

startled to observe in a sudden a dense volume of smoke rose from the earth near the hedge by the field.

He walked quickly down to the spot, wondering whether his senses had deceived him, or whether a new volcano was about to declare itself in his peaceful back garden. Volcanoes, certainly, had long been out of fashion in England, but perhaps they were coming in again—you never knew your luck!

All idea, however, of this nature had to give place to less romantic conjectures as he neared the column of smoke. Smothered voices, apparently underground, struck his astonished ears. Because he was a matter-of-fact Briton, all question of gnomes or brownies was dismissed from his mind as preposterous, but it was some few moments before he reached the bottom of the truth in this strange matter. The large amount of recently thrown-up earth which lay around struck him as abnormal, nor could he at first quite make out whence the voices were proceeding. His interesting soliloquy, beginning with "Well, I'm bothered!" was, however, quickly cut short. The voices were becoming rather more distinct, and he had no difficulty in recognizing their owners. True, they sounded muffled, but they were unmistakable.

"You silly muff!" said one. "You'll choke us both!" Cough—cough—sneeze.

"Well, how should I know—" Sneeze—sneeze—cough.

"Put it out, you gaby! Do you want—" Cough—cough—gasp.

"Jack, it's getting into my eyes awfully. Oh!—" Sneeze—sneeze—cough.

The next moment a blinking face rose from the earth on the other side of a mound not far from the feet of the astounded Mr. Thompson, and a voice exclaimed:

"I say, Jack, here's your father!"

After which the face disappeared hurriedly, and for two or three seconds there was silence. The smoke, however, which hitherto had issued from a small hole further away from the mound, and evidently intended for a chimney, now began to make its way

through the larger opening where the head had last been seen, and in another instant, with much coughing and spluttering, the two half-choked youngsters struggled into the daylight.

When they had rubbed the smoke from their weeping eyes and coughed out the last wreaths of it from their lungs, one youth stood a little awkwardly in suspense, but the other collected his wits and said faintly:

"Hello, dad! It's a cave, only we couldn't get the fire to act right."

"So it seems," said Mr. Thompson, grimly, "and who, may I ask, gave you permission to dig up my garden and set it on fire?"

"We thought we'd do it as a bit of surprise packet," said his elder son. "I knew jolly well you wouldn't mind having something different from the rest of folks in your garden. Come and have a look, the fire's going out soon, I expect, and if you crawl on your stomach for a little way, there'll be room for you in the cave."

A flame of memory flickered up in Mr. Thompson's brain. Time was when it had been far pleasanter to sit cooped up under a tent of one's own erection in the back yard than to have the run of the whole house unhindered; when thick bread and butter, and tea made from smoky water over a fire of brushwood and moss, had been sweeter far than any dinner, cooked ever so well and served in style at home. He thought, with a little sigh, how great a part imagination had played in his boyhood's years, and how small its sphere for him in these latter days. And the little flame of bygone memories softened any feeling of irritation he might otherwise have felt at the youngsters' liberties with his garden.

"Humph!" he growled, and tried, unsuccessfully, to put his smile behind him. "Mind you don't do any more damage, that's all. How have you managed to keep the ground from tumbling in and burying you?"

"Oh! we've worked it all right, Mr. Thompson," put in Jim eagerly; "we've got some short wood planks and laid them across the roof like a shelf."