, in my constant intercourse with the country people, and especially with old people whom I always loved, I heard a great many legends and traditions, often beautiful, often instructive, and which, as far as I knew, had never been written down. I was always in request with children for the stories which I knew and could tell, and, as I found they liked these legends, I thought it a pity they should be lost after I should have passed away, and so I always meant to write them down; all the more that I had felt the need of such reading when I was a child myself. But I never had time to write them as long as my eyes permitted me to work at my drawing, and afterwards, when I wanted to begin them, I found myself unable to write at all for more than a few minutes at once. Finally I thought of turning the stories into rhyme and learning them all by heart, so that I could write them down little by little. I thought children would not be very particular, if I could just make the dear old stories vivid and comprehensible, which I tried to do. If, as you kindly hope, they may be good for older people as well, then it must be that when the Lord took from me one faculty He gave me another; which is in no way impossible. And I think of the beautiful Italian proverb: 'When God shuts a door He opens a window.'"

After such an account of the origin and growth of these poems no further comment would seem fitting, unless it be that made by Cardinal Manning when writing to Mr. Ruskin in 1883 to thank him for a copy of Francesca's Story of Ida. He writes:—

"It is simply beautiful, like the Fioretti di San Francesco. Such flowers can grow in one soil alone. They can be found only in the Garden of Faith, over which the world of light hangs visibly, and is more intensely seen by the poor and the pure in heart than by the rich, or the learned, or the men of culture."

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