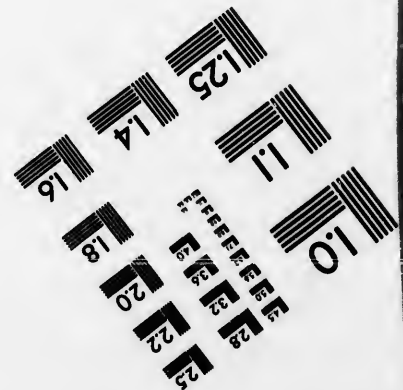
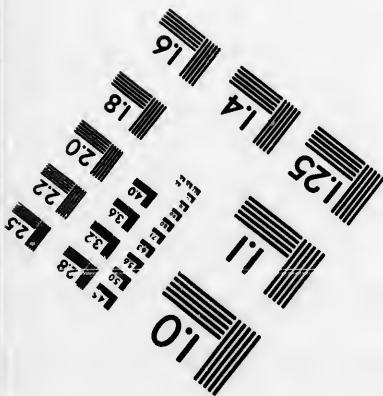
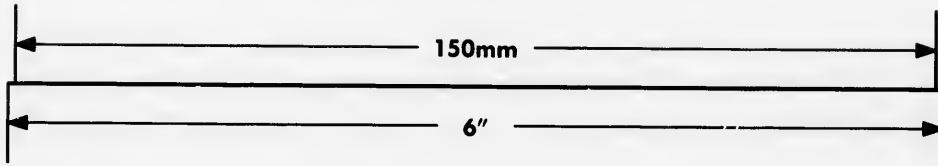
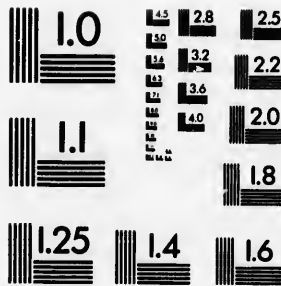
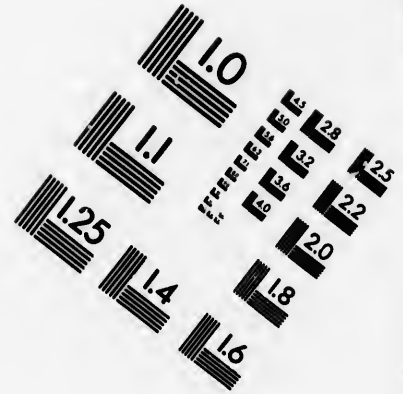
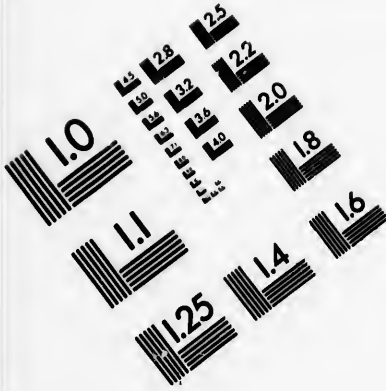


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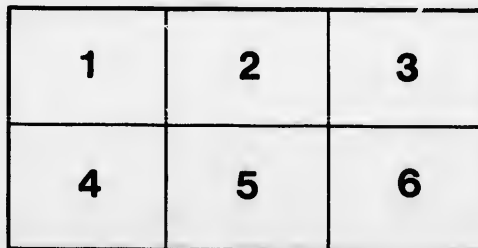
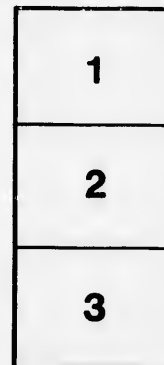
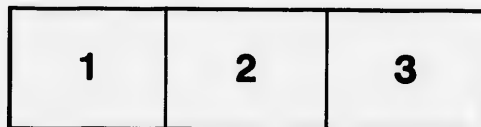
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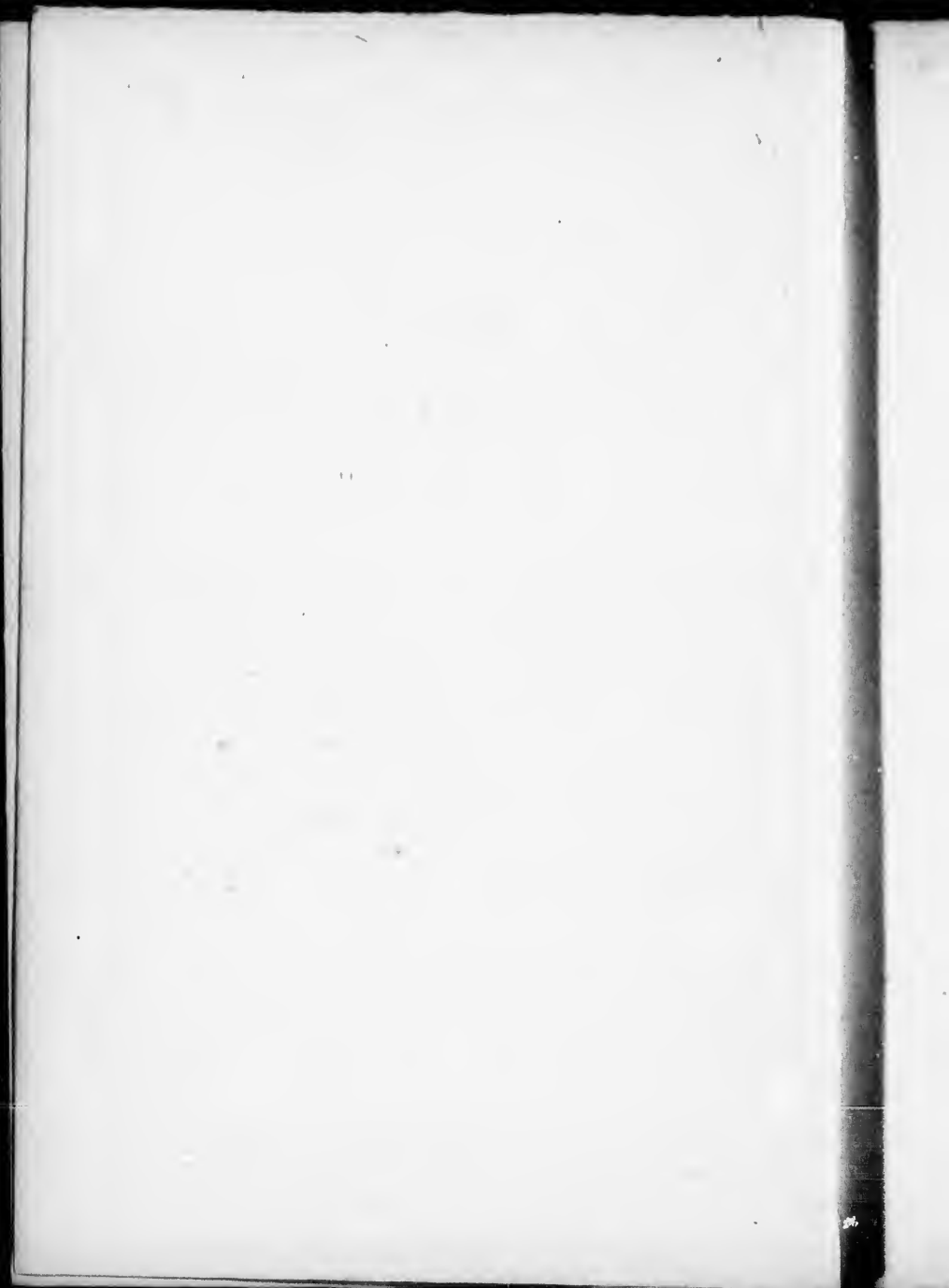
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AUTHOR OF
"THE ENAMORADO" AND "ROBERVAL" DRAMAS; "THE TRIUMPH OF
CONSTANCY, A ROMAUNT" "IMMIGRATION OF THE FAIRIES," ETC.

Romeo. 'Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace;
Thou talk'st of nothing.'

Mercutio. 'True, I talk of dreams;
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.'

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ANNALS

OF

THE COURT OF OBERON

CHAPTER I.

HOW I BECAME ANNALIST.

It is sad to reflect that there are persons, otherwise intelligent, who (casting aside the sworn testimony of their ancestors) affect to disbelieve the existence of fairies. Not to everyone, however, has it been given to mingle familiarly with that interesting people. Events over which I had no control gave me that privilege. The circumstances were these:

I am a man graver than my years. The world has saddened, not soured me. I am given to mooning about with books and lying under trees. I am generally considered harmless and my views old-fashioned.

A green scallop-shaped dell in a wood used to be a favourite haunt of mine. Where the mouth of the shell would face a slow-moving river flowed, and at the hinge end an umbrageous plane spread

wide its boughs. On one occasion, on visiting the spot, I was startled to see a little gentleman in a green uniform, with a sword by his side, seated under the plane reading a book I had forgotten there, which book was in fact a copy of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. On observing my approach, the little gentleman came forward and, taking off his chapeau, addressed me in a very courteous tone :—

“Sir” (said he), “history is fiction. Characters are made or damned by their annalists. Look at the unlikelihoods Count Caylus and Monsieur Perrault, the Countesses d’Aulnoy, Murat and Auneuil, Mesdames de Beaumont and de Villeneuve, and Mesdemoiselles de Lubert and de la Force have put forth under the pretext of history. Poetical, perhaps, but wholly inexact. As to the Grimm-Andersons and the whole tribe of Old Luckois, they are twaddlers, sir, mere nursery twaddlers, I give you my honour. This Mr Shakespeare’s book (yours, I presume) is, however, fairly well done, considering. Which reminds me that His Royal and Imperial Highness OBERON, *Naturæ Gratia* of Faërie and Fairylande, Emperor, and King; Soldan of Wonderland; Archduke of Out-of-Doors; Duke of Phantasie; Marquis and Earl of Greensward, Coppice and Rill; Viscount Myth; a Baron; having no fit annalist to record the acts and revels of his ever-glorious reign, wants a feeble-minded elderly person for that duty, and has deigned to appoint you to the office.”

“Your Excellency,” said I, tremblingly, “I am unfit. A Government officer requires intelligence—”

How I became Annalist.

3

"Quite the contrary," he replied sternly.

He gazed in my eyes. My senses became hypnotised and I had to follow him whithersoever he would. Arrived at headquarters, a Commission was issued under the Great Seal of Faërie, and I became unpaid *attaché* to the Court of Oberon.

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CHAPTER II.

A DISSERTATION ON FAIRIES.

THE history of the ancient, ever-glorious and populous realm of Faëry is less known to professional historians than it ought to be. Regrettable, therefore, to have to say the literature that bears the name of Fairy throws little light on the personality and social condition of an interesting people. Incongruous dreams, mixed up with nonsensical moralities, have done much to throw doubt on authentic records, such as these Annals, and have tended to relegate veritable Faëry history into the region of myth.

The boundaries of the realm of Faëry have not been well defined, but there is much in the polity of the kingdom that may well serve as an example to other states. It is ruled by a dynasty bearing the regal name of Oberon, in like manner as Pharaohs ruled Egypt, and Cæsars Rome. Its particular form of sway is that best of all governments—a good-natured despotism. The power behind the throne is Mr Grundy, that is to say, public opinion, and there never yet was an Oberon in all the line who has dared to brave that terrible temperer, or who would not have been ashamed of

himself if cut by his subjects, or have the cold shoulder turned to him, instead of being everywhere met with lively marks of personal regard.

Thus among this happy people the tone is always in accord between the governing and governed. Attachment to locality (or, in other words, patriotism) is therefore the normal state of mind. This feeling induces every man-fairy to be trained from his youth to the use of arms for service of the State, to overcome the war-like erdsprites, and also to chastise rats, snakes, carrion crows, and other predatory orders, but the distinction of wearing uniform is considered a full acquittance for pay and allowances, and it is an object of ambition to get one's son into the guards.

The military department is not unaware of the devil's masterpieces of rifled cannon and torpedoes used by Christian nations, but feels it more humane to retain as the national arms of precision the bow and flint-headed arrows used by man in his first Darwinian stage. The elf-bolts the fairies shoot are picked up by antiquarians, and may be seen in museums.

The only secular force they possess is retained from sheer conservatism, in the shape of an effete police, to which the ancient watchmen of Inspector Dogberry's day were but as sucking babes. On occasions of pageant or public assembly the effect of this constitutional force, with all the paraphernalia of justice, an usher of the rod, a crier, and above all, a beadle. all in cocked hats, and dresses of remote cut, is far from disquieting.

Society is, however, such that no one has any inducement to commit crime. Were a misdemeanour to occur, the culprit would be punished by verbal order of the King, by deprivation of light for a shorter or longer period, according to the gravity of the offence, for all children of light are afraid in the dark. Minor delinquents are debarred from dancing, or are set in dunce-caps, and permission given to "chaff" them. In the rare event of disputants showing symptoms of becoming litigious, the watch knocks the offenders' heads together until they come to a better frame of mind.

Administration is reduced to its primitive elements. The people are too intelligent to want an elective parliament, or any parliament at all; and as very few can read, the public mind is not molested by a press. The hydra-headed serpent of so-called "politics," cannot exist in a community so constituted.

Having no revenue, the kingdom has no expenditure, consequently no taxation, and especially no civil list. The King's salary, as well as unforeseen outlay, is met by a succession of surprise parties. Public officers are selected, without pay, on a principle unknown in mundane affairs, namely, fitness for office.

The populace have no effects, personal or real, no tents or kettles, nor do donkeys of theirs graze on the common; hence they are exempt from ticklish questions of the relation of capital to labour, for they have neither.

There are other annoyances common to worldly states from which the realm of Faërie is free; for example, having no system of education, the State is not endangered by the veiled treason of denominational schools. Sacerdotalism is therefore un-called for, for every one, from infancy up, acquires from his surroundings a knowledge of his or her moral and social duties, and to have them dinned into the ears weekly from a platform, would be considered a bore. In short, there are many points in Fairy manners, from which terrestrial nations, the most civilised, might draw instructive lessons.

The origin of the Fairies has been discussed futilely by anthropologists. Darwin, Huxley and the Evolutionists have settled to their own satisfaction that Man was evolved, but, I think, Fairies were created; for we must pass over, as a mere classic fable, that Prometheus made a little man whom he called Elf, and finding a beautiful corresponding creature wandering in the gardens of Adonis, married them to each other, and their progeny were Fairies. Bulwer Lytton approaches nearer to the mark when he puts it in this way,—“May not the air be full of intelligent beings of a finer mould than ours, yet, to our grosser vision, invisible?” The Koran—an authority accepted by a majority of the human race—settles the point by expressly revealing that different orders of beings, intermediate between man and the highest, were called into existence. Collateral evidence is not wanting that Fairies, such as we are acquainted with, are a branch of one of those orders.

Man is the first intelligence, a little lower than the angels. On him rests the responsibility of intellect. He was placed in the earthly paradise, and fell. The Fairies, lesser in faculty than the nine angelic orders and Man, were not placed in either the heavenly or earthly paradise, but were let loose on this beautiful earth. Their origin and personality are thus accounted for. We cannot get over the authority of the Koran.

Civilisation has not killed off the Fairies. It has merely made them incomprehensible to the realism of this end of the century. The mind of a child can, and does, identify itself with the life of Faërie; and in the golden or other idyllic age, unlettered mortals could understand and enter into it; but in the mechanic mind of this age of steam, only finer souls can possibly sympathise in such poetic personification.

Fairies proper are of three orders, with many genera, namely:—

Terrene.

Tenebrous.

Water-dwellers, or Undines.

It is highly probable there are also Fire-dwellers, such as salamanders and sprites that, as Dante says, are contented in fire, and whose faces we see in the embers, but I know nothing of them. My term of service was with the Terrene.

The personality of the fairy folk is interesting. They have the human form and features, but more spiritual and refined. Misapprehension exists as to their stature. All the Fairies I have ever seen

were about as tall as children of two to four years' growth, but much more delicate and slender. To say that they sleep in a tulip and hide in tiny harebells is a wicked story, a hyperbole of diminution, as a lover might say that his sweetheart, of five feet six or so. had crept into his heart and lay hidden there. That they are able to appear in different shapes is not more surprising than that a cloud should seem "very like a whale"; that they become invisible at will from the mere act of keeping out of sight, is quite comprehensible; but how, being wingless, yet having ponderosity and tangibility to the touch, they can, by sheer elasticity, soar a little higher than the tops of trees and there weave complicated circumgyrations as gnats do in evening sunshine, I confess (to use a strong expression) stumps me. Yet they do.

Fairies' traits are very human. They are born, marry and die; that is to say, they exhale into their component elements. They smile, laugh, weep, tremble and get into mild paroxysms of spite with each other. As might be expected from their sensitive organisation, music gives them thrilling delight, and they are capable performers. They know the language of ground animals and of flowers and trees, and can chirp in bird-tongue and appreciate the love-poems of nightingales. Sunlight expands their nature as it does the closed buds. Vivacity is one of their marked characteristics. No lotus-eaters they. Having no carking cares, they "fear no enemy but winter and rough weather."

Their mental qualities are such as might be predicated from their physical organisation. They make no progression. They do not build a hut as the forerunner of a pantheon, for they never construct anything more architectural than a bower. Such as creation's dawn beheld, they exist now in the perfection of their imperfection. Their reasoning is rapid, but so inconsequent that it sometimes leads them into harmless mischief. Some of their little failings may be gathered from incidents related in these Annals. The Fairy mind lacks the essential of profound thought, for they have never known sorrow. Their affections are warm for love or hate, loving all beautiful things, and hating everything coarse or ugly. From birth to the cessation of existence their whole being is as the inspiration of a poet when his spirit is most exalted above earthly trammels. A life all joyous, an idyl of idyls. To be happy in God's gifts, is their one idea of worship.

In their domestic relations they are irreproachable. Matrimony is held in great respect, for, as Mrs S. C. Hall justly observes, in Fairyland all husbands are lovers. The family *ménage* runs without jar. No complaint is ever heard from the dear ones that they have nothing to wear, for costume ranges from none at all, to swan's-down winter cloaks, picked up from among the reeds when the wild geese are flying to the south. I never heard of any fairy seeking to loosen the connubial tie. Under these circumstances, it is to be feared that a general offer to extend the sphere of Woman's

Rights would provoke an *émeute* on the part of the more charming sex. In this respect the Fays—delightful life-companions as they are—are old-fashioned and behind their civilised sisters of earth. But what can one expect from a race whose whole system of ethics, inculcated on every child, is summed up in these words: "Be square and do kindly, and you will be kindly and squarely done by."

Such are the sentient and intelligent beings that everywhere surround us in places suited to their haunt. If they do no labour and produce nothing, it may be asked, How, then, are they fed? Look around, oh, Observer! and note how the All-beneficence provides for its helpless ones. As honest Isaac Walton says,—“Contemplate the lilies that take no care, and those very many other various little living creatures that are not only created, but fed, man knows not how, by the goodness of the God of Nature.”

CHAPTER III.

QUEEN GLORIANA.

AN error has widely spread as to the name of the Faërie Queen. How the misapprehension arose, it may be hard to say, unless it were through the mere dunderheadedness of the illiterate. Ask almost anyone, not a Shakespearian, "Who is the Faërie Queen?" and the reply will certainly be "Queen Mab." Let us correct this mistake. Edmund Spencer gives the keynote,—

"Upon a great adventure he was bond,
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
That greatest, glorious Queene of Fairy lond."*

The truth is, the queenship is hereditary in the family of Titania. Titania is, therefore, the family name, as Guelph is that of Queen Victoria, but the reigning name is Gloriana and its meaning is equivalent to Czarina.

The queen is a lady of surpassing personal loveliness, somewhat of the blonde type, but with much more of queenly stateliness and intellectual force than is usually possessed by blondes of the human

* *Fairy Queen.*

fair sex. In stature she is moderately small. Were you to make a reduced copy of the Medicean Venus it would not be Queen Titania, and still less would be the identity if you compared her with the Venus of Milo. Titania—for some time my loved and honoured liege lady and mistress—is much more *svelte* and slender and delicate in her proportions, and more instinct with latent fire. An angel yet a woman too. If my kind and fair reader has a lovely little fairy-like girl-pet about four years of age, with violet eyes and blonde silk hair, and will refine and etherealise all her pet's beauties and proportions, and further throw womanhood into the child's aspect, she will have Titania.

The calumny that Queen Titania is a tiny mite of a thing, is too contemptible to be patiently contradicted. Mab is to blame for it all. Shakespeare, who knew everything, sets the matter right at once.

"Mab" (he says) "is the fairies' midwife, and she comes,
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone,
On the forefinger of an alderman."

So much for Mab. When he speaks of Titania he makes her of stature tall enough to embrace an ass, a mistake she once made, and which her mundane sisters have too often inadvertently repeated:—

"Tita. My Oberon! what visions have I seen?
Methought I was enamoured of an ass."

Shelley, although in deference to folk-lore he

called the wondrous poem of his college days "Queen Mab," was not unaware of the difference between the nearly microscopic "midwife" and the stately queen. Shakespeare had recorded that Mab's carriage was an empty hazel-nut "drawn by a team of little atomies," but Shelley horses the queen's chariot with winged coursers. The transcendental poet—the characteristic of whose verse is not absence of, but (so to speak) *attenuation of*, realism—describes the Queen of Faërie herself thus:—

"Human eye hath ne'er beheld
 A shape so wild, so bright, so beautiful,
 As that which o'er the maiden's charm'd sleep,
 Waving a starry wand,
 Hung like a mist of light.
 The broad and yellow moon
 Shone dimly through her form—
 The form of faultless symmetry . . .
 The Fairy's frame was slight, slight as some cloud
 That catches but the palest tinge of day
 When evening yields to night—
 Bright as that fibrous woof when stars endue
 Its transitory robe.
 Her thin and misty form
 Moved with the moving air."*

Mere words, even the words of poets, are so weak to express the grandeur of beautiful thoughts, that to picture beings of superlative excellence, can only be done by according to them the points that the æsthetic eye applauds in the human form and aspect. One of these descriptions, addressed to his

* *Queen Mab.*

future queen, Joan Beaufort, when "walking that very womanly, with beauty enough to make the world to dote," by a king, but a king behind prison bars—James I. of Scotland—is so refined that it may well stand for a vision of the Queen of Faërie:—

"Of her array the form if I shall write,
Towards her golden hair and rich attire,
In fretwise couchit with perles white
And great balas beaming as the fire,
With mony ane emerant and fair saphire;
And on her head a chaplet fair of hue,
Of plumis parted red, and white and blue.

About her neck, white as the fire amail,
A goodly chain of small orfevory,
Whereby there hung a ruby without fail
Like to a heart shapen verily,
That as a spark of low, so wantonly
Seemed burning upon her white throat." *

And as further says honest Willie Dunbar.—

"A costly crown with clarefeid stonis bricht,
This cumly Queene did on her heid inclose,
Quhylk all the land illumynit of the lycht."

Dryden, when laureate, thought he saw a vision of the Fairy Court, which he thus puts on record,—

"In velvet white as snow the troop was gowned,
The seams with sparkling emeralds set around;
Their hoods and sleeves the same; and purpled o'er
With diamonds, pearls, and all the shining store

* *The King's Quhair.*

Of eastern pomp ; their long descending train,
With rubies edged, and sapphires, swept the plain ;
High on their heads, with jewels richly set,
Each lady wore a radiant coronet.*

Poets, however, are apt to see double, and the fair ones Dryden saw, may have been only a bevy of the ladies of Katherine of Portugal.

* *Flower and Leaf.*

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CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN'S MARIES.

SOCIETY was pleasant at Court. There was, to be sure, among the wives of the bureaucracy a good deal of that formality and looking down from their heights on meaner persons, that generally comes over wives when their husbands are promoted ; but this defect was more than counterbalanced by that pleasant military frankness which almost always characterises the married ladies of a garrison. The unmarried maidens, whether of barracks or bureau, were much like the fair ones we meet in good society on earth, and as full of all the charming inconsistencies of their sex. But for all that was attractive in manner, and lovely in person, and refined in mind, none could approach the Maids of Honour, who were spoken of lovingly as the Queen's Maries. In my time there were four-and-twenty of these darlings. To see them grouped around their perfect Queen was a sight to behold. Had a young and ardent poet been privileged with the sight, it would have driven him crazy, and he would have been relegated to an asylum, or have entered La Trappe. Being myself neither young nor an ardent poet, I am

safe to introduce the delightful creatures to the courteous reader, which I do alphabetically, for where all were equally lovely, it would be disingenuous to imply any precedence. They were:—

AA,

a stately young fairy, observant of the proprieties; unfathomable eyes, with a sad smile in them. Her favourite flower, the white lily, or, as Dryden calls it, the *agnus castus*.

AILIE,

a sweet little soul. Hair, flaxen; complexion, creamy; eyes, porcelain blue.

AMINA.

I always fought shy of Amina because she had a sarcastic tongue.

BABEE

was the plumpest little thing. You could not help wanting to kiss her.

FLUFF

was a pet. Her portrait was painted by Millais.

JIP,

the very fay for one's money; full of fun and frolic, with mirth ever dancing in her brown eyes; quick at repartee, but with no nonsense about her.

Taken with a snap-shot kodak one day, but so hideously unlike her, we all screamed when we saw it.

LALALU,

a very lovable fay; rather sentimental. Had a fancy for draping herself in a veil, and peeping out in the most seductive way. A nice girl was Lalalu.

MUR.

This was a plaintive jade, who had a fashion of requiring to be spoken to twice. Hence she was called Mur-mur.

NU

was of a good domestic kind. Given to patching wounded butterflies' wings and poulticing bruised bumble-bees. She knew all the medicinal plants and flowers, and gathered them at full of the moon. Her favourite flower was *herb robert*.

PIP.

There is no denying that Pip was a coquette. Her original appellation was Pippa or Pepita; but from her habit of saying, "Call me pet names, dear," she was abbreviated into Pip.

QUIP,

as her name imparts, was rather fond of playing practical jokes and hearing herself talk; but it was only her fun, and there was no harm in her.

ROLY.

Pink and white Roly; like a big baby, so soft and warm and cosy. Favourite wreath, white and pink lilies of the valley.

SĀSĀ.

A lazy slut, who would do nothing if she could help it, but swing in a hammock of honeysuckle, and fan herself with a calycanthus leaf. Always wore a garland of red clover.

TRIPPET

was the most obliging thing, and, therefore, a good deal put upon. Anyone had only to say,—“Go, fetch me my handkerchief—ah! do, now,” and off she would go, buzzing like a humming-bird.

ULA.

A clinging dear; afraid of death's-head moths, and at sight of a devil's darning-needle thought she should die.

VIVA.

Joyous Viva! instinct with life and movement, ever on the run in quick, flashing spurts. Would not hesitate to go heels-over-head in the manner of a tumbler pigeon. Partial to long sprays of any vivid blossom.

VIVIEN

was of the highest intellectual calibre of all the

fays, and was distinguished for beauty. She had, besides, some experience in mundane society—(See Chapter XI. of these Annals). Her place was next to the Queen.

ZUZU.

A good, serviceable fay.

Besides these were some others, whose names have escaped me, excepting Avé, whose ancestress was the identical industrious Teutonic fay who invented cloth-weaving at Lorch or Hippenheim, where was first grown red vintage on the Rhine; and Wawawa, a gamesome nymph, who hides behind rocks, and playfully enacts the part of echo.

Yes, we had a delightful circle at Court—feminine graces unsurpassed, polished manhood in all its varieties of occupation and character, yet all combined by the family tie; and, although etiquette was never transgressed, its easy bonds offered a marked contrast to the ponderous stiffness of petty German dukedoms, or, let us say, of the preposterous Court of Monaco.

CHAPTER V.

THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD.

ONE day in our camp—some time ago, now—voices were heard in the inspiring chorus of “Yo, heave O!” as used by sailors when heaving the anchor, carrying out other nautical manoeuvres. Approaching were seen several fairy boys walking backwards, hauling on a rope to the other end of which was appended a red-and-white puppy. Zug, the gnome, lifted the animal by the tail and dropped him in the outskirts.

What happened next is not on record, but it is known that the ill-treated creature took refuge in a rabbit-hole, and it is surmised that the boys used to go there and feed him surreptitiously. A few weeks afterwards rumours grew that a red-and-white thing had been seen running about chasing sparrows. On being approached, it took refuge in its hole.

Fairies are far from insensible to the endearments of filial affections, but there was much coaxing, before the subject of the puppy would be even listened to. At length, importunity prevailed, and permission was given to adopt the waif on condition it should never be allowed to come within fairy

ground. The boys went off triumphantly to their dog. I know not by what association of ideas they named him Tycho Brahe, but by that name he has been known throughout his eventful history.

Notwithstanding Childe Harold's cynical assertion that his dog would tear him after a few months' absence, memory is one of the strongest of canine attributes. At first, Tycho was chary of re-entering the precincts from which he remembered he had been ignominiously expelled. Gradually, on the encouragement of his young masters, he ventured farther and farther into the area of the haunt. His circle of acquaintance enlarged daily. He became as the dog of the regiment. In process of time he developed physically into a magnificent specimen of his order, beautifully marked with clear red and cream, with long silky hair, and a tail like the meteors that affright nations. Intellectually, he was a giant. Darwin would have loved him as an instance of the higher development. Individually, he showed idiosyncrasies. He refused to abandon the rabbit-hole in which his infancy had been sheltered, but enlarged it as his housekeeping required, and the wheelbarrowsful of earth he threw out with his hind feet showed spacious halls within, and outside formed a considerable barrow. Constructiveness in him was well marked. Humour was none the less so, in fact it was his prevalent characteristic. He was a fellow of infinite wit. As I have seen in a very few other dogs, he had the faculty of pursing up his lips and laughing at his own jokes. Sometimes he would sit up like an

Australian kangaroo, and from that attitude attempt to jump, with the most ludicrous effect. Occasionally, to afford amusement to his friends, he would revolve in pursuit of his tail, in the manner of a whirling dervish. Benevolence in his cranium was mountainous, morality small, philoprogenitiveness none at all. Health superb. It may or may not be that pigs see the wind—although the circumstance is noted in natural history—but it is a fact that from some inner consciousness, some electric affinity, or a fine, but occult sympathy, Tycho could see the fairies when invisible to other eyes, and he readily adapted himself to fairy habits. He came to know the social grade of people, and graduated his civilities accordingly. He would follow Oberon when hunting, although always driven off, and from a safe distance would give joyous barks when the game fell. On his own account he dug out mice, as poodles do truffles. Strange to say, he seemed to have a kindliness towards squirrels, for he never attacked these pretty gymnasts, but would lie for hours watching their graceful gambols, or seeing them run up and down their ladders with their pouches full of nuts. To cats he was what Claverhouse was to the Covenanters. He learned to fish by the process called "groping," and would wade gently into pools beneath overhanging boughs and feel about with his paws for trout, lifting them out as did Isaac Walton, gently as though he loved them. Moreover he could climb up the sloping stems of trees, and from that bad eminence would gravely patronise the fairy sports. Unfortunately

his ear was faulty, for he had an objection to music and would join in with deprecatory howls. A facetious habit he had was meekly to follow foot-passengers as if he were a lost dog seeking a master, and suddenly make off with a mouthful of coat-tail.

He was hated by all who know him, except by the fairies. Conspiracies were laid for his life, but the rustics had no firearms and he always travelled with his weather eye open. Briefly, he might be described as a sad dog.

His reasoning powers became singularly acute and his prescience wonderful. One might almost, without impropriety, have called him a gymnosophist or naked sage. What made it the more praiseworthy was that his culture was the result of his own unassisted study. On one occasion, when he felt disinclined to enact the part of a palfrey, he ran away and, rolling over and over in an adjacent swamp, presented himself to his constituents, a moving mass of mud, which spoiled the projected ride. Then with a waggish leer in his eye he retired to his hole and amused himself with the idea. Noticing the ladies one day admiring a pheasant's wing which they passed from hand to hand, he rushed away and returned with a pheasant, for which he was petted and made much of. Instantly he dashed off and brought a hen, with which they buffeted him off the premises. At a loss to understand the indignity, he did not appear for some days, but at length the thought struck him and he came carrying the wings only of a cock pheasant—having himself eaten the body—and

laid them at the Queen's feet, thus rehabilitating himself in public esteem.

Notwithstanding his many fine qualities, it is to be regretted that in his moral perception he had a twist. In fact he was a kleptomaniac of the most pronounced type. Any king might have taken a lesson from him in raising involuntary loans. From the pains he took in secreting the spoils, it is to be feared that, like other Chancellors of the Exchequer, he knew it was theft. It was an occasional amusement of the boys in his absence to fish out of his hole with a long stick the proceeds of his forays, which were usually found to embrace, as opportunity had offered, old hats, old boots, handkerchiefs, chemises, wool, spoons, and pieces of homespun that had been hung out by the cottars to bleach. What Falstaff's men intended to do, he did; he found linen on every hedge. Bones and hareskins he always buried, not for sanitary reasons, but that he might know where to find them when wanted. One of his most rollicking exploits was when he rushed into a solemn fairy convention, dragging an obsolete hoop skirt and chasing the shrieking fairies about with it. Where he got the article he did not say. Once from a picnic, a mile or two distant, he brought a basket containing two silver mugs and half-a-dozen forks. Generally he attended all the picnics in the neighbourhood, by lurking under bushes and bolting with pies. Another time he attempted to convey a bottle which he seems to have broken on the road and to have lapped the contents, for he arrived home

in a state of intoxication. He never repeated this offence.

There was no end to his adventures by flood and field. Had he been a tithe proctor, he could not have collected his levy with more regularity. As he had no use for coined money, he took payment in kind: butter, eggs, cream, cheese, chickens, or whatever came handy. The chief difference between him and other assessors, was that he never evicted anybody. On the contrary, wherever found, they evicted him. But, on the whole, his life was not an unpleasant one.

This valued friend of the juveniles, lived contented in his cave on the outskirts of fairyland, a voluntary eremite. Grateful for kindness, helpful and devoted to his patrons, thoroughly unselfish, brave, prompt and prudent, watchful of the interests confided to him, and reliable in all he undertook, he had all the exceptional virtues, and none of the vices of man. When he should die, the fairies would be sorry, which is much to say of any being who has lived.

Thus it will be understood that the fairies' dog Tycho Brahe was the dweller on the Threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRUE STORY OF THE UGLY DUCKLING.

THE Ugly Duckling was the only son of Joseph Glubb of Glubbsley, Esquire, Justice of the Peace and quorum. After being long longed for, the subject of our memoir made his appearance unexpectedly one day in the nursery, to the intense delight of his father, the dolour of his mother, and the satisfaction of Squills, the practitioner, who was handsomely feed for his share in introducing the youth to the reception assured him by a large rose-and-white satin pincushion, the antecedent gift of a maiden aunt, which bore the legend, "Welcome, little stranger," in warranted solid-headed pins. The nurse's opinion of the new arrival was, "What a hideous little wretch!" but the prudent woman, perceiving the fond father stealing on tiptoe to take a peep at his boy Unigenitus, changed her sentiments to "And was it a lovely dear—a pet—and the very picter of his honor's worship," a piece of hypocrisy that gained her a sovereign.

Even the most loyal subject and most lenient Court Annalist cannot conscientiously claim that King Oberon might legitimately strip his pre-

decessor Arthur of the distinction of being "the blameless king." Perhaps the best that can be said for the present occupant of the Faërie throne is that he is no worse than other crowned heads. But Titania may in all truth and sincerity be styled the blameless queen. She would never conduct herself as Queen Guinevere did. Queen Titania, my gracious and royal mistress, has but one little weakness, and it has on more than one occasion brought her into trouble, once notably in a wood near Athens, where she

"As her attendant had
A lovely boy stolen from an Indian King,"

and which brought on a ludicrous *contretemps* with one Bottom, a weaver. This, her only weakness, is an æsthetic craze for collecting handsome pages, as other ladies have, or had, a passion for collecting monstrous old china. She, therefore, determined to steal Mrs Glubb's baby, and bring him up as a page. To succeed in this, it was necessary to have him carried off before he was baptised, because after that ceremony, fairies have no power over babes. Three old fairies of the Court were therefore deputed to ravish the Glubbsley nursery, and entered the sacred precincts invisibly with that intention. The monthly nurse lay snoring in an arm-chair, with a strong pervasion of gin in the atmosphere, and the heir to the acres, lay hidden between two pillows, with a lace veil covering his face. The fairies drew the veil. "Let me see the Duck," said the oldest, who

was soft-hearted and purblind. Candour compels me to admit that the child did not appear at his best. His small face had a blackish tinge, his closed eyes were swollen, and his nose was already the image of his father's, namely, bulbous and ruddy. "Oh, the Ugly!" cried the second fairy. "Let him keep his ugliness," said the third, "the Queen will none of him." Then all three flew away, one having made him a duck, and the others having doomed him to perpetual ugliness. Taken together, these decisions made him an Ugly Duckling. This was rather hard on the unconscious infant, whose parents were more in fault than he. And indeed a baby is a despicable object. Strange that out of it should sometimes grow a large-minded and Jove-like man.

Two ritualists—for it took two and an aquafer—baptised the infant. The heir was not given his father's name. Joseph is a significant cognomen, and is besides too suggestive of eleven brethren, a number that Squire Glubb's small patrimony could not afford. "Joseph" is likewise too apt to be corrupted into Joe, and "old Joe," and "young Joe" for father and son would never do. His lady mother therefore decided that her boy should be called Anatides. She was sure she remembered the name as that of an eminent Christian in the early age of the Church; besides, it was so sweetly pretty. When the name ANATIDES GLUBB was handed to the clergymen, they smiled, and said it was quite appropriate.

There are some children whose heads are so

dense, blockheads, in short, that Thor's hammer or Charles Martel's maul could not drive the alphabet into them. Anatides was not an infant of that kind. From the period when he could stand on his feet without the aid of a chair, he picked up the symbols of literature from A to izzard as pigeons pick up peas. Aided by highly-coloured representations of quadrupeds and household utensils in his primer, he soon learned to distinguish the combination of emblems that stand for dog, cat, pot, pan. Thus it was that when but a few years of age, under this fostering system he became precocious. One day when two lady visitors chanced on him alone in the drawing-room, one of them said,—“Come here, you little duck!” Anatides obediently rose and toddled across, whereupon the other said,—“How can you call that imp a duck? Certainly he waddles.” This incident was the master latch that unlocked the treasure-house of his mind. As soon as the visitors were gone he sat down on the floor and consulted his *Natural History for the Nursery*, published destructibly on linen, 4to, illuminated, and therein found a representation of a horsepond, in which were depicted a duck and ducklings, with the lucid description for an infant mind, “A Duck is an A-quat-ic Fowl.” He misread it “A-quack-ic fool,” meaning, of course, a foolish bird that quacks. Hence, he naturally arrived at the conclusion that as he was a Duckling, or little duck; he was a little fool who quacked. This, his first essay in inductive ratiocination, shows the mental power of the boy.

How strangely the threads of the Fates are intertwined. At the precise moment by Greenwich time that little Anty, as he was called for short, was receiving at the age of seven years nine slaps on a portion of his person for sailing paper boats in the cream pot, and was yelling lustily under the infliction, a tinier yell, more resembling a squeak, issued from the lips of a female child just introduced into the world, some hundred miles off, and by her cry protesting against it. The wails of the boy and the baby might have been exchanged by telephone had that instrument been invented, but, as it was not, their mingled complaints rose in the atmosphere and ascended to heaven. Anatides had been for seven years a fixed fact; the baby was the legitimate result of a ball, a year before, at Plymouth, where a distinguished sea-captain on His Majesty's staff proposed to and was accepted by the pretty duck who was the belle of the ball, and who had been praised by the Sailor King's own lips. Hence the baby. Which baby, though neither of them would know it for years to come, was Anatides' fate. The proud father, who was equally devoted to his profession and his wife, named the child Rosalinda Temeraire, the first name being after the mother and the second after one of His Majesty's most fighting ships. This child was the darlingest little thing. Her eyes, even in infancy, of the tint of sapphire, were a delight to all who saw them, but, as she grew up, what do you think they were when they intensified into the deeply, darkly beautiful blue of Byron's heaven? Nature herself gave her those

eyes. All the other enchanting graces of the favoured child were the gift of the fairies, who had loved her mother. Neither mother nor child ever had an enemy but one; but as that one was a female, it was more than enough. The enmity arose from a thoughtless remark made by a gossiping fay, to the effect that Rosalinda Jane (now the babe's mother) was pretty, very like Aunt Peascod's maid, only prettier. Aunt Peascod never forgave it, and, therefore, when Rosalinda's child was born, she flew to it to give it some evil gift. The blue-eyed innocent in its bassinette looked so sweetly smiling, that the morose fairy only grumbled, "Aye, you are pretty enough now, but let ugliness stick to you all your life." The other fairies, alarmed at what seemed a malediction, held a conclave to devise measures to counteract it, the result of which was that they sought the ugliest child they knew, who happened to be Anatides Glubb, and took him under their special protection. Thus do the Parcæ weave the web and woof of destiny.

When Anatides went to school and into the Latin class, the lads of his form looked in Lempiere for "Anatides" without finding any such proper name, but in the dictionary of nominatives they found "anas, a duck; anatide, the duck family." Choosing to accept anas, according to its English pronunciation, an ass, they forthwith christened him "Neddy." It took more battles than were fought in the Peninsula to rid him of the sobriquet. In the field his adversaries found him ugly. His lady acquaintances continued to speak of him as a duck.

The heir of Glubb having passed through his classes with the reputation of a clever, warm-hearted, ugly lad, developed an unquenchable taste for the sea. Wherefore his parent hunted up and besought the patronage of a relative of the family, who, in consequence of having never seen the sea except at a watering-place, had been appointed a high officer at the Admiralty. This official mentioned the subject one day after dinner to his brother dignitaries, with the result that young Glubb, after due cramming, was shipped as midshipman on the *Irrefragible* ironclad, commanded by Captain Tompion, distantly related to Admiral Sir Peter Parker, whose flagship at that time was the *Pinafore*. The former ship was the one on board which so many unburstible 100-ton guns had exploded and killed members of the crew.

To the eye of an intelligent foreigner nothing more pleasantly points out the glory—I mean the former glory—of England as mistress (formerly) of the seas, than her midshipmen. All of good family, fairly educated and trained, gentlemanly lads full of frolic, nicely clad, and armed with a preposterous reaping-hook that makes their mothers and sisters squeak when they draw it, but is incapable of other mischief, they are a brave little gang, whom it always delights me to look upon. Possible heroes in miniature; pocket editions of the marine code of war.

As our hero's digestion was as good as that of other midshipmen in the fleet, he was constitutionally brave. Take notice, contractors and commis-

saries! The gastric fluid, with a steady, adequate supply of sound beef and vegetables for it to work upon, is the very basis of valour, and the essence from which mighty deeds spring. Our ugly duckling found increment in anything. Therefore he was as void of fear as a Nelson; and as his moral faculties were exceptionally fine, he was a general favourite. But a good deal of his fine capabilities depended on his victuals.

It was at a bombardment not so long ago. The admiral in full dress uniform, a conspicuous mark, was standing on the quarter-deck of the flagship, with his hands in his trousers' pockets and his legs very wide apart, watching the practice with a face as expressionless as the figure-head. A damaged boat with a number of men in it, that had had its oars carried away by a couple of round shots, was drifting hopelessly under a shore battery. "Fetch her in, sir?" asked Anatides, touching his cap. "Well, yes, youngster," said the admiral, again turning his eyes to the shore. Four volunteers sprang into a gig with the dashing young midshipman and, amid a *feu d'enfer*, succeeded in bringing off the disabled boat until within a few hundred yards of safety, when an exploding shell knocked both boats into chips of the dimensions that the Irish call smithereens. The survivors swam to the nearest vessels. Our hero kept steadily on for the flagship. Clambering up, he presented himself all dripping, with his face covered with blood from a splinter, and, touching his forelock, for he had lost his cap, reported, "Come on board,

sir." The admiral smiled. Now, this admiral was the father of the girl Rosalinda Temeraire. Thus was forged another link in Anatides' destiny.

As lieutenant, he did fairly. There are no great sea fights now as were in the days of Nelson, Howe and Jarvis. Our ocean vehicles are now constructed on the principle of bank coffers, to keep safe the securities within, and are attacked as burglars attack safes by blowing them open with torpedoes. Yet England has always one or more little wars on hand, where the no longer tarry Jack tar, once the man "whose deck it was his field of fame," is put on shore to do lobster's work as auxiliary to the marines. In one of these land affairs the naval brigade, disdaining the regulation scaling ladders, made a sort of uphaul with a few coils of rope and scrambled up the face of a fort in a manner that none but sailors or cats could. When Lieutenant Anatides, who was first up, reached the battlement the enemy took him by the collar and threw him into the ditch, a stray bullet taking him about amidships as he fell. After many weeks in hospital, the result showed itself in a limp that lasted the brave fellow for life, and which, if not graceful, was at least interesting.

As captain, his sphere of duty lay much in the Malay Archipelago and along the farther Cambodian shores, where we have the interests of opium and Christianity to attend to. Here, what with the burning of villages and sinking of proas (which exploits were officially hidden from the

newspaper press), he passed an agreeable time, but considerably to the detriment of his complexion, which acquired a permanent Cambodian sallow hue. A lengthened term of service on that part of the western coast of Africa that Germany as a maritime power has recently choused the settlers out of, overlaid the original jaundice of his cheeks with a tint of bronze; while, later still, the torrid noons of the Red Sea gave an artistic finish of lurid red to the bridge of his nose, bringing it into high relief. There, too, while leading his gallant Jacks to attack a stockaded post, he imprudently mounted a horse, and, being unable to steer the animal, was cut down by an Abyssinian sabre, which gave him a permanent scar across the face similar to that worn by Quentin Durward's uncle, the balaféré. The *Gazette* mentions his having blown up some enemy's gates; on another occasion having exploded a hostile magazine with much waste of life; and, on another, having sunk an enemy's ship with four hundred men. England expects every man to do his duty, and Captain Glubb did it.

I know not how to account for the circumstance, but it is as well authenticated as anything in these Annals, that Captain Anatides Glubb, R.N., on the coast of Africa dreamed a strange dream. His gunboat was lying in ambushade in a small horseshoe bay, the slow waves of which, black in the shadow, rolled in and broke sullenly on the high, perpendicular rock face, making a faint phosphorescent gleam around the base of the cliffs with their

spray. Overhead, the Tropic stars gleamed with unnatural lustre, and the moon, not many degrees above the western horizon, looking larger than the moon of the north, made every object its rays touched, as shining white as if encrusted with actual silver. The row of palms that crested the cliffs had their heads imperfectly defined by a line of white, while their trunks, facing the sea view, were in the blackest obscure. From the shore came now and then the harsh cry of a guinea fowl disturbed by some nocturnal enemy, and occasionally a deep and sonorous roll that reverberated among the cliffs and out to sea—the roar of the lion. The thermometer stood at 110 degrees, not with the sharp, prickly heat of India, but with a sodden atmosphere like the breath of a baker's oven. Captain Glubb lay on his back in his hammock on board ship, and dreamed. Ere he dozed off, he could hear the humming of hundreds of insects that, attracted by the light, had flown through the open ports and filled the cabin with a sleepy murmur. Mechanically he counted the number of times the cockroaches ran up the wall or across the table, and fell on the floor with a thud. Then his sensation of outward things grew indistinct, and he seemed to be parading his crew on shore for inspection by a gigantic ourang-outang that looked the very embodiment of savage African war. As he got his men into line, their faces and his own darkened and blackened until they assumed the aspect of Congo negroes. He himself especially grew so unspeakably ugly that

it were cruel to describe him. Suddenly was heard a low tinkling as of water; then it seemed to be emitted from harps, until low-toned flutes, one after another, joined in, and a ravishing air stole on the ear. At the first note of the music, the ourang blew up with a loud report, and went off like a rocket in a spout of sparks. The music approached nearer, and with it a gay and shining *cortège* of fairies—Ailie, Cherie, Wawa, Zuzu and the rest, all in their aerial beauty. Then the brilliant throng opened, and from among them came a lovely lady of mortal mould, who proceeded to review the blackened crew by passing along the line. Pausing in front of the captain, she stretched her beautiful arms in an appealing attitude, and implored, "O, hideous one! be thou my beloved!" At that moment a mosquito of the worst type crept under the bars and stung him on the lip, which instantly swelled to the size and appearance of a cherry, and he awoke. That lovely face of his dream—the face of Rosalinda Temeraire—accompanied him in all his subsequent wanderings.

At length he returned to his country in the prime of life, though not of beauty, and what more natural than that he, now a K.C.B. and V.C., should take up his quarters for a time with his old commander, the admiral.

Of course he was everywhere welcomed by men as a brave and true-hearted sailor, and regarded by the fair sex as a duck and a darling. Not very long after his return a fashionable street in the capital was blocked with carriages clustering

around the door of the Church of St Jude the Less, and every coachman of them all had on his lapel a nosegay and in his hat a wedding favour. An expectant crowd gathered around to see who was taking the vows of matrimony with so much magnificence, when out came Sir Anatides Glubb, V.C., and hanging on his arm as his wife was the fair Rosalinda Temeraire. For so the fairies had planned. As the lovely bride walked along the carpeted pavement to her carriage, she pinched her husband's arm and fondly whispered, "Oh you dear old Ugly Duckling!"

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CHAPTER VII.

TIMON THE MISANTHROPE.

At the time of which I write, a few furlongs up a footpath leading from a bridleway that led from a side road diverging from the highway on which lay the hamlet—so that the place was sufficiently solitary—stood a cottage of stone, with narrow windows in leaden lattice frames, and with a stout oaken door studded with great nails like the inhospitable portal of a jail. The house, though small, was rather picturesque than otherwise. Thirty or forty years before our time there had existed a diletante sportsman who, under the delusion that as he was an amateur designer he was necessarily an architect, had the edifice built for a shooting-box in the impression that it was Elizabethan. Climbing vines now covered it from base to roof, and rampant sprays sprawled across the slates and clasped the Gothic chimney. Once a year an agent of the estate made a visit to see that the house was weatherproof, and the windows unbroken, but otherwise it lay undisturbed. Swallows lodged in the chimney-pots, and sparrows lived beneath the eaves. Blackbirds and throstles had their houses in the overgrown lilacs, and the wren laid its dozen

or so of eggs in the mossy bank that was odorous with thyme, and in which red-breeched bees bored. Hares barked the stunted and gnarled fruit-trees, and on fine days on the little patch of weed-grown lawn you might see them sitting on end washing their faces. The place was so lonely the rustics deemed it "unchancey."

One day, to the stolid amazement of the villagers, a sharp-eyed gentleman, whom you could tell at a glance was a lawyer, drove into the hamlet. He was followed by a wain containing a modest assortment of household furniture, such as an hospital iron bedstead, some common deal benches and tables, and a huge carved oaken chair, surmounted by a mitre that looked as if it had been looted from some cathedral. A farmer's truck next arrived with a screaming collection of poultry, bundles of shrubs and roots, barrels of beef, flour and beer, together with a number of heavy packing-cases said to contain books. Idlers were impounded to convey the property to the cottage, and a very old crone was engaged as house-keeper. Then the lawyer departed, and it became known that the cottage had been rented for an indefinite time, by a gentleman of the name of Timon.

In a few days, the gentleman himself, with a knapsack on his back and a crabtree stick in his hand, walked in unannounced. His first act of proprietorship was to come into the kitchen with a framed placard, which he affixed to the wall. Did the wall-plate express the usual pious ejacula-

tion,—‘God bless our Home’? Not at all. It bore this legend:—

“TAKE NOTICE.—I must NEVER be spoken to. Cups and saucers and knives and forks must not rattle. On pain of death.

“(Signed) TIMON.”

This strange tenant was an elderly bachelor, who had been a Turkey merchant—whatever that may be. I do not myself know what a Turkey merchant is, but infer it has something to do with Bagdad and Bassora and caravans. He had been wealthy, but had lost much by credulity in inter-oceanic canals and railways; and now, with the modest remains of his fortune safely invested in national securities, he had abandoned his kind and gone into retirement as a misanthrope.

The gentleman had his little peculiarities, which became known by degrees. For instance, he would have no servants about his place except the decrepit old housekeeper. He was an enthusiastic gardener in labouring with his hands, but sadly ignorant of thermic influences, and of the plants suitable to the latitude. A specialty of his was yellow roses, which, being too tender for the climate, always died. Gum arabic and camphor palms did not do well with him out of doors. His perse-

verance in attempting to grow dates in the open air was really commendable. A most ill-natured peacock, his constant companion while he worked, was a source of much anxiety to him from a habit it had of picking off the buds and screaming at him when disturbed. His other pet, a tame seagull or murre, was more tractable, but still troublesome from boring holes in the flower-beds in search of worms. A blue jay that he had, proved a regular *gazza ladra* in the matter of spoons; and a toad to which he was much attached, fell a victim to the murre. Dogs were included in his aversion towards the human race; and he could not bear to look on cats, for he said they reminded him of women he had met.

When he had earned digestion by some hours' hard labour, he was wont to eat his dinner, and shut himself up in an apartment wherein the public opined he devoted his hours to the black art. One day a bustling young man who acted as collector of rates made his way into the house when Timon was absent (for tax-gatherers penetrate even into wizards' dens), and reported that he found himself in a bare room, in which was little but a table and a huge carved chair with a mitre on the top, and around the walls innumerable books, among which he observed the titles of *Gesta Romanorum*, *Rabelais*, *Decamerone*, *l'Heptameron*, *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, the Florentine Secretary's Plays, the Villon Arabian Nights, Scarron, complete sets of novelists, poets and dramatists, and an infinity of fairy tales, so that the misanthrope's studies could

not have been of a severe or depressing cast. Timon came in, and refused to pay the tax, and turned the collector out; but the amount was remitted by the lawyer in town in the course of a few days to avoid a summons.

When the occupant of the cottage came to be personally known to his bucolic neighbours, he was to them a marvel and a mystery. With some queer reminiscence of his former business, he always wore a Molsem fez instead of a hat, which, with yellow leather gaiters and buckled shoes, gave him at once a malignant and waggish appearance. Occasionally a gigantic pair of water-proof fishing-boots indicated that he was going a-fishing, which amusement he justified on the plea that he would catch nothing; and besides, if he did, fishes have no feeling. But he never carried a gun, for he said the wild creatures of the woods and fields never had done him any harm that he knew of. Although a good-looking old gentleman in the main, he had taught himself a ferocious scowl that really startled one. When he appeared in the one street of the village with his scowl on, children and dogs fled at his approach. Only the fairies' dog, Tycho, whom he sometimes met in his walks, would look at him with a knowing grin, as if there were a secret between them, and would salute him with a friendly wag. Even cocks and hens scuttled away when they saw him. Geese and turkeys, with the fatuous insolence of their respective races, would follow and peck at his heels. Looking down with contempt on the feathered rabble, he would

remark,—“How characteristic of this fag-end of the century!”

The tales among the rustics concerning him were manifold. It came to be generally accepted that he had been a pirate and highwayman, and was now gnawed with fruitless remorse. The vicar of the parish, whom Timon had offended by refusing to see him when he called, did not hesitate to say there was too much reason to fear the stranger was a secret emissary of the Propaganda, and, besides, a Voltairian infidel. What the Propaganda was, the hearers had no idea, but “infidel” was plain enough; it was something like “Tom Paine and them Frenchmen.” At all events, he was far from popular.

There was one incident that told greatly against him. An orphan lad, whose parents had come from nobody knows where, but who seemed to have been a shade above the ordinary labourer level, was left utterly destitute, and did all the odds-and-ends work of the hamlet, taking his pay mostly in kicks. He was an intellectual-looking boy, and Timon had been observed taking notice of him. This lad suddenly disappeared, therefore the belief became general that Timon had murdered him and secreted the body. A worthy schoolmaster on the distant edge of the county could have told how a man brought him a boy, and after gruffly explaining that his means were limited, left a sum to pay for the boy's schooling for three years, and then to place him in some respectable mechanical pursuit.

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An aged cottar was laid up with acute rheumatism, and was unable to plough his two or three acres of farm. His old wife herself tried to run a furrow with their one lame horse, but could make nothing of it. The neighbours would do nothing for nothing. Driven to extremity, the old dame went around with a subscription paper to hire labour, and among the rest to Timon, who violently refused to give her a copper. Next morning two sturdy ploughmen came whistling o'er the lea with teams, and, before night, had ploughed and seeded the poor man's croft, then went away along the highway, again whistling as they went. Nobody but Timon knew where they came from or went to.

Another time, a lad was run over by a passing vehicle, and somewhat injured. Timon sent for his housekeeper, and thus addressed her:—

“I am glad that brute of a boy got hurt. I trust all his limbs are broken. Nevertheless, as his mother very likely has not much to give him, you may let her have what she wants—beef, and stove-polish, and what not. The jade! she deserves to be switched at a cart's tail for bringing superfluous mouths into the world. She cannot have read *Malthus's Principles of Population*, as she ought to have done. A sound philosopher, Mrs Snipes, was Thomas Robert Malthus. Oh, thou antique female! the evil thy sex hath done by overpopulating this planet is incalculable—in-calculable! Go!”

Mrs Snipes went, and the profusion the boy and

his mother revelled in, for weeks after the bruise was completely cured, made them wish for a repetition of the accident.

Seeing two ruffians stooping down torturing a cat, he walked quietly behind them, and with two well-planted kicks on their ehrenbreitsteins, or broad seats of honour, sent them sprawling. The hoodlums got up in wrath, but our misanthrope in his red fez, with his scowl on, and his crabtree grasped by the middle like a quarter-staff, looked so belligerent, that they slunk away. Timon ob-jurgated the whole feline race, whether cats or women, and trudged on.

When Timon was walking out another day to take the air, a dove, pursued by a hawk, took refuge in his bosom, undeterred by his scowl. He kept the bird, and it became so tame that it would sit on the crown of his fez like an order of the Espirto Santo.

In process of time it began to be observed that immediately after each quarter day (at which date Timon received his dividends), numerous anonymous gifts found their way to persons badly off. The rumbling of wheels would be heard in the village's one street at night, and in the morning a load of coal would be found dumped at some cottar's door. Plucked geese ready for the spit were mysteriously secreted in old women's washtubs. It was not an unfrequent sight to behold a quarter of mutton suspended on the door-knob of some bumpkin, who had more children's mouths to feed than he knew how to fill. And once a

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bed-ridden "widow-woman" who was laid up from a debility, of which hunger was the main cause, was frightened nearly out of her wits one moonlight night, by seeing a leg of beef lowered by a string down the open chimney.

Such goings-on could only be attributed to good fairies, although, in fact, the proceedings were Timon's. Therefore the fairies liked him, because they got the credit of his deeds, and in consequence "the Good People" were exceedingly popular in that neighbourhood. Once or twice, they coyly showed themselves to Timon, preparatory to better acquaintance, but our practical misanthrope looked on the figures as arising from indigestion, and went home and took a blue pill.

The time came, however, when he could no longer shut his eyes to the fact that fairies were about. Before the truth dawned on him, he had been a good deal puzzled by several little incidents that could not be accounted for on ordinary principles of reasoning. On fishing excursions he would often see three or four toads sitting around his lunch-basket, and gravely looking in. Just as he was in the act of raising a specially fine trout, a pebble would be thrown in, and a tittering would be heard in the air. When his outer pockets were filled with grasshoppers, he was confident he had never put them there. The truth is, the tricky spirits were playing him tricks. On one occasion they carried it too far, for he distinctly saw before his visual optics a gigantic purple emperor butterfly that would measure two

feet across the wings. Amazed beyond expression, he gave chase in his fishing-boots, over bush and bog, until it flew into his own garden and disappeared in the lilacs. He forthwith wrote a faithful account of this remarkable specimen to the Smegmatic Society, of which he was an Associate, and although his communication was signed Timon, A.S.S. (Associate Smegmatic Society), he was nearly expunged from the roll on a charge of having attempted to befool that learned body. Glances of colour in the shadow and little jets of laughter among the leaves led him at length to suspect fairy agency. So one day he took a charm out of *Cornelius Agrippa*, and anointed his eyes with the herb speedwell, when lo! all was made plain, and he witnessed with his eyes the gambols of the fairy folk.

This circumstance may perhaps account for the events I am about to relate. It happened that certain outdoor labourers, coming home from long days' work, had grown into the habit of saving themselves a tramp of half-a-mile by taking a short cut across a corner of the fairies' walk, to the great annoyance of the touchy people, and worse threatened to befall them, for the Road Supervision, on the eve of a municipal election, not knowing it would impinge upon the fairies' rights, and not caring if it did, decided to open a highway through the very middle of their woodland haunt.

Fifty years or so before, two estates adjoined, and the owners of each mutually gave up a few

paces in width along the dividing line to serve as a private road common to both. It happened that both estates were subsequently sold, one after the other, by metes and bounds, up to the edge of that road, so that the road itself remained the property of nobody. This narrow strip of vacant land, a mile long, by thirty feet or so in width, intersected at right angles the proposed new line of highway. Immediately on the last of the two estates being sold, a shrewd Scotch weaver ran up a hut in a single night on the disused strip, and by lapse of years acquired title. Timon, through his lawyer, hunted up the weaver's descendants and bought the mile-long ribbon of land for an old song. When, therefore, the assessors came to lay off the new highway, they found planted right in their line two stout peasants with clubs, backed by Timon, as owner of the soil, waving a document which purported to be, but probably was not, an injunction in Chancery. The lawyer in town also bestirred himself, with the result that the Road Trustees dropped the case rather than combat so determined an opponent. Then Timon had a huge finger-post painted with this legend—"TRESPASSERS BEWARE! MAN-TRAPS AND SPRING-GUNS SET HERE!!!" and erected it with his own hands. On his return from having performed this duty, the fairies, who were watching from under cover of the leaves, timidly crept out and surrounding him at a safe distance, struck their low-voiced dulcimers and tapped their tambourines. Timon gazed around, but seeing no one, pressed

his fez well over his eyes and went along smiling, for he knew who it was made the music. The serenade accompanied him all the way home, and all night long a nightingale sang in the lilac bush beneath his window.

Nor was this all that the grateful fairies did for their rugged-mannered friend. The sequel shows how good a thing it is to keep on friendly terms with the invisible beings who surround us.

Timon could never account for the impulse that induced him (fairies again!) to dig into a mound at the end of his garden. In the language of American philosophy, "it was borne in upon him." He did dig, and came on a great buried treasure—chest on chest—that had evidently lain long in the earth, and which was probably buried in old time to save it from sack. The treasure was very large, and completely recouped him for his lost fortune. With a rectitude that did him honour, he notified his discovery to the Exchequer and to the lord of the manor, that each might claim their share of the treasure trove.

From the lord he received a reply, dated Baths of Ems, saying, in a trembling hand, that, as his heir was a person whom he particularly disliked, and as he himself had made his peace with God on account of gout in the stomach, he begged not to be troubled with sublunary affairs. The official reply from the Exchequer was merely a curt acknowledgment "of your communication of the 6th ultimo," and with a clerk's signature stamped in stencil.

Thus thrown on his own discretion, our fortunate hero consulted his legal friend, who advised him to keep what he had found, which he did. It is needless to say that he purchased the fairies' haunt, and secured it to them for ever.

His next act was less graceful. He sent to the clergyman of the parish (whom he disliked for being an advocate of a personal sheol) a good round sum in rose nobles, with a letter, of which the following is a copy:—

“Here is gold.

Do you damn others, and let this damn you.”

SHAKESPEARE'S *Timon of Athens*.

Next he made over to his housekeeper a gratuity, together with the furniture, books excepted, with a small annuity on condition that she would make herself acquainted with *Malthus on Population*, and would never marry. Seeing she was three-fourths deaf, decrepit and seventy-nine, the matrimonial clause seemed an unnecessary proviso. Then he ordered his library to be packed till called for, and departed as mysteriously as he came, leaving behind him the reputation of a human bear.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENAMOURED.

ARE there no sunsets except in Italy? No glow save on the canvases of Claude Lorraine? I think there are. Our English skies in the hill counties are translucently azure; and gorgeous beyond imitation by mortal hand are the tints on the horizon when the orb is sinking to the west, whether into a fringe of forest or into the bosom of the deep. His slanting beams turn the topmost leaves of the mighty umbrageous trees to golden, rubying the ripples of running streams, causing the sky-pointing spires of many a city to glitter, and throwing a warmth over the grass and corn-lands. In truth, this of ours is a fair land. In what particular spot of it to look for our haunt I decline to say. Suffice it, that the place was very lovely and retired.

"I name not its name, lest inquisitive tourists
Hunt it and make it a lion,
And get it at last into guide-books."

The locality was sacred to the fairy people. An amphitheatre lying among gentle grassy acclivities, which were dotted, park-like, with single specimens of deciduous trees. On the evening of our story

the sun was verging towards setting. The fairies were from home that evening, but were momentarily expected to return. Meantime the orb of day went down flamboyant among the pines on the ridge. The gold and crimson of the sky turned to purple. The singing - birds of the region, after chanting their vespers, were abed behind the curtains of leaves. It is never perfectly still in Nature, but on that evening it was so still that the babble and play of a rill were more than usually audible. This gamesome thread of water took its rise high up on the slope, where it came out sparkling from a wedge-shaped cleft and rained into a basin it had worn in the stone, whence it escaped and amused itself, baby-fashion, by tumbling over inch-high ledges and running around small boulders that had been brought there in the Glacial Period. After a good deal of bubble and turmoil it subsided, apparently without current, in a channel the shape of a collar of SS. Thence it gleamed away through an opening beneath the trees, sometimes exposing and washing their roots, and in one place forming a pool where great, green, round leaves of water-plants lay floating. The birds and small deer knew the place. Sometimes in afternoons a singing-bird would alight on one of the leaves, and after having dipped its beak in the flood and twittered the spray all over his feathers as a grace after meat, would fly away and sing a virelay. The small quadrupeds of the hedgerows, with their furtive eyes, came down and drank there, dipping their paws daintily. Big, long-legged water-spiders ran about

on the surface. Dragon flies (most demon-like of all ferocious insects) hunted there. In mellow autumn-time mountain-ash berries fell with a flop into the water and slowly drifted. In spring-time there was a rain of petals and willow honey-dust. All summer there was a pleasant *susurrus* of rustling sprays and a balmy odour of leaves. The sun seemed to shine there with tempered ray. And when the brook left the alcove of the wood and winded away in complicated convolutions through the meadows, reflecting the sky and shadows, it looked from a distance like a delightful serpent with black and azure scales.

There was a legend attached to the spot. Once upon a time the lord of the soil lost his way when hunting, and being parched by many hours' thirst, he vowed a vow that over the first spring that ministered to his want he would erect a shrine. Scarce had he made the pious resolution, when he came on the fountain on the hill. Successive water drops, then as now, fell into the mirror of the hollowed stone, like the Lancelot diamonds that angry Guinevere shied into the mere at Caerleon, and, then as now, the tiny stream, escaping from its basin, gambolled down the slope in a succession of small cataracts, or swirled along in miniature rapids, or wound like a ribbon of crystal among the roots of the ferns. The lord drank and was thankful. In pursuance of his vow he subsequently came with one of those dreadful men called Gothic architects, who proposed to confine the spring's joyousness in a stone tub with an iron ladle chained

thereto, beneath Corinthian pillars surmounted by a Byzantine dome and with an inscription in old English black letter to "keep off the grass." But when the lord beheld the falling prismatic drops, so like the diamonds won for the wife of the blameless king, and heard the tiny cascade tinkling for gladness, and saw the harebells nodding at him, his heart smote him. So he dismissed the man of art, and in lieu of him sent two stout foresters with bundles of young trees and orders to stick them in on the slopes wherever they would grow. At the same time he issued strict injunctions to his heir to preserve the fountain to all time in its innocence and purity. Hence it was so chaste, retired and beautiful, that it was a favourite resort of Oberon and his Court.

Between the slopes that rose on each hand lay a level plateau of short, sweet grasses, the area being about five chains in diameter, which, I am given to understand, is one hundred and ten yards, more or less. The grasses had already shed their bloom, and the fruit stalks had withered down, leaving an aftermath of that light emerald or softened green that is so refreshing to the eye. In the middle of it was a ring, of perhaps fifty feet in diameter, of a dark grass-green, the periphery about a yard in width. This was the ring on which the fairies danced. As the band of fays were returning from their excursion—Ailie, Babe, Jip, Lalalu, Mur, and several others—Jip, pointing to the ring, suddenly shrieked, "There is a great brute of a man!" Consternation ensued; and there, flat on his back, with a battered

hat over his face, and his boots standing up edgewise like tombstones, right across the fairy pathway, and half in and half out of the ring lay a lout.

Giles, the lout in question, was the son of Hodges ; Giles being a supposed Christian name, and Hodges the surname. The Hodges did not come in with the Conqueror, for they were there when he came. From time immemorial every succeeding individual of the race, without entail or break in the ancestry, had followed the laudable profession of swineherd. They married the daughters of swineherds, and thus preserved the blood blue. From their out-of-door life, and acorn, brawn and beer victuals, and long association with swine, they had acquired something of the physiognomy and points of the quadrupeds among which their lot was cast. If you had put a short-snouted boar into a smock-frock, and stood him on end, he would have been remarkably like Hodges senior. Naturally the Hodges had ever been a pious family. In early time they offered their rough ejaculations to Thor ; later they crossed themselves for St Vast, but since the era of Harry the Eighth they had been counted in, on very slender grounds, as belonging to a Church which inculcates the duty of being thankful for the sphere of life in which it has pleased Providence to place us.

During all the centuries this amiable family had devoutly believed in the existence of fairies, and the power of those good people to bestow golden gifts.

Giles, the subject of our memoir, was a lad rather loosely put together. But this lout of a herd-boy

was not so unobservant as he looked. He had noticed the fairies' ring, and knew that they frequented it, and hence his appearance there with the intention of extracting a subsidy in coin.

The returning fairies found this uncouth mortal lolling in the very sacred centre of their haunt. They recognised the intruder as the driver and associate of beasts they abhorred. Need one say their ire was great? They buzzed about him in circles like angry hornets, but invisibly, and made dabs at him as if they would bite him; but he looked so large and sturdy that they were afraid, otherwise they would have pinched him to their hearts' content. A council was therefore held, wherein, as is usual in times of excitement, various impracticable suggestions were offered. The colonel of the guards would have riddled him with arrows had he not discovered that the invader's boots and corduroys were shot-proof. Nothing remained but negotiation, that last resort of a feeble policy. The four gnomes—Zug, Tumblebug, Xip, and Grymyrg whose name spells the same backwards and forwards—were deputed to hold a conference.

Proceedings were opened by Grymyrg climbing up the nearest tree and sitting astraddle on an outspreading branch, in the guise of an old man in the long waistcoat of Queen Anne's reign. Then he gave three short barks like a dog.

"Hillo!" said the lout lazily.

Grymyrg being, like the reigning family of Britain, of somewhat German origin, is less facile in the use of English than could be desired,

and therefore sputtered, with a guttural accent,—

“How much better you out of this place for to get! How bettermost much! How much!”

Giles raised himself to a sitting posture, and promptly replied,—“Five pounds.”

Now Giles had never seen, and had no human probability of ever seeing, one pound sterling in a lump sum in the whole course of his life. To him five pounds was an unimaginable quantity, such as the Franco-German war indemnity might be, gentle reader, to you and me.

Again the gnome shouted fiercely in a rising crescendo of wrath,—

“How much you bettermost out of this get! How bettermost much! how much! how much! how much!”

Again Giles sturdily responded,—“Five pounds.”

Here the lout, if he could have been astonished at anything, ought to have been astonished to hear from invisible throats a confused shrieking as of many angry canary birds. Only that it was more subdued and in pleasanter tones, one would have thought it was a pack of women scolding. At the same moment six other gnomes, all in long waistcoats, sprang up and sat on six overhanging limbs of trees around Grymyrg, and all stared gravely at the lout. Slowly turning his eyes towards the quarter whence the sounds of anger proceeded, the obtrusive Giles *was* astonished for once, for there he plainly saw, among the bushes, the outline of a little lady draped from head to foot in a filmy veil,

through an opening in which she gazed on him with angry and flashing eyes. She was Lalalu. Nevertheless his material instincts did not forsake him, for he stolidly remarked,—

“Not a penny less.”

Again the gnome Grymyrg took the parole,—

“And yourself and the other swine in seven years not here again will for ever not come? Nevaire again?”

“Done along o’ you,” said Giles.

Whereupon one of the gnomes—it was Tumblebug—dropped from his branch and disappeared. Speedily a spot in the sward began to upheave as if a mole were at work, and out of it came Tumblebug, who “swarmed” up the tree and handed to Zug a lump of something glittering. The latter took it and hurled it with such precision that it hit the suppliant full in the stomach, and he fell uttering a yell that echoed through the wood and caused two barred owls that lived there to come out and shriek. The fairies laughed consumedly, but nobody heard them except myself. When Giles came to himself he was lying on his back, knocked over, pinched black, blue, green and yellow, and beside him lay a lump of gold weighing about five pounds. The uncommercial gnome had mistaken avoirdupois for sterling!

Giles slowly gathered himself up, and, when he had partially recovered from the stomach-ache caused by the golden missile, went to his ancestral hut, where he related his adventure, all but the incident of receiving the gold. That fact he care-

fully concealed. The other incident of the fair lady whom he had momentarily seen he kept profoundly secret too, for, in truth, that fleeting glimpse had stirred his sodden brain with delirium, and had struck him to the heart more surely than the captain of the archers could have done with the most charmed of elf-bolts. On hearing the narrative, Hodges senior very properly and promptly lent him, Giles, a ringing cuff on the ear, with an injunction to go about his business and not come there with cock-and-bottle stories. Giles consequently went. He disappeared, and the pig-pens of his fathers knew him no more.

Doubts may be thrown on my assertion that in this end of the nineteenth century exist orders of men who appreciate an intellect that is capable of going beyond the multiplication table and the very vulgar fractions of the ledger. Chief of these is the Order of Salvator Mundi. Like ozone, this mysterious element pervades the atmosphere and ripens as often poison apples as red russets. This politico-polymathic power has set its impress on the destinies of the past three-and-a-half hundred years. Or, to drop metaphor, the Order of Salvator, framed in a large knowledge of human nature, and intended to lead the leaders of men, has come by experience to be able to play on all the manifold springs of human action, having but one end—the advantage of the Order, to be reached by every means. In no other organisation has ever been such self-negation to attain that highest object of human and angelic (or demouiac) aspir-

ation—the possession of power. Self-sacrifice has been, and no doubt is, to the brotherhood of this remarkable organisation, the normal condition. Behind the thrones of great kingdoms, in the solitude of unknown deserts, on the savage-peopled banks of the great rivers they discovered, in the sinks of cities, in poverty, obloquy and martyrdom their steadiness to their One Idea has been proved. Whether the world owes to them good or evil is not within our story, but the perfection to which they have brought administration excites wonder and condones arrogance. *Sint aut sint aut non sint* is an improvement on *Cæsar aut nullus*. The occult body I refer to met with Giles Hodges in his exodus, and noting his capacious Saxon head and obdurate jaw, sent him across sea for some years' study to a fortified town in the marshes, where they manufacture clay tobacco-pipes. Here, at the College of St Janus, he had diligently pursued his studies according to the ritual of Peter Tooth—broken only by a circumstance which I shall afterwards relate—and now, just seven years to a day from the date whereon he received from the fairies his avoirdupois weight of gold (which just paid his schooling), he returned to the fairy haunt, a scholastic of the Order of Salvator Mundi.

Seven years! How many changes in mind, body and estate, do seven years bring forth. Time hath exalted the lowly and abased the proud. The gay young man of the mall is a father with arrows in his quiver, and the peach-blossom daughter of

the house has filled into a matron with children at her knee. Seven years have turned the crucial lustrum of the middle-aged, and have guided the old seven steps nearer to the grave. And seven years allow ample time for tombstones to become lop-sided, and for all tears to be dried.

During Giles's studies at the College of St Janus, he was haunted as was St Anthony. On the thick folio pages of stout Thomas Aquinas (Benedictine edition), a lovely face, framed in soft brown hair, for ever traversed the text. To do him justice, he combated the devil as sternly as Macarius the elder did, but Giles's was a fair devil, that, like the ghostly friar in *Don Juan*, would not be driven away. In the pictured saints and cherubs on the chapel windows he saw but the face of Lalalu, and in the marble angels in their graceful robes beheld but her veiled form. Nay, so far was he gone, that there was one theorem of Euclid—to inscribe in a given circle an equilateral and equiangular quindecagon—that he never looked at without a thrill, although it certainly was most unlike the contour of the haunting fay's sweet countenance. He had only to fill in eyes and nose and a mouth, and her face looked out at him from between A B F E C D. Theologically he was in a bad way; mentally he was mad. Scripturally speaking he was possessed by a devil. Actually he was crazily in love with the fairy he had seen but for a moment. Strange that a love mania should endure seven years. Yet in his case it did, possibly from having had no communication

with the lady during that period. Therefore, at the end of seven years, which term of banishment he conscientiously adhered to, he came again, under pretext of leave, and again at sunset presented himself in the haunt of the fairies.

When Giles left the country, he was, as has been said, a lout. Now he was a smug young man. He had acquired a scholarly stoop, and that expression of face that seems habitual to those who have studied the post-Niceæn commentaries, and which harmonises so well with the M.B. vest, and the lengthy, collarless soutaine. Had not his eyes been so close together, he might have passed for good-looking. As it was, Tumblebug recognised him at a glance, and a whisper went round,—“Here is the swine-herd again, in the disguise of a professor!”

The infatuated scholastic took his stand in the centre of the fairy ring, and began a wild invocation, in which all the love superlatives of heaven and earth, were poured forth to the lady of his dreams, begging her, in wild rhapsody, to show herself to her votary.

Whether it were malice, or foreknowledge of what would happen, or merely the coquettish consciousness of her charms, which every fay and woman possesses, is not known, but Lalalu, in answer to his supplications, partially solidified herself, so as to show the outline of a very attractive little woman, and let one flashing sweep of her dark eyes fall on her devotee. Thereon he fell on his knees on the sward, and prayed her with more fervency than he had ever prayed within the lime-

stone walls of the college of Janus in the marsh,—

“Oh, ærial, ethereal embodiment of beauty most ravishing, star resplendent, *sylviae stella*, with the sparkle of thy fair body shining through the leaves! Loved lady of all love delights. Queen of Faëry, if indeed thou art the Queen, accept, oh accept, the adoration of thy worshipper! One touch of thy hand, one word of endearment from those perfect lips, if only to deny me. My life is in the prayer. One word, one look, else I die.”

In the excess of his madness he fell down and grovelled.

The fairy looked at him with cloudless, passionless eyes. Then she murmured in half soliloquy,—

“Poor child of clay. If one of Us could pity, I would pity thee. It is an error for the mortal to love the immaterial.”

She had been standing with her round arms decorously folded on her breast. Slowly she raised those arms with a gesture of repulsion, and imperceptibly faded away in the gathering dusk.

Next morning a passing labourer found Giles dead in a distant coppice. How he died is known but to the recording angel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PUNSTER'S FATE.

NOTHING so clearly shows the decadence of a race as the corruption of its language. This remark holds good of nations, families and individuals. Even as in listening to the talking of a stranger in a crowd, we can accurately estimate his education, surroundings, tastes and habits, so the language at any era of a people's history, correctly indicates the tone of the national life at the time. Philologers may tell us how a national language is gradually built up and expanded by the necessity of more words for the expression of increasing ideas, until it attains a perfection of vigour and dignity, and the era in which it is so attained is known as an Augustine age. An acute observer can thus trace progressive improvement in the tone of public thought through three stages of speech, namely, the rude, the florid, and the stately. Decadence commences with the slipshod. No nation was ever capable of grand deeds without gutturals in its tongue. The *ore rotundo* is the *fors animæ*. Had the Romans spoken modern Neapolitan they would never have conquered the known world. The Alemanni would have done it

for them. When gutturals slide into labials, the national vigour is in an advanced stage of pulmonary consumption.

As the slipshod is the enfeeblement of national vigour, so is slang the dry-rot. How lowered must the public mind have become, and how utterly devoid of reverence for the great and grand, when it expresses itself in slang. One cannot conceive the old Roman mind so debased. Intelligent readers must agree, with pain, that the English or, rather let us hope, only the American mind is arriving at this stage of degradation. Call to witness the "paragraphists."

Humour is a quality inherent in man, as also in the lower animals. Whoever doubts this latter assertion has only to watch dogs at play, when he will see an expression of unmistakable facetiousness come over their faces when anything comic occurs. In even the lowest type of human savages there are always buffoons and practical jokers. As society advances and practical jokes become actionable, fun is confined to words. Wit is the practical joke etherealised until imperceptible to the uninitiated. Alas! there is none now. True wit went out when the guillotine came in, and graceful word-fencing perished with the last French marquis. Modern wit, so-called, is, at its best, coarse and beefy. It is needless to add that the wretchedest and vilest simulacrum of wit is the pun.

From influences such as these we have glanced at, conversational speech is becoming—has become—debased. Nor is this verbal deterioration confined

to the human species. It for a time extended to our fairies.

It must have occurred to intelligent readers that spiritualists are very much at sea in accounting for the appearances and manifestations that take place at *séances*. Somehow it seems too awful a thought that the dead can be brought out of their graves and made to answer questions at a shilling admission fee. If the dead and buried can be so cheaply disturbed, what is the good of being dead? An explanation is obvious. The incantations of the spiritualists do not reach the souls of the immortal dead, but are taken up by the fairies by way of a practical joke. It is odd this explanation has never been reached before.

Landscape painters who have diverged from a certain R.R. track have discovered, near the head of a lake, a pleasant hamlet that would fain think itself a village. Few other persons know of its existence. This is Doltown. It is one of the oldest of settlements. Two or three labourers' cottages gathered a long time ago at a point where four roads met, and in time became the sleepy hamlet it is. The four branch roads lead, in fact, from nowhere, and run to nowhere in particular. No business appears to be done in the place. Children, and a stray dog or two, are the only moving things that lend an occasional life to its street. The men of the place never seem to have anything to do but smoke pipes and lean against walls. Women now and then rush out of the low-browed houses and scold the men, or seizing each her own offspring by

the hair, drag them within doors. A stranger would be at a loss to imagine how the population make a living. The nearest surmise is that they have something to do with malt for a giant brewery in the county town, also with hops, together with the growing of aromatic herbs for the perfumers. Nevertheless, the inhabitants are not barbarians. Far from it. The march of ideas has reached even Doltown, and the place possesses, besides a skittle alley, a debating club in which the more intelligent young men wrestle with such questions as: "Which are the ruinousest,—Rum or War?" "Who is the greatest patriot—Mr Chamberlain or Mr Gladstone?" "Which is the best to take holt on—nature or art?" and the like. A public tea-party winds up the session, the beaux providing the tea, sugar, lights and candies, and the girls the cakes and the giggling. A £10 reed organ, bought by instalments payable over three years, supplies the accompaniment to sentimental and fashionable songs sung by the misses. These functions are Society, the *haute volée*.

There is one inn in the place—the Dolt's Arms (a bar sinister on a trousers proper)—that had once stood alone at the cross-roads, and yet affords, in a moderate way, good entertainment for man and beast. In front of this humble hostelry grows an ancient maple tree, in the shadow of which are erected a permanent table and rustic benches where, in fine weather, travellers prefer to sip the modest cup of ale for which the before-mentioned county brewery is famous. Wandering

artists, resting on the rural benches, always pull out sketch-books and make a note of the old-fashioned inn with its weather-beaten sign hanging on a gallows in front. One A.R.A. has idealised it by producing it as a background to a girl much prettier than barmaids are now, and in shorter petticoats than are now worn, administering a goblet of blackberry wine to a cavalier who is mostly boots and feather, mounted on a war-horse that any dealer could have told him was spavined in the off hind leg. This picture was hung on the line of the Academy and was rapturously spoken of by art critics. It was afterwards reproduced in colours as a prize in a word competition, under the name of "Doch 'an Doris," with the motto from Keats,—

"Oh ! for a beaker full of the warm south."

The table and benches are frequently occupied by another class of travellers, more useful, perhaps, than artists. Commerce, without which no place can be great, is fairly represented at Doltown by one shop, in which the worthy owner, deacon of a sect, carries on a retail trade in everything that the domestic wants of so small a community may require. When Deacon Williams runs short of supplies, he sends a truck to the neighbouring larger town and lays in more. Notwithstanding this, he is rated in the books of the mercantile inquisition as "good," and consequently the place is overrun by commercial travellers two or three in a day, wanting him to order things. The

sample trunks they bring are enormous, resembling side-show caravans, and the articles they travel for are multifarious—wooden and metallic, hammered and cast, tinned and coppered, woven and spun, flexile and brittle, solid and fluid, tobacco, starch, mustard, patent rights, seeds and drugs, especially drugs. Mr Williams never orders anything, but the business ambassadors come all the same, which shows how confiding is the commercial mind, and what considerable profits somebody must earn to keep so many festive young men on the road. For they are a gay as well as shrewd race, these business tourists, and though sharp as needles, are full of jokes as a jest book. They would sit under the tree at the inn and rattle off all the quips of the road.

Now, Doltown being a place so restful and rural, a detachment of fairies had taken up their residence near it, on the banks of a beautiful brook that sparkled over a bed of gravel, and took leaps and swirls where it met a boulder or other obstruction. This proximity to human beings had, however, a deleterious effect on the purity of the fairies' tongue. For these delicate and inquisitive creatures, when the public tea-parties of which we have spoken took place, would, themselves invisible, climb and peer in at the windows, and, it is to be feared, learned many conventional and idiomatic expressions which, although perfectly harmless, somewhat muddied their "well of English undefiled." In like manner when the gay commercials cracked their jokes the fairies would sit

overhead in the tree, and unconsciously pick up the phraseology of the road and rail. To such proximity to human society must be attributed in a great measure the modern tone of thought and expression that broke out so fatally in the fairy Court. For, not long since, the locality in which the Court then was, was infested with wit, which, had it not been checked, might have been productive of serious evils. This impending calamity was brought about in this wise.

The Court was then temporarily lying within measurable distance of a fair city which justly asserts herself as an intellectual centre. Cultured readers on their next Sunday outing can readily identify the exact spot of the royal camp, within a radius of ten miles from the city, by well-defined rings of greener grass in the meadows. Some matters requiring adjustment between headquarters and the Doltown fairy settlement, an emissary, who was appropriately named Quibble, was accredited to the Court. From the first hour of his arrival the influence of this person was malign. His air and manners had too much of the tone of the young men who travelled for orders and put up at the "Dolt's Arms." Indeed, there can be little doubt it was from them he acquired the mischievous habit of being witty. There was nothing about him of the Vere de Vere repose which we of the Court affect, nor even that appearance of stupidity which is so becoming to Government officials. On the contrary, he was jerky and spasmodic. His taste in costume was vile, for,

will it be believed, he had the affectation to present himself at the King's levee in the evening dress of the human race, but the utter hideousness of the costume caused him to be refused admittance. Being looked on as an eccentric lion he, however, became the rage and found a host of imitators. Very little time elapsed ere the polished tone of the Court grew unwholesome from bad puns. Instead of genial talk of the weather and coming delights, the question everywhere was,—“Have you heard Quibble's last?” Titania's English was in danger of being permanently corrupted. The dullest were the worst bitten, and those who were least capable of constructing three plain sentences, exasperated themselves and others in putting compound words to the torture.

“They raved, recited, maddened through the land.”

“This is rinderpest,” said the Chancellor; “we must put the sanitary laws in force.”

Perhaps the unfortunate being who brought this sad epidemic, had once really had a true perception of the facetious, but his sense of genuine humour had been perverted by hearing commercials read the works of humorists, and the jokes in the patent medicine almanacks. What could anyone think of a person who would ask, Why is a seaman in a sailcloth coat good to eat? and reply with a grin, Because he is a canvas-back; or of an ambassador who so far forgot himself as to say that he was dependent on a relative, because he lived on the fairies' 'aunt; or, more deplorable still,

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who had the hardihood to remark at a party, that a decoction of the berry of Mocha was a negro, because it was Cuffee; or to say of himself that in his love for a dish of gossip and cup of tea, he was quite old-maidish and saucer-dotal? Of course the Annalist remonstrated with him, after hearing him remark to a pretty fay, that his views on the Irish question had undergone quite a change since he chanced to meet a home-ruler, in fact (he said) met-a-murphy-sis!

"Sir," said the Annalist, with considerable heat, "such conduct is atrocious. Tear out these fly-leaves from the scrap-book of your brain. You really must check this dreadful propensity lest it become chronic and prove fatal. You apprehend my meaning?"

"Your meaning, my dear Annalist," said he, impertinently, "is like a Parnell pig,—it is not a-pay-rent." When the Chancellor threatened that if he did not curb his wit, banishment would be his portion, he replied contemptuously, "'Tis no pun-is-meant."

Knowing how offensive the utterances of a witling of this kind must be to any cultured mind, the narrator spares the courteous reader the grief of hearing any more of his execrable sayings. Matters indeed drew rapidly to a head, for he was heard openly to demand in an assemblage of the young and innocent, "Why is an iron baking-pan on a kitchen range like the longest side of a right-angled triangle? Because it's a high-pot-in-use." The applause that followed, saddened the souls of the

Chancellor and Annalist. Yet one might have forgiven even this last, had not the infection spread to the innocent children. "Dear Mr Annalist," lisped one of the sweetest pets, "why am I like a little fool?" "Because you are one, my dear," replied he. "No, that is not it—because I have just had my dinner and am a little full, don't you see?" Distressing enough in grown fairies. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings it was terrible.

One could not help looking with horror on such a person as Quibble; but what could one do? Fortunately in Fairyland the law directs that a bore can be treated as a public enemy. Putting it on that ground, the Chancellor and Annalist laid their heads together and formulated an impeachment which they laid before the King. His Majesty was much affected when he sent for the complainants to substantiate the charge. With that prescience which has ever distinguished his reign, he saw the gravity of the crisis,—

"What's this about Quibble?" asked King Oberon.

"Rinderpest," promptly replied the Chancellor.

"God save us!" exclaimed the monarch; "where's my *sal volatile*?"

His Majesty quickly calmed down and deigned to inquire,—

"What do you think of it, Annalist?"

"Sire," replied that gentleman, "in the words of Locke, a word may be of frequent use and great credit, yet no more be learned by all that is said of it, or attributed to it, than if it were affirmed only of that bare empty sound. They who would

advance in knowledge, and not deceive and swell themselves with a little articulated air—”*

“Cease prosing!” said the King sharply. “Send the accused hither.”

The accused was brought in, trembling, and His Majesty continued,—

King. “Caitiff! you are charged with a grave offence. Prove your innocence. Try him, some of you, and see if it is drivelling idiocy, or only temporary insanity that is the matter with him.”

Annalist. “Quibble, speak to the King.”

Unfortunately for the punster he was not that day in the vein. The fountain of his wit was low and his imagination evidently arid. It was therefore with considerable nervousness that he took the parole, and, wiping his brow, on which the drops of perspiration stood, thus addressed the Sovereign of Faërie,—

Quibble. “May it please you, Sire, I interpret it as your command to give a specimen of mine art, to which your Highness deigns to listen. The words I am about to utter resemble a neat instrument of military music, because they are a cunning drum. (He! he!)”

Here a brilliant thought seemed to strike him, and his tone rang triumphant as he demanded,—

“Why, O Sire, is an animal of the bovine species out in an electric storm like a hasty summons for admission? Does your Majesty give it up? Because it is a ‘Thundering Knoeks!’”

* *Locke on the Understanding.*

King. "This is intolerable. Take him out and shoot him."

The condemned was led away, and the trumpets of the King proclaimed that from that day forth punning is forbidden in Fairyland under pain of death.

Arrived at the mournful scene of execution, the firing party drew up in line.

They fitted their arrows to the string.

"Halt!" implored the intended victim, "I would say a few last words."

It was clearly against orders to permit a speech at the place of punishment, but the provost-sergeant was a kindly man, the father of a family, so he wiped his eyes and said,— "Say on."

The condemned pondered for a moment and then demanded in an inquisitive tone of voice,—

"When is a door not a door?"

The archers felt their weapons paralysed in their hands, at once, at the audacity and antiquity of the inquiry.

"When is a door not a door?" he repeated.

They dropped their arms.

"When it's a-jar!" shouted he.

They turned and fled, but after them they heard the voice of the possessed punster yelling,—

"When is a door not a jar? When it's a-gate!"

They only fled the faster, but fast as they flew were overtaken by the demand,—

"When is a door not a gate? When it's a shutter!"

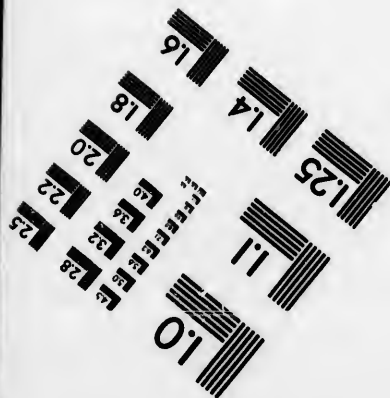
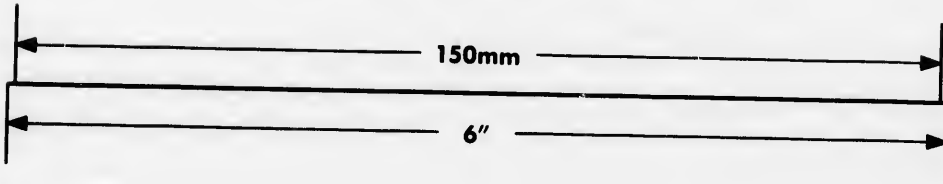
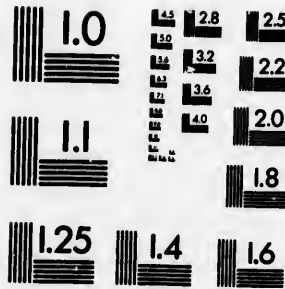
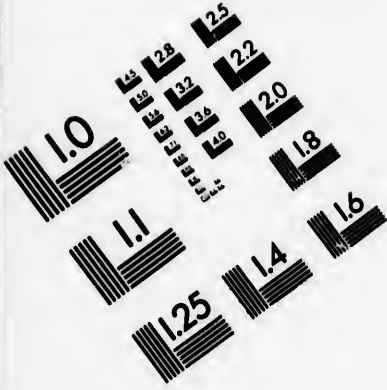
The party reached camp in great despondency,

and communicated to the King the failure of their mission: whereupon, as Baron Tennyson says,—
"There was dole in Astolat."

Since then, banished from his species, the punster has been wandering in solitary places, propounding conundrums to Echo, and beseeching that nymph by trying to make her repeat "Kex's Cocoa."



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CHAPTER X.

SESAME AND LILIES.

TINY DELL, also known as Steal-away-nook, was not in reality either a dell, or dingle, or dale, or holm, but rather a simple depression in the southern acclivity of a green hill, much resorted to by a circle of lady fays who held their heads high in society. Short grass, pied with daisies, made an elastic turf, and pale primroses clustered around the base of a few moss-clad boulders that lay within it. Here the fays would come on sunny afternoons under the chaperonage of some elderly dame and sit on the stones, or lie about on the grass and there gossip. In the fruit season wild strawberries, with the juice of which they stained their fingers, and, later, bird-berries, which they cracked with their teeth, were abundant. A few medium-sized mountain-ash trees hung clusters of red beads over the rim, available for necklaces and bringing blackbirds to pilfer. The spot being known as a frequent resort of the lady fays, was never intruded on by the ruder sex, and I can assure you that the *entrée* was very select indeed. The ladies, asking Oberon one day what would be a good password to tile

their meetings and keep out the uninvited, laughed and replied—"Sesame!"

On one special afternoon some of the fays, with whom the reader is acquainted, were gathered in the dell under the presidency of good Aunt Favourable. The usual topics of the day having been winnowed in an intermittent way, the young people called on the stately fay, Vivien, for a recitation. This young lady, it should be observed, was a perfect mistress of the Delsarte system in all its branches, and could have graduated from any conservatory of elocution.

"Give us a recitation, please do, Vivvie," cried the young folks.

"Certainly," replied she, rising with her eyes rolling, right arm stiffly extended and figure thrown back. Then casting loose her hair until it fell across her face and shoulders like a lurid cloud, she burst in a blood-curdling voice into the following incantation,—

"Fierce anthropophagi !
Spectres ! diabolii !
Hobgoblins ! lemures !
Dreams of Antipodes !
Night-riding incubi
Troubling the fantasy—"

"Oh, don't!" cried everybody. "You frighten us."

"I thought I should," remarked Vivien calmly, as she sank back on a mossy seat and rearranged her hair. "Do none of you yourselves know anything?"

"I do," exclaimed Lalalu, "darling lovely Robin Hood!" and she went on to repeat a verse of a ballad that the fairies and myself alike believe in,—

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and longe,
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste,
To here the foulis songe.
To se the dere drawe to the dale,
And leve the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grene wode tree."*

"Thanks, Loulie, that will do," cried several.

Here innocent Peepy held up her hand and said,—

"I will tell you a story, please."

It appeared that Peepy (who is a sharp little thing) had observed a group of ladies in a grove, listening intently, with their heads together, while one of their number read aloud a tale in a printed book composed by a widow. †

Our little pitcher with the long ears crept in among them, and had come home full of the story. From her account it would seem that the hero of the narrative was a godlike individual, to whom Antinous and other supernally beautiful persons were but as shilling plaster casts on the board of an Italian image-vendor are to the Phidian marble. Not only lovely was he but terrible. He might readily have been mistaken for the Nemean lion in

* Earliest ballad of Robin Hood, anterior to Ritson's.

† The story the little fairy overheard the ladies reading seems to have been in Ouida's works, and its incongruities are owing only to Peepy's inaccurate memory.

evening costume, and when he appeared at tea-fights, a voluptuous thrill went through the heart of every lady up to the age of eighty or beyond. As to honour, he had sent more members of the higher aristocracy to their long account in the duello than he cared to count. In short, the general conduct of this woman's ideal man was such that were he to exist among men he would probably be kicked. He was in the habit of losing unspeakable sums every night at unlimited loo, which he always paid for on the spot with copyhold manors, and had a ridiculous custom of backing his own horses, which invariably came in last in the ruck, through the ineptitude of his jockeys.

No wine was permitted in any of his numerous establishments, even in the servants' hall, except Johannisberg at £5, 5s. a bottle. He was a man of faultless faith, and had several spouses in various summer palaces, and after causing the wife of the reigning prince to die for love of him, determined to marry his mother, or perhaps it was his aunt, or (for here Peepy was at fault), somebody else's aunt or mother.

About this time his secretary, on the alleged plea of being his brother, chiseled him out of everything he possessed. The defrauded demigod spent his last guinea in twenty-one shillings' worth of opium, which he swallowed, and lay down to sleep in the street, but was moved on by the police, whereupon he pawned the diamond collar off his dog's neck, and enlisted as a private in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, where he gained the friendship

of a Bourbon prince, who left him some principalities, and a balance at Rothschild's, but he handed over the lands to Garibaldi, and in the sacred name of Liberty invested the ready money in American Confederate bonds. Thereafter he supported himself by writing for the *Saturday Review* and *Paris Figaro*, but the moral corruption of the age touched on by those papers broke his heart. A band of advanced thinkers carried him to the grave, where a noted Atheist pronounced a funeral oration. A penny subscription of the working classes was opened to erect for him a gorgeous mausoleum, but the sum never reached beyond the sum of three shillings and ninepence sterling, equivalent to the subscriptions of forty-five admirers, a sad commentary on the text that the world does not know its greatest men.

Such was the tale poured out by the innocent lips of little pitcher. Whether the imp had altered or added to the bald facts of the case I cannot pretend to affirm; but she brought it to a close by saying,—“I do not remember any more.”

Aunty shook her head and said mildly that she thought it represented an improbable state of society. What impression the story of so splendid a hero with so remarkable a record, made on the fays cannot be known by mortals; but it must have been transitory, for almost immediately several of them exclaimed,—

“Now, you tell us a nice story, kind Aunty Favourable.”

“Surely, surely, my dears,” responded that excel-

lent lady. "Once upon a time there dwelt in a sunlight land an eminent brassfounder who had gathered quite a large connection by the manufacture of lamps; but one singular feature of his business was that he was always ready to barter new lamps for old—"

"Oh, we know about that!" cried several voices. "Aladdin!"

"So it was," replied aunty. "Well, let me see. In a far away country there were some very bad men. Oh, shocking! And among the rest were forty burglars who lived in a cellar where they stored oil—"

"Ali Baba!" was the unanimous exclamation.

"Deary me, you know that too? Shall I tell you of the narrow escape I had from a cruel wolf when I was Little Red Riding Hood?"

"Oh, no, no, no! you have told us that *so* often," cried all the fays, alarmed at the threatened offer.

"Have I?" asked aunty, innocently. "Then, children, I will tell you a true story of people I knew myself. It is a long time ago now. How time flies, to be sure. I call it—"

"'WHITE LADIES.'"

"Long ago lived a great lord whose castle was in a kingdom where were always wars. The king of that country was a cruel tyrant, which made all his barons tyrants too, so that they oppressed the common people, for the nobles always follow the

bad example of the king, and that brings misery and trouble on the land. The baron I speak of had lived to middle life in the midst of war and turmoil, until at length, he thought he would marry and settle down, and employ his leisure in hunting boars instead of men. Now, it chanced that near him lived a lady of high state, beautiful exceedingly, but more haughty than if she had been a king's daughter, for she owned in her own right great part of the hills where the erdsprites and malicious gnomes have their homes. A marriage was arranged between the baron and this haughty lady, and it was to be celebrated with much pomp. Lords and dames were to come from far and near, to be entertained with tournaments by day, and the dance of the *pavon*, or peacock, at night, and great feasting. Gallant minstrels on prancing steeds, with their jongleurs, or attendants, on mules carrying the rebecks and music of the masters, filed in, to the great content of the ladies, who hoped to hear their own praises carolled as the fairest of the fair, and to see some knight knocked on the head or run through the body in trying to prove his favourite she as fair as the minstrels had sung. Everything was to be as gay, fantastic, and cruel as fitted the cultivated taste of the high-born company that would be there assembled. As it was not necessary to make any settlements in the case of so rich a bride, the baron served out new doublets to his jackmen, and made known the programme of the day, detailing as many men as could be spared to make an imposing procession, but with a strong reserve to

hold the salient points of the castle and take the initiative by firing on the guests if they should attempt a surprise. None of the commonalty were to be admitted, it being felt that their presence would be vulgar; but in return for many days' hard labour without wages, a quantity of beef and ale was sent to the hamlet, which lay about three arrow-flights from the outer defences.

"Nothing could be more natural than that, from time immemorial, a friendship had existed between the elves of the hill and family of the haughty lady who was now a bride. Not a marriage nor birth in the direct line of descent but the elves had sent to pay their compliments; and when any evil or misfortune was to befall, due notice was given by voices crying mournfully, as can be proved by many credible witnesses. Accordingly, on the occasion of the lady's nuptials with the stout baron, one of the elves was deputed to pay their respects. This lady elf arrayed herself in her best attire, and put on her steeple hat and her grey gown, with so many short skirts that she looked quite bunchabout, also her buckled shoes and red stockings, as if she were high up in holy orders. Thus accoutred, she presented herself on the threshold of the baron's hall with a gift basket of white buds on her arm, and gravely said,—'Save all here.'

"'Arroynt thee, jade!' cried the baron, who was flushed with wine, 'what fool egg-wif^e have we here?'

"'May it please your Valiancy,' replied an old

retainer, 'this is one of the good elves of the hill, whom it is ill fortune to unfriend.'

"'Good or ill wife,' roared the incensed noble. 'What ho! menials! scourge me this old guy off the premises, and see that ye spare not stirrup leather!'

"The unwilling grooms obeyed and belted her across the drawbridge to the edge of the moat, where she majestically shot up to a stupendous height, and stretching forth her arm in a threatening attitude, said in a voice that all the company heard,—

"'Hark thee, proud and cruel lord! no son shall bear thy name. Thy house shall pass away without a head, and the flowers shall wither on thy grave!'"

"Then she disappeared. The impenitent baron spluttered forth some of the worst epithets in the language, and called on the musicians to strike up, which they did, and for three days the nuptial feast lasted, and came to an end with no more than the usual quantity of cracked helms and broken bones.

"Seven years passed and seven daughters had been born to the warlike baron, but no son. Then the haughty lady died and the seven little maids were motherless.

"I have already said that the king of that time and country was a cruel tyrant. He was much addicted to hanging up his subjects on lamp-posts on slight pretext. This he called 'Regulating the Commons.' A favourite employment of his leisure was besieging and burning the baronial castles in

his dominions, putting the owners to the sword and confiscating their estates, and this he described as 'Repressing the Nobles.' Ostensibly he was desirous of building up a 'Middle Class,' which he did by imposing immense fines on every industry and retaining in his own hands the monopoly of wool, salt, and other paying businesses. In this state of affairs, the proletariat could do nothing but submit to be hanged, and the middle class must either pay or be starved out, but the turbulence of the nobles was such that some of them retreated to their strongholds and showed fight. Among these was the father of the seven little maids, who promptly fortified his castle, and calling in all his dependents on pain of death, several times defeated the royal contingent sent against him. This undutiful conduct so wounded the king's feelings that he sent a polite message to the rebellious baron that he himself would come, God willing, on Tuesday of next week, immediately after breakfast, if convenient, and decapitate him on his own doorstep. The monarch not only kept his royal word, but hanged all the garrison and burned the castle, but the seven little maids could not be found, notwithstanding that the king (who was somewhat parsimonious) offered a reward of a florin a head, or three dollars and a-half for the lot, swearing by St Jude, that when he caught them he would have them brought up as kitchen-scullions, or given to the horse-boys. Thus was the elf's prophecy both literally and figuratively fulfilled, that the baron's line would pass away without a head.

“Meantime the seven little maids had been rescued and spirited away by the good old seneschal and his wife, and conveyed to a small chateau, far away and retired. There they grew in seclusion from childhood to youth, and a lovelier bevy of damsels could not have been found in all fair France. As it would have attracted attention and discovery had they worn mourning garments for their father's fate, their thoughtful guardians clad them in white, which colour they continued to wear; so they were spoken of by the few persons who knew of their existence as the White Ladies. In due course of time, the cruel king was poisoned by his *chef*, and his successor on the throne was too much occupied in fighting for a foreign duchy, that he had no claim to and no use for, to trouble himself about a pack of women who could not bear arms either for or against him. When their good protector and his wife died, the ladies lived all alone, the elder taking care of the younger. But the fame of their beauty had spread and reached the gallants of the period, whose chivalrous fancy painted them as something as mysterious as lovely.

“Now seven gallant young knights of the first circle, bold and honourable as any knight of the Round Table, were looking for adventures and heard of the seven White Ladies. Although many a lance had they shivered in joust for ladies' charms, their hearts were yet untouched, and their hard blows in honour of this or that fair one's beauty were, in those belabouring times, no more

sincere than the drawling compliments that men pay nowadays to a beauty at an evening party. The fame of the comeliness and virtue of the recluse sisters awoke all that was pure and noble in the hearts of the seven youths, and predisposed them to love. Accordingly they set out together, gay and gallant, unattended by squires or other spies, and diplomatically taking advantage of an impending thunderstorm as an excuse, drew up with a clatter of arms at the gate of the lonely chateau, and besought hospitality. Unquestioning hospitality was a virtue of the age. The ladies were descendants of a race of nobles, therefore they placed everything beneath their roof, excepting themselves, at the disposal of the unlooked-for guests. Thus it was that the knights who had come to woo, became inmates of the chateau of the seven sisters.

"It is not for me, my dears, to trace the risings of love. That is a passion that comes to all once in a lifetime. Some who hear me may have experienced its sweet pangs. To others it will come if they are good and virtuous. It came to these young people in the chateau, and each knight pledged to one of the ladies his hand with his heart in it, and won in return the confession of her love.

"Love, however, to the heart of a woman is a high and holy thing. Adela, who was the eldest and acted as mother to her sisters, became a little timid at what had been done, and consulted an old hermit, their ancient friend. The good

anchorite explained to the blushing maids that the passion of love was forbidden by the canons to all persons in holy orders, therefore, he himself knew nothing of the feeling, but he believed it was customary to send away an ardent wooer for a time, so as to prove his constancy—at least so he remembered to have read when he was but a silly acolyte. He recommended that the knights be sent away for a year and a day to make trial of their faith.

“In those days, my dears, men were true and faithful, and willing to wait any length of time or undergo any trial for the ladies they loved. I am told it is not so now. The seven wooers cheerfully assented to the arrangement, and they were all, knights and ladies, taking their last walk together in the garden, each maid hanging on the arm of her bachelor and full of fond thoughts, when they saw a little old woman approaching, with short skirts, a steeple hat, buckled shoes and red stockings, and with a basket on her arm. The old dame was weeping and said,—‘White Ladies, I am the elf-dame who foretold your father’s fate,’ and as she spoke she took from her basket and dropped on the ground seven clumps of lily roots, and, still weeping, receded from view.

“‘Let us plant the lilies!’ cried the knights gaily. Then each couple planted a root, and smoothed the ground. ‘Now let us name them!’ they cried. So they named the lilies by the names of the ladies—Adela, Alice, Barbara,

Eremé, Helen, Liliás, and Yseulte. Then with fond adieus the gallants put on their swords and leaped to saddle. For as when the Seven Champions of Christendom came to a broad plain where stood a brazen pillar, where four roads met, they every one went a separate way, so the seven knights parted—two to the north and two to the south, two to the west, and, with many backward glances, the youngest of all to the east. And thereafter the weeks sped, and the seven White Ladies stayed at home, and watched the growth of the lilies.

“Woe’s me! not long time had gone when a man-at-arms, sore bespent, with his armour hacked and his horse in foam, rode in from the north with news of dole that two of the knights, gay and gallant, had fallen with their faces to the foe, and the last words on their lips were Adela and Helen. Yet do misfortunes fall not singly, for ere long came the monk, looking very sad, with letters from a convent in the south that two gallant knights had fallen in battle with the infidel, and had breathed their last in uttering the names Yseulte and Alice. Soon a running footman arrived from the west with a scarf and ribbon, both dyed with blood, and delivered the mournful tokens to Barbara and Eremé. Lastly came a palmer in cockle-hat and shoon, returning from the east, and the news he brought was that the youngest and gayest of the gallant seven had been stricken with the plague, and died in delirium murmuring

of little Liliast. Adela faded first, and as her pure spirit fled, the remaining sorrowful maidens noticed that the pure white lily bearing her name expanded into flower. Another of the ladies died and her lily opened its white blossom. So it was until all the seven white lilies were in bloom. Then came a nipping frost, and the flowers shrivelled and perished. The White Ladies still haunt the scene where their unhappy fate befell. Still they wander in the garden with the ghosts of the lovers, and that is why white lilies are called White Ladies."

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CHAPTER XI.

VIVIEN.

IT was a crisp yet balmy summer morning, on a beach of the seashore. Round-topped hills of no great height shut in a crescent of the coast. Between two headlands, on one of which was a lighthouse, a placid bay glimmered green, and threw up in regular musical plashes its champagne-like ripples on the yellow sands. Gaily-painted pleasure-boats swayed gently on the scarce-heaving swell. Along the sand was a range of bathing-houses striped in vermilion and white. Landward, and facing the sea, four monster hotels reared their stuccoed fronts, each pierced with myriads of windows, and looking as unlike as possible to one's idea of a home. Higher up, stretched an esplanade of fantastic cottages, tinted with all the colours of the rainbow. A long wooden pier ran into the rippling edge of the bay. Amphibious boatmen leaned on the rail and chewed tobacco. At the end of the pier sat, on camp-stools on a kind of turn-table, thirteen very Teutonic Germans of the band, smoking grotesque pipes, with their brazen instruments beside them, until the hour should arrive when they might bray out the latest operatic air from

the Rhine. Very few guests were afoot at that early hour. Everywhere floated flags. The place was, in short, Newville-on-the-Sea, on the other side of the Atlantic.

Four persons were promenading slowly on the firm sands. The first was a lady in the earliest bloom of womanhood. As this lady is the heroine of our tale, she ought to be described as surpassingly beautiful, and—as these annals are true—I can conscientiously say she was very lovely. Slightly below the medium stature, but svelte, swaying, willowy, lily-like. A dammed-up flood of golden hair, that would have been a cataract, if let loose, was confined beneath a hat that six days before was in Paris. It was the incongruous custom of the place to wear ball-dress materials at all hours of the day; therefore her robes, that caught the saline particles of the sea, were the most *recherchés* products of the silkweavers' looms. The little hands of the lady, *gantés à ravissement*, were incredibly small, and the faint impress of her foot on the sand so tiny, it could not be believed. A sunshade of light azure covered with costly lace partially clouded her sweet face; but when she raised it, a pair of most glorious large deep blue eyes flashed out; and she spoke to her companion in a voice so mellifluous that, had the words been sentient, they would have clung like bees to her lips. Her companion was an elderly lady with a stern expression of countenance. Rich cocoa-brown satin, with bonnet and parasol to match, was the costume she had chosen for an early morn-

ing walk. (This lady is further referred to in page 146 of these Annals.) Behind the ladies came a male domestic, carrying two camp-chairs, and with him a young woman in a Normandy cap, with silver rings in her ears. The party sauntered towards that first-class palatial summer hotel, the Grand Seraphic, which, with fittings, had cost the Joint-Stock Company \$400,000, and entered by the staircase reserved for ladies. Had the clerk at the counter in the office been in a conversable mood, he might have informed you that the young lady was the orphan, but multi-millionaire heiress, of a father who had early struck oil, and ended his career by tumbling down his own well, an incident which was not considered the least satisfactory one in his history. Further, if so disposed, the clerk might have added that the party had engaged the best apartments on the first floor, and had registered as Mdlle. Vivien and suite.

Persons familiar with Italian literature cannot have forgotten the Florentine Secretary's sensational novelette (which some critics deem purely imaginative, but which I myself think founded on fact), how Pluto, observing that a large proportion of the men who came to perdition were married men, sent Belfagor, one of his most intelligent subordinates, as Commissioner to earth, with instructions to marry and thereby ascertain if the alleged holy state of matrimony had a tendency to drive men to the bottomless pit. Belfagor, under the name of Señor Roderigo, espoused the fair Monna Onesta of Florence, and the result realised

Pluto's worst surmise. In a manner not dissimilar, the fairies had their curiosity (of which they have a large share) excited by hearing mortal women talking of nothing but men, so, after innumerable consultations, it was decided in full council to send a Lady Commissioner to earth, with orders to seek out a matrimonial alliance, and report to her Government the ins and outs of fashionable married life. The unanimous voice of the council fell on Vivien. She, it may be mentioned, was not the person who shut up the enchanter Merlin in the tree, but she was quite capable of having done so. She was the most ladylike of all the fays. In her manner was a sleepy, voluptuous languor, relieved by jets and spurts of *espèglerie* that made her very attractive. She had the additional qualification of being quite heart-whole, a condition that not all of the young fays were in. No better choice could have been made, the rather that she was so singularly beautiful as well as accomplished and clever. It is one of the advantages of fairies' personality that they can transport themselves to any part of the world without being cramped in railway carriages or laid away sea-sick on shelves in the cabins of ocean steamers. They have but to wish they were in a given place, and lo! they are there. How this is possible I do not know, for, the truth is, we are very ignorant of the possibilities of transport, and it does not make the matter clearer to have hypnotheurgists declaring they have been in two places at once. Oberon—who, as may be supposed, is *au fait* as to what is

going on in the terrestrial world — decided that as all marriageable young American ladies are heiresses (or at least all who come to this country are), Vivien should take a flight in that capacity to America. There exists no record in the books of any of the shipping offices of passage tickets having been sold to the party, yet it consisted of four, namely—our charming Vivien; the old lady who at the Faëry Court bore the official title of “the Mother of the Maids,” and who, much against her will, was detailed to act as aunt and duenna; Zug, a gnome in the guise of an old family servitor who was dumb; and an ordinary fay of the people, speaking no English. These were the four persons we saw walking on the beach at Newville-on-the-Sea.

Our fairies for some time after their arrival, until they should have become accustomed to the strangeness and confusion of terrestrial life, confined themselves much to the seclusion of their apartments, where they lived mostly on fruits and candy, and where their retirement caused them to be maligned as haughty and stuck up;— which gives us time to describe a very distinguished guest who just then made the Grand Seraphic his headquarters. This was no less a personage than Count Alexis Polonotowskivitz. The Count’s resplendent raiment fitted him to a miracle, his polished boots were mirrors, and the quantity of jewellery hung on his person would, if genuine, have represented a moderate fortune. He was by no means reticent in letting it be known that his

intention was to marry and settle down. In person he was all that any romantic young lady would long for, for what could any damsel wish more than to be a countess, with a dark-eyed Lara-like count for a husband, doubly interesting because his ancestral estates lay groaning beneath the heel of the Czar, and whose only known dissipations were cards and billiards, at both of which he was singularly successful? Consequently the Count was the hero of the hour, and might have made a brilliant match long ago had he not been too solicitous to prevent the lady's fortune from being settled on herself. This curled darling, attracted by the report of Vivien's wealth and beauty, watched for her appearance, and laid himself out to woo her as the other count, in Tom Hood's story, did Miss Kilmansegg.

On their first introduction to life everything was new to our fairies. When Vivien first saw a negro waiter a shudder of affright came over her, for she thought he was one of the malignant genii of whom her race have a horror. Besides his complexion, the superciliousness of manner that white men have taught the blacks by overpetting them, overcame her for a moment. Vivien, however, was noted for self-possession, and recovered herself promptly. Her alleged aunt was of such stern stuff that nothing could move *her*.

When Vivien with her duenna at length ventured to appear in the ladies' salon, an extorted buzz of admiration broke for a moment the hum of conversation. In case my lady readers should wish

to know how she was dressed, it was in "a billow of white, of a blanchness that would shame boreal snows, a coronal of diamond flakes encircling her classic, golden head." (I found this fact in the *Evening Peeper* next morning.) Our beautiful heroine subsided on a *fauteuil*, and looked around curiously. She had never seen anything like this. Music was going on, chattering, laughing, yawning, make-believe of finger-work, and all the other elements that make up a society paradise. Quite a number of half-fledged youths and girls half grown were present, and appropriated to themselves an offensive prominence. Snatches of conversation among the general company reached the ear, but the staple was unintelligible to our fairies, who had no antecedents. Mrs A.'s receptions, B.'s dinners, Addy C.'s divorce, Mrs D.'s jewels—all seemed mixed up with each other, and, interlacing all, the frequent repetition of the word "dollars" came in like a refrain. There were few present who were not in affluent circumstances and had travelled; but the most vivid reminiscences seemed to be of the Principessa Pocourante's ball, or the Comtesse's Thursdays, or the crush there was at the opera on opening night. Nothing seemed hearty or earnest. To Vivien, who was wont to thrill with delight at everything beautiful of sight or sound, and whose aspiration to travel was that she might continually behold grand and lovely things, the society into which she was thrown was depressingly inane.

The Grand Seraphic did not do things by halves.

No, indeed! Four evenings a week the house gave a reunion in the superb ball-room, a dance and promenade that eclipsed anything. On one of these occasions our two lady-fairies were present. Next to Vivien sat Mrs Coupon, a lively little girl of seventeen, most lavishly dressed, who was wife of a stock-broker. This young matron made up to our fairy in a gush. She knew everybody and everything, and seemed delighted to impart information. Here it is somewhat in advance of our story to say that Coupon, not having any property, omitted to settle it on his wife, so that, a few months afterwards, when he ought to have paid half a million of shrinkage, he paid nothing, and went to the wall; and fashionable Mrs Coupon, whose principles were good, poor soul! accepted a position as sales-lady in a ready-made baby-linen establishment. She was a good creature, and adversity brought out the noble qualities that often lie dormant, only awaiting development, in seemingly frivolous butterflies. While man knocks under, woman rises to the occasion.

"Look, my dear," said Mrs Coupon to Vivien, "that short person with the bandy—you know—owns a fast horse that can run a mile in a second, and the money he squanders on the creature! He never gives anything to churches or charity, for he says it is opposed to the principles of political economy, and rubbish of that kind. The tall, thin man with a Roman nose—(Good evening, doctor!)—is a physician

who charges fifty dollars a visit, and you have to pay, besides, for podophyllon and pink draughts and stuff. They say that he and an undertaker are partners in a drug store. The other man, with the brassy eyes, who is philandering with the old lady that looks like a bolster, is a celebrated jurist, and it is known he would ruin you as soon as look at you if he took a spite. I do declare there is Mrs Flitter in a new dress! *That* never came out of old Flitter's pocket; there has been pinching in the housekeeping—or worse. That dissolute young man is the only son of a widow; he has all the vices, and is breaking his mother's heart. She ought to marry again and cut him off. *I* would, I know. That is my husband in the corner flirting so outrageously with some girl from the country. He never comes near me—the bear!”

“Ah! reverend sir, delightful evening; so pleased to see *you* here.”

“An agreeable evening, as you say, Miss Juliet,” sternly said the pulpit orator, as he passed on.

“Rev. Judas, my dear,” continued Mrs Coupon; “horrid hypocrite, my love. Lives on the offertory and pew rents. Pretends not to know I'm married, but he would have given his ears to come round me before I took Jim. There he goes, smiling on that prig Specieson, who is cashier or trustee or something to a benevolent institution, so he will soon bolt with the till—*his* father made all his money by shipbreaking or housebreaking or something, and now he is a miller, for he grinds the

poor—that is the father looking like a decayed porter. Oh, you odious Betsy Jane Brown, how I hate you! Did you ever see such a guy as she is in that rag? That's her father; the old shabby witch is her mother—they say she reads the poor inoffensive old man curtain lectures, and beats him; she is jealous; imagine anybody being jealous of dozy old Brown. Those three girls, the Fairs, set up for professional beauties—the idea! I am positive the youngest squints, and as to Mary Eva, with her fine figure—all make-up, my dear—if you only saw her with her clothes off.”

“Not just now, Mr Blossom. My card is full. Did I promise? Ah! I had forgotton. Not just now, thanks.”

“My dear Mdle. Vivien, do look. How funny! I declare he is here, after all. Isn't he nice? Who? Why, that smart, intellectual-faced fellow who seems so bored with listening to Lady Blue's eternal twaddling about sciences and things. He is a literary man, a journalist—a sad Bohemian, I am afraid—and can say the wickedest things—quite daring!—he is a special favourite of mine,—but hush! the largest fish of the season swims this way—all the girls are dying to catch him!”

Here a wholesome good-natured-looking young man with small mutton-chop whiskers and an impressive countenance, came dawdling along, and was quickly brought to a seat by little Mrs Couper. He was a scion of a family that had made history any time these eight hundred years.

The lively lady plied him with questions, asking him naïvely, among other things,—

“Will you not marry, my lord, before you return to your ancestral seat?”

“Should like it of all things,” said he, reflectively, “but there are others to be considered; my mother and sisters, you see.”

(“What a good young man,” thought Vivien, “he thinks of his mother!”)

“But,” said he, rising, “I apprehend you are engaged. Here comes the—ah—Polish gentleman.” And his lordship lounged away.

“Where was I?” resumed Mrs Coupon. “Oh, you see that portly man with the bald spot on the top of his head, and the bristles combed up into a *toupee*, like a handle to lift him up by? He would like to pass for forty. Sixty, I should say, if he is an hour. Immensely rich, my dear. A widower on the look-out. They say he killed his first wife with ill-treatment. They were wretchedly poor in those days. Then he started a pawnshop, which grew into a bank, and it is well known he paid his cashier to run off. The bank broke, and realised only a cent on the dollar, and that is why he is so rich—worth three millions at least. Mansion, paintings, furniture, plate, fast horses, carriages. Oh, his next will be a happy woman. ‘Sh, dear, he is coming this way.’”

“Miss Vivien, may I have the honour?” said he, offering his arm.

“No, thank you,” said Vivien, coldly.

The millionaire turned away with a puzzled air.

It was the first time since he became rich, that he had been received with other than effusion.

"Ha! ha! how you snubbed him," laughed little Mrs C. "By the way, look there, that is Dr Pangloss, one of our most celebrated men. He is on the look-out for a rich wife. He learned to read Latin after he grew up, and translates things out of the fathers and what-you-call-ums, and passes them off for his own."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed our fairy; "even science debased to a sham! Is there no truth in anything?"

"Not any, my dear," responded Mrs Coupon, cheerfully; "but what does it matter so long as you get a good establishment? Don't think me satirical in what I have said, for I'm *not*—if I liked I could tell you things about people that are awful, positively awful! But hadn't we better dance? I always fill my card and keep them waiting, it is such fun, they quarrel so."

Count Alexis Polonotowskivitz had by this time made his way to where the two ladies sat, and took his place with an air of proprietorship that was very displeasing to Vivien. In fact, although the Count was disagreeable to her, she had taken no pains to avoid him, knowing her mission, and that she could at any time sever any bond by suddenly disappearing and going back to Faërie. This evening her dislike to the distinguished foreigner grew into hate.

Three evenings after the above incidents, when our fairies had retired to their apartment, the mother

of the maids, her alleged aunt, observed Vivien cutting notches in the ivory handle of her fan.

"What are you doing now?" snapped she.

"Merely recording three more proposals declined. During the short time we have been here I have refused eight despairing lovers. The wretches! What can they know of me that they should want to tie themselves to me for life?" cried Vivien, warmly.

"You had best make a choice pretty quickly, before you get yourself more talked about with that Frenchman," retorted the aunt.

"What Frenchman?" asked Vivien, wonderingly.

"Pullet Wowskey, or whatever you call him. It is in everybody's mouth that he is going to marry you."

"He!—going—to marry!! ME!!!"

"He says so."

"Oh, it is too horrid!" exclaimed Vivien, passionately. "Dear mother, let us back to our own fairyland. I stifle in this fashionable world. Cruel, heartless, selfish, inane, wretched, wretched, oh! oh! oh! Let us go to-morrow before sunrise. I long to see again our own sun rise out of the pines. Meantime," said she, becoming calmer, "I have an assignation with the Count at midnight to-night."

"With the Count?"

"Yes. I intend to drown him," replied Vivien, calmly.

"Best thing you can do with him," said the mother.

At five minutes before the hotel stable-clock told midnight, a muffled figure, like one of Lopé de Vega's disguised gallants in Spanish comedy, stole along the pier to the landing-stair. It was a curious place, he thought, for an assignation, but these rich young women must be humoured. A single lamp left the stair in obscurity, but shed a deceptive glare on the water beyond the shadow, and rendered it still more deceitful as to distance by falling on the ripple of the tide. Count Alexis peered about.

"Where are you, dearest?" whispered he.

"Here, in a boat, gay wooer," replied a mellifluous voice from the water in the shadow.

One pace forward, and the Count stepped into eighteen feet of water, and the world contained one knave the less. Vivien laughed a pleased little laugh. Fairies of all kinds, although delightful creatures, are rather spiteful!

Mdlle. Vivien's intendent was summoned that night and directed to let it be known in the hotel that the lady had received a telegram announcing that a beloved uncle had been stricken with paralysis, and she must depart at once if she would see him in life. Her voluminous baggage was forthwith conveyed to the railway and safely stowed in the freight-room, but, strange to say, it was not there in the morning. It had disappeared! At earliest dawn the ladies left for the station in one of the "Grand's" grandest carriages, with the dumb servitor and the lady's maid in the rumble. It was yet

more strange they took no tickets, and that nobody saw them on the train. This sudden departure was a four hours' wonder at the Seraphic, but something else occurred, and the stream of folly flowed on as ever.

CHAPTER XII.

A SQUARE DEAL.

A WELL-APPOINTED travelling carriage was proceeding at a very leisurely rate along one of the smoothest highways of the prettiest midland county. The coachman had orders to drive carefully and avoid all bumps. Inside the vehicle were a celebrated physician and his patient, the former a florid, puffy little man with straggling brown hair carefully combed over his shining bald crown, the latter a tall young fellow with a good face, long, tawny moustache, languid grey eyes, and a general appearance of being used up and sickly. And so indeed he was. The physician was bringing the patient home to Du Bourg Castle to place him under the care of a resident medical attendant, with strict orders to take absolute rest and fresh air.

"Ozone and indolence, my dear Lord," said this high authority, "are the only things that will bring us round."

The history of this young fellow is instructive as a warning not to go and do likewise. His full name was Algernon John Lancelot de Beauregard du Bourg, in the peerage of the United Kingdom, viscount; Baron du Bourg and Clachmacuddy, in the peerage of Ireland; a baronet; but for some reason, or no reason, at school was always called

"Keb." The pet name of school did not stick to him at college. There he fell into a bad gambling set, and on coming of age devoted himself single-mindedly to ruining his estate. Horse-racing had no attraction for him. Beyond losing a pony or two with great regularity on the favourite, he regarded a horse as a quadruped and not as a facile instrument of squandering. Cards were his speciality. They were more easily carried about, and would run through a fortune as fast. He plunged heavily and played badly. Therefore he cursed his luck. His name became unduly prominent as a reckless gamester. He had even played with the Prince of Shriek. His misdoings reached the ear of his sovereign, who directed the Lord Chamberlain to strike his name off the reception lists. The children of Israel, to whom he had been as a golden calf, became less obsequious and added sixty per cent. Thereafter he went rapidly to the bad. His health broke down as well as his estate, and his affairs were given up for settlement. A terrible muddle they were when put into the family lawyers' hands for adjustment.

By paying off usurious claims here and clapping on an extra mortgage or so there, and patching and paring all round, matters were so far reformed as to leave him in nominal possession of the estate. For some years he would necessarily be poor for his station, but would eventually work through, provided he refrained from extravagance. Old Mr Deeds, the hereditary solicitor of the Du Bourgs, talked very seriously to the young man, who, to do him justice, felt ashamed of himself, and made a half-hearted

resolution (although he did not tell Deeds so) that he would not again be tempted into the execrable vice of gaming, to which indeed he had been attracted by the fierce excitement of the thing, and not from any real pleasure it afforded. And now he had been brought home broken down in body and means.

A bullet-headed servant named James, who had been born on the place and retained because he was so densely stolid and had been born there, was selected to wheel his lord in an invalid chair about the grounds. James pushed him along here and there for a week or two, until, with returning strength, the last representative of hard-hitting Rollo du Bourg, the Conqueror's companion, was able to walk feebly about by himself with the aid of a stick.

On one of the occasions when James was wheeling, they came upon the land steward and a party of labourers with levers and hoes on their shoulders, about to commence some sort of levelling operation at the entrance of a glade in a little wood. It was a grassy cove in a coppice, a kind of small amphitheatre of green. In the centre of an isolated patch of old beeches, of no great extent, was a circle devoid of undergrowth, but with a fringe of young trees or saplings that shot up and mingled their feathery tops with the older foliage, forming, in fact, a treillage of leafy sprays that threw cool shadows over the clearing. Birds were singing among the boughs, and squirrels ran out on the limbs and chattered. The short, springy turf with which the alcove was paved, was of that light olive tint that is so pleasant in shadow, and on its surface was

perceptible a well-defined wheel or ring of dark-green grass of some twenty yards in diameter. James paused that his master might look at it, which he did, and spoke to the steward.

"Jackson."

"Yes, m'lud."

"A pretty place this, Jackson."

"Yes, m'lud."

My lord contemplated the scene through his eyeglass, and resumed.

"What is that green circle on the grass for?"

"Fairy ring, m'lud—fairies dance there—not lucky to have 'em about—bewitch cattle and so on."

"And they dance there?"

"Yes, m'lud."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Break it up, m'lud."

"Ah!" (A long pause). "Well—no—better leave the poor deyvels their rink."

"Very well, m'lud."

So the steward withdrew his iconoclasts, and the lord was wheeled away.

As Lord du Bourg grew stronger, he took longer walks. On the first day of the month (the date is important) he set out for a constitutional, and his steps strayed to the fairies' ring. Seeing a cool spot where the exposed roots of a great birch tree formed, as it were, two arm-chairs lined with the driest and softest moss, and with another broad limb of root representing a serviceable table between them, he sat down in one of the arm-chairs, and pulling a pack of cards from his pocket, proceeded

to go over the particular cards by which a sharper had mulcted him in four figures. He was absorbed in this occupation when a voice from the other arm-chair put the question,—

“What’s trumps?”

“Clubs,” replied his lordship, courteously, and looking up saw Tumblebug, the gnome, seated opposite to him, in the grey cloak he usually wears and with a modern felt hat on his head.

“Excuse me,” said his lordship; “know I’ve met you—Eryctheum, perhaps—Mr—? Mr—?”

“Tumblebug,” said that personage.

“Ah, of course—memory treacherous. Will you take a hand?”

“With pleasure,” said Tumblebug.

As he shuffled the cards, said his lordship,—

“You live near?”

“Close at hand,” responded the other, producing from under his cloak a leathern bag from which clanked the pleasant chink of money.

They played for the greater part of the day, and du Bourg won largely. Tumblebug paid cash down. His lordship noticed that the gold was of very remote coinage, but gave the matter no attention, or, if he did, thought his opponent had possibly dug up a pot of money on his estate in the neighbourhood.

“You will give me my revenge? Shall we play here every day for a month, and settle up on the 30th?” questioned Tumblebug.

To which his lordship replied,—

“Oh, certainly!”

"Honour?" asked Tumblebug.

"Upon my honour," said Lord du Bourg.

Thus it happened that these two for a month of days, day by day, sat at the fairies' ring playing *écarté*.

It was the morning of the thirtieth day. Fortune had gone against Lord du Bourg. How much he could not say, but it was a fearfully large amount. True, he had several bags of Tumblebug's gold in his *escritoire*, but, then, Tumblebug held a sheaf of his lordship's I.O.U.'s. He took a pen and began to cypher. Arithmetic had always been his weak point, so he soon gave up the calculation, satisfied that his liability reached a sum that he never by any possibility could pay. Then he took a duelling pistol from its case, scratched the letter B on a bullet, loaded carefully, put the weapon in his pocket and walked to the place of appointment.

They played all day, his lordship getting deeper and deeper and deeper. Fortune was very adverse. Towards sunset Tumblebug remarked,—

"The time has nearly come to finish our pleasant game. Let us make a coup—du Bourg castle against your I.O.U.'s."

"Couldn't do that, you know," said the descendant of Rollo du Bourg; "old family and ali that—blank in the peerage. I really could not entertain the proposition."

"Then, my lord, I hope you are prepared to redeem your engagements. The thirtieth of the month was to be settling day, you remember."

"Yes, I remember."

Algernon John Lancelot de Beauregard du Bourg fell into a profound reverie, muttering—"Last of my race—nobody miss me—Ann might a little—" then raised his eyes and with steady hand set his ancestral inheritance on the turn of a card.

Luck was against him. The estate changed hands and the I.O.U.'s were still outstanding.

"Sir," said he, "the place is yours. Keep on all the old servants."

His lordship rose, yawned and stretched himself.

"Bye-bye, Tumblebug," said he, "I've put the pot on too heavily."

Then he placed the pistol to his forehead and pulled the trigger. No flash followed the fall of the hammer.

There was good pluck in the du Bourgs. He proceeded calmly to reload, but in doing so, ran the ramrod down the barrel and found the weapon was empty. He turned hastily to Tumblebug, but that worthy had disappeared.

At that moment arose peal upon prolonged peal of invisible silvery laughter and the clapping of unseen hands. The marked bullet that he had destined as the instrument of his own destruction dropped from a tree and rebounded with a sounding plump from the crown of his hat, while a perfect snowstorm of paper torn into small shreds came showering around. He picked up some fragments and found they were his I.O.U.'s—which a passing gust caught and whirled away forever.

Lord du Bourg walked home very gravely. He did not sleep well that night.

Next day he sent for his land steward, who entered, and the following colloquy took place:—

“Jackson?”

“M'lud.”

“Direct Deeds & Doquet to prepare a rent charge or mortgage or something, of the Fern Spinney for ever.”

“Yes, m'lud.”

“In favour of a gentleman of the name of Tumblebug. Leave a blank for his Christian name.”

“Yes, m'lud.”

“And—Jackson?”

“M'lud.”

“Tell them to insert a clause that the ground shall never be broken up.”

“Yes, m'lud—never broken up.”

“And, by the way, Jackson, you had better have the place enclosed with a light wire fence and keep it so in perpetuity.”

“Yes, m'lud—perpetuity.”

“And, Jackson. If the deer or poachers or people go inside the ring, the keepers shoot them.”

“Certainly, m'lud.”

“Oh by-the-bye, Jackson, as you go, tell Binns to send me up a glass of claret and some chicken. I feel actually robust. Hungry, in fact.”

From that hour Lord du Bourg improved in health, happiness and estate. He never played again except for love.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CASTAWAY.

THIS happened in the fairy camp :

It was a singular sunset. For days the sun had risen and set as red as blood, and during the day had glared of a brick-dust colour. Hours after the orb was beneath the horizon, the whole western sky was illuminated by a ruddy glow, as by the reflection of some immense conflagration. The most experienced seamen along that coast pawned their souls that they knew not what to make of the weather, unless it might be that the end of the world was coming. It was afterwards surmised that the celestial phenomena arose from volcanic dust cast out, and floating in the upper atmosphere, from the greatest convulsion that has occurred in modern times.* A strong breeze from the east had been blowing for some days.

Some of our men — hee-fairies, as the poet Spencer calls them — went to the sea beach to witness the war of the elements ; the winds fighting with the sea. Sea fowl had all flown inland, for driving spray dashed over the face of the

* In Java, a few years since.

rocks on which the white-winged gulls usually rested. Not a living thing was to be seen on the surf-beaten shingle, excepting two amphibious fishermen who were smoking pipes under the lee of the wreck of a boat. Our men-fairies passed on until they came beneath a bluff, split with crevices, where they took shelter to look out on the hell of waters. While there, their quick senses heard a kind of mewling like that of a kitten or a sea-mew, and they saw something whitish blown ashore and hurled into a cleft of the bluff. Quickly securing it, they found themselves in possession of something in shape like a child, yellow, water-sodden and shrunken, but with ragged wings, from which they knew it was some kind of a being of their own nature. One of them took it under his arm and hurried back to the haunt, where they gave it over to the care of the women-fays.

These kind souls, having no other place to dispose of the derelict, took it into their wardrobe cave, and made for it a bed of moss, which they covered with their swan's-down winter mantles. Next they douched it with fresh water to take out the salt, and kindly watched by it.

The creature thawed out rapidly, and its wings, which had been shrivelled like a bee's just out of the comb, expanded wondrously, and the watchers found the waif was a female fairy of surpassing loveliness. On awaking, much developed in appearance, from a long, refreshing sleep, she spoke, but none of them could make out what she said.

Queen Titania sent for me to interpret, and was quite cross that I could not speak Sanscrit. But a very ancient fairy was found as intrepeter, who knew the sort of *lingua franca* that all the aërial orders understand more or less. The words the stranger uttered in a soft tone, as she languidly opened her eyes, were,—

“Sisters, where am I? Is this a cave of ocean?”

Under the gentle care of the fays, the castaway speedily recovered. When found, she was quite naked, excepting a necklace, of which each bead was a small coiled serpent of gold, with ruby eyes; also a long, pendant, drop-shaped carbuncle in each of her tiny ears. The interpreter recognised the necklace as being made by the Eastern djins.

Fairies are very handy with their needles, so they made her a suit of clothes, according to her own design; but she preferred wearing over all a white stuff wrap of Queen Titania's, about six yards long, in which she draped herself from head to foot, and, bringing it over her head, made a yashmak or face cover, so that nothing of her countenance was visible, save her large, black eyes.

Several days were given her to recruit. Meantime the incident caused much excitement. The men were curious to know what she was like, but all they could learn was that her hair and eyes were black—in itself an exciting circumstance, seeing that our local fairies generally have fair hair, with eyes the colour of violets. The stranger made herself very popular with the girl-fays, who

brought her flowers and gossiped with her in her broken tongue. In fact, they almost adored her. Hence it came that when the time arrived for her to be officially presented to the King and Queen, she was led along by a band of little fairies to the grassy Tynwald mound, where their Majesties were seated with their Court. The stranger, draped from head to foot in her white shroud, looked among her young attendants like a tall, white lily in a plot of daisies.

She made a profound obeisance in the Eastern manner, and stood silent.

"Welcome, proud cousin," said Titania, for that is the etiquette by which fairies receive honoured strangers of their race.

The stranger again made an obeisance and stood still.

"We are uncovered," said the Queen, with a slight wave of her hand, whereupon the rescued castaway, by one touch of her finger, let the yashmak fall, and stood before them in her strange foreign beauty. All the males, from Oberon down to Titania's smallest page, made a murmur of admiration. The young girls had all seen her before, so they were prepared, but the married ones disliked her from the first, and whispers went around:

"I don't like her complexion—do you?"

"Sallow."

"Bilious."

"Like a copper tea-kettle."

She was neither sallow, nor bilious, nor like a tea-kettle, but of the highest order of *petite* brunette

beauty. In stature medium, lines ravishing. She had satin-lidded eyes—great orbs, languishing and sleepy. Her hair fell like a fountain. Her hands and bare feet were exquisite. No heart of rose could be lovelier than her lips. Her complexion might be described as a transparent brown, as if the thinnest film of palest gold had overlaid light bronze. From her beautiful shoulders depended long, graceful, rosy wings in shape of those of the luna moth. Her manner was quietly self-possessed. At first as she spoke, her utterance was slow, though soft, but as she proceeded, she became almost voluble. The following is a sufficiently correct report of her words. As she stood there before the Court of Faëry, she slowly raised her dark, languishing eyes and shot one glance full at the King. I chanced to be looking at his Majesty at the moment, and saw that the shaft had struck home. I think Titania saw it too.

“Gracious Lady and Great King, my cousins,” began the stranger, “thanks for your generous hospitality to a shipwrecked sprite. I was sojourning in the land of Dwaja, of the thirty-six volcanoes. where the malignant Divs are imprisoned beneath the rocks. The angry Divs, struggling, burst the hills and fire streamed up high—oh so high! and a number of us were carried in the fire-sparks, up to the stars. Then a strong wind set in from the Eastern sea, and with the volcanic dust, that made the sun red, we were hurled along floating. My companions were lost one by one, but I was swept ever on, day and night, over many lands, and then

over the sea, angry and cold, and I was frightened. Oh, the terrible sea, roaring and leaping beneath! Then I was dashed down and these kind friends" (here she swept a seductive glance around the circle) "saved me, and I am here."

Murmurs of sympathy and astonishment passed around.

"And do you not pine for your own land, my cousin?" asked the Queen.

"No. How can I, among friends so kind?"

"If it does not recall your grief," said Titania, not unkindly, "we would hear more of the visitor whom a dreadful but fortunate chance has cast upon our shores."

The stranger's voice was as thrilling and sweet as that of Israfil, who has the most musical voice of any of the angels. Using sometimes the *lingua franca* of fairydom, and sometimes oriental words which the ancient interpreter had to translate, she went on,—

"I am a Peri, Perizaâeh—Peri-born—in the Unequalled Valley that lies between Amberabad, and the City of Delight, which is the capital of Shadukiam, built of gems, in the county of Peria, and the realm of Jinnestân. The realm of Jinnestân is large, and extends wherever are the Moslemah." (Here our visitant turned and made a salaam towards the east, in the direction of Mecca.) "We Peris are created of smokeless flame. My mother is the Princess of Peria, more beautiful than Nourmahal, the light of the harem, who was afterwards called Nourjehan, the light of the world. Like Mamouna,

the ever-youthful enchantress, she and I are ever young. We Peris are half-sisters of the houris of Paradise. Our life is happy. Men love us"—(again that seductive glance addressed to the male portion of the audience)—"and we can love other aërial beings, or even mortals, and sometimes mate with them." (His Majesty was observed to be very attentive to this explanation.) "My name is Merjan, or, the Pearl."

A little movement of surprise was visible among the ladies, who seemed to think that the appellation of Pearl did not suit her dark complexion, but when the Peri smiled, they had to admit that her teeth, at least, were pearls.

"Our land," she resumed, "is fair, oh, so fair! It is carpeted with light. Beautiful trees, that ye know not, clothe the hills up to where the rose-coloured snow on peaks of the ghauts pierces the azure of the sky. The venerable lady who is so good as to interpret, tells me that this, your land, is over-peopled. Come, oh come! Fair Queen and Great King, to the land whence I flew in the volcano storm."

"We would learn of your life and employment in that fair but frightful country," said the Queen, with some appearance of interest.

The Peri replied,—

"We wander in the shade of the marvellous trees. We feed on perfumes, and revel among the flowers. Our promenades are on the scented turf when the Samaur wind blows from the south—there we hunt the demoiselle flies. We search for the delicious blossoms of the negacesara—so delicate

we eat them. We skim after the antelope fawns and little pigmy deer, and when we catch them lead them in flowery chains, for they can see us, you know, though men cannot always. We set traps for turtle-doves and singing-birds, and teach them to fly about with us. Besides, we sometimes harness swans to great leaves and sail about. When we find gems, such as diamonds and emeralds, they are of no use to us, and we pelt one another with them, but not with the opal, because it has a heart of fire. We put petals to steep in shells and hollow crystals, and make attar from the life of the rose. Sometimes we have concerts of syringas and vinas, and melodious stones that ring like bells, but oftener we join in the chorus of the singing-birds, whose language we know, and whose notes we sing. Sometimes we light tapers, and launch them in tiny boats on the breast of swift rivers, while we fly along the bank to see how long ere the light be extinguished. We like to amuse ourselves in garden kiosques when the owners have retired, and then we enjoy the dripping of the fountain, or the chatter of the nine-brown-sisters in the thorn, and the plaining of the bulbul, and the odour of the scented blooms. When the harem is closed, we glide through the zenana and find pleasure in looking at the beautiful persons and things, and we know the sleepers' dreams. Dancing is your fairy pastime; we Peris are sprites volant. Often we fly up to the empyrean, and listen at the gates of Paradise to hear what they are saying within."

Titania. "A species of eaves-dropping, is it not?"

Peri. "Yes, and so interesting. Sometimes we peep through the key-hole, and see grave people drinking and telling stories about Queen Maya and the Princess Mahâprajâpati. We even hear the crystal bells on the trees of Paradise. Then again we attend mundane processions in our land, and take note of the handsomest young men, but never of the old or decrepit, for we never look upon anything that is hateful or ugly, nor mention death, or age, or sorrow, or sickness, or pain. Ah! lady! ours is the land of Love. The lily there loves the sun, and the lotus the moon, the nightingale the rose, and we Peris love the land. Come! Oh come! I will pilot you the way to sunrise."

"Pearl," said the Queen, with more show of feeling than she usually exhibited, "we fairy-folk differ from you Peris, the fluid in whose veins is flame. Our ways are not as your ways. Our tastes are not for splendour. We are of a domestic order, and this is our own land. We have an interest in it; we know the people—have seen them born, live, marry, and die; we share in their joys, and have a chastened sympathy with their sorrows. *Your* race seems to have the whole East for a home, and to live among the ruins of a dead civilisation; *our* home is the quiet rural nook, and our surroundings quiet country toil. Nevertheless, we will consider the information you have given us, which is not without a certain degree of interest. With that discretion which distinguishes

our reign—I mean the reign of His Majesty—we will amass further evidence. Meantime, cousin, as a stranger, we commend to you the *female* society of our Court."

"Yes," said Oberon, rising and speaking in a tone of gallantry, "we will take your statement under advisement. Fair must be the land that produces such daughters. And blessed be the mothers who make them so beautiful."

The Peri cast down her eyes.

This terminated the audience. Some days rolled on in their usual course. The men-fairies all vied in courtesies to the attractive stranger (the King especially so), and such is the force of example, the young girl-fays went about with their hoods drawn over their faces, in the manner of yashmaks, with their innocent eyes peering out like those of the veiled women of the East.

A severe political economist might have deemed it indiscreet, if not unconstitutional, for the Queen Consort to dismiss from Court an involuntary guest, member of a powerful family, without consulting the Sovereign. On the other hand it is admitted that the Queen is the arbitress of fashion, and, although it is true the Peri was not yet the fashion, there was considerable danger of her becoming so. Her Majesty therefore summoned three old ladies to council on the matter. The Peri (who, in truth, was making the most of her time in captivating all hearts, especially Oberon's) was fully discussed at all points.

"The idea," exclaimed the Queen, "of men being

deluded by creatures like *that!* What do you think of her, mother?" she asked with some anxiety.

"An odious, foreign, squinting, tawdry, deceitful, designing baggage," promptly replied the Mother of the Maids.

In a literal sense the Peri did not squint, yet the charge of squinting did not seem altogether inapplicable. She had a sort of moral obliquity or strabismus.

"Strange," soliloquised Titania, "that men should be *such* fools. What they can see in her I can't think. . . . Mother, she had better be sent away."

"On a broomstick, the hussy! and joy go with her," said Madre.

"Not so," replied the Queen. "She shall go with every appearance of courtesy. His Majesty would not be pleased if she were not treated with consideration."

"He would *not*," said the mother, in a very significant tone.

The Queen actually blushed, and changed the subject. It was, however, decided, *nem. con.*, in the Council of Four that the frail fay of the East must go.

Her Majesty sent for the beauteous Oriental, and held a long, confidential communication with her. It is surmised that the Queen represented to the thoughtless thing how unseemly is lightness of conduct in a young person, especially when absent from the protection of her relatives,

and how sure even innocent flirtation is to provoke the breath of scandal. Putting it on the ground that the Peri must needs be longing to embrace the princess, her mother, her Majesty mentioned that a suitable escort would be provided to convey her to an elevated place on the sea coast, where was a good starting-point for a flight to the Continent, and whence she would be given honourable dismissal. Regretting, at the same time, that there was really nothing in the treasury fit to present to a sprite from the opulent East, the Queen begged her to convey to her mother and relatives in Peristân the assurances of her own distinguished consideration.

What passed between their Majesties on the subject of the aerial castaway, was not fully known to the public; but my position near the throne enabled me to overhear more than one conversation. On the morning when the Oriental was to be remitted to her native clime, the King, attired in hunting costume, came strolling along, and casually remarked,—

“So our Peri goes this morning?”

“Yes,” replied the Queen, shortly.

“Is it necessary, my love?” asked the King, in the tone of one who seeks information. “Emigration is one of the questions of the day, and there seems much in what she says to demand attention. If I were like any other King, I would appoint a Commissioner of Emigration; but, dash it! you cannot expect a commissioner

to live abroad on a stipend of rose leaves. Better keep our interesting informant a little longer."

"She—goes—to-day," said Titania. "I have made arrangements respecting emigration statistics. I have summoned an authority whom even you will respect.* You know my firmness in anything involving a matter of principle."

"Y-e-s, my dear, I know. . . . By the way, by which route did you say our expelled cousin would go?"

"From the cliff on the coast to the north," said Titania; the fact being that it had been decided the visitor should take wing from a green headland in a contrary direction along coast to the south.

Watchful eyes observed that when Oberon went hunting that day he took *the road to the north.*

According to pre-arrangement, a pelaton of the archer-guard were paraded in full dress as an escort to the banished Peri. According to military etiquette this force should have been commanded by a lieutenant, but the colonel, in gala harness, himself took command. The poor colonel was one of the hardest hit by the charms of the Peri, and wore a very lugubrious face indeed as he marched sadly alongside the litter hand-in-hand with his passenger, quite regardless that the music piped its cheeriest, and that Cheeks,

* See next Chapter.

the bugler, blew his best. Arrived on the summit of the green headland overlooking the sea, an affectionate farewell took place. Merjan the Pearl gathered a spray of eidelweiss, and, with her own hand stuck it in the colonel's buttonhole. He spoke of it for weeks after as "a tooba-bud that blooms only for love." At length the Peri unveiled her beautiful wings and spread their rosy splendour, the great bronze, purple, green and azure plaques on each pinion gleaming like peacocks' eyes. After one or two premonitory hops, the volant sprite rose spirally, describing a series of graceful, ever-lessening circles, until almost lost in the blue; then, like an arrow from a bow, she shot away aslant to the south-east. As she rose, she sang in a voice of ravishing melody:—

"O'er earth and sea we Peris fly
To heaven's gates,
Where Nakir waits.
Although he will not let us in,
We list outside, while standing by,
The soft, restrained, melodious din
Of houris and of Moslemin—
We fly! we fly!

O'er earth and water now I fly
To heaven's gates
To meet my mates.
And once again, while standing by
The golden grate to hear the strain
Of angel chitars sounding nigh.

Home, where the Orient glows amain !
Back to my natal East again
I fly ! I fly !"

The colonel concealed his emotion in his handkerchief. The troops, who were standing at "present arms," could not do so, but there was not a dry eye in that armed guard. Sadly they returned to camp.

Now, our gracious Queen is a most conscientious lady, of fine executive powers, and performs her full share in the duties of administration. In fact (be it whispered) it has been hinted that she, like that much-maligned dame, Lucrezia Borgia, has sometimes taken upon herself more of public act than might be supposed to have fallen legally within her province. Oberon, on his part, is, as husbands go, a loving spouse, but somewhat careless withal, and is, besides, much taken up with out-door sports. Husbands will therefore be at no loss to understand why and how it is that a good deal of the minor executive is done unconstitutionally by the Queen, but always with a view to keeping up the credit of her consort. On this occasion the subject of emigration from their overcrowded haunt to a less peopled locality had really engaged the attention of the fairies; and Titania having, woman-fashion, first made up her mind on all points of the case, thought she would like to hear evidence. An embassy of three gnomes was, therefore, despatched to a Lapland witch who

ived in a basaltic cave on the northern coast, directing her to summon before the Fairy Court by her spells a functionary who had much fame in her day as one of the lesser prophets.* I reserve details for next Chapter.

* Mother Shipton, a celebrated spae-wife in Henry VIII.'s time.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOTHER SHIPTON.

SCENE—*The Fairy Court. Oberon, Titania,
Fairies and Mother Shipton.*

TITANIA. Witch! we have sent for thee; for
we do own

Your fame, e'en at the Faërie Court, is known;
Tradition tells how thou hast shown thy skill
To Wolsey and the rest, for good or ill;
And now we have a matter on our hand
With reference to this fast-decaying land.

MOTHER SHIPTON. Fairy! for thee I've donned
my best attire;
Fairy! for thee I'll wake prophetic fire,
And grade-school grammar shall my lips inspire;
For though to Yorkshire boors I've had to screech,
To royal audience I can frame my speech.

TITANIA. Time was, O Prophetess! when fairy
folks
Their homes had underneath the Druid oaks,
When fresh and fair from the Creator's hand
Was given to us to hold the happy land;
Our place was in the sempiternal plan,

Aye to be near to, but apart from man.
The Saxon thane and thrall our habits knew,
And would not trespass where our harebells grew ;
E'en the fierce Norman o'er the narrow seas
To Britain brought faith in the Breton fées,
And, when the races mingled, grudged not rood
For our small haunts, and called our folks "the
Good."

There have we by possession made a home,
And in the dell and woodland, thorpe and combe,
In green depressions on south sides of hills,
On level swards by marge of singing rills,
We aye have lived and married men, and maids,
The harmless spirits of the peaceful glades.*

MOTHER SHIPTON. Agreed.

TITANIA. Good witch,

Our life needs solitude.

But now, o'er field and fell, through dell and wood,
Come men with tripod and long chains in hand,
And run gridiron roads across the land,
And dire-wheeled monsters fed on fire and steam,
Like penal cars where tortured genii scream,
With horrid shrieks rush on in fell career,
And split the tympanum of fairies' ear ;
Wire strings round bottles' necks on tall masts
strain,

* Says Chaucer :—

" In oldè dayès of the King Artour,
Of which that Breton speken gret honour,
All was this lond fulfilled of faërie ;
The elf-quene with her jolie companie
Danced full oft in many a grenè mede."

To carry hello-pipes athwart the plain ;
And post-hole diggers, sprawling 'neath our trees,
Drink rum and beer, and lunch on pork and
cheese.

The rustics, too, are changed ; the open brow
Is turned to moody discontentment now ;
They cease "God-den !" they prate with angry
fuss,

And, would you think it ? *don't believe in us.*"

MOTHER OF THE MAIDS. Aye ! women huzzies,
with their Woman's Rights,
Who dress themselves like Japanese and frights.

TITANIA. A Woman's Rights lie in the cradle,
mother.

OLD FAIRY. Ill would the world speed did she
claim aught other.

MOTHER SHIPTON. In my day, madam, the true
rural-born

Were as a band of brothers honour-sworn ;
Born on the land, they lived there all their days
In full, rough plenty, and the dells and braes
Were to them State and home ; together grew
The lord and peasant, each respective true,
For bonds of kindly feeling anchored fast
The lowly labourer to the higher caste ;
Society was *one*, nor "great" nor "small,"
Nor "boor" nor "upstart" did each other call,
For Giles met kindness in "master's" hall ;
When accident befell or sickness came,
Giles's women sought their bountiful liege dame,

Or castle leech, or butler of the bin,
With all the confidence of poorer kin,
For aid, not charity, but as a proof
That castled court protected cottage roof.
If trouble rose beyond their homestead cot,
They knew nought of it, and they sought it not,
But left to monarch, noble, church and fate
The happy guidance of the wholesome State;
Yet patriot they, for quick in war's alarms
They strung the bow and clad themselves in arms,
Rushed to the front, and back the invasion rolled
From the land given to them "to have and hold."
All loyalty and truth and honour went
When men were first permitted to dissent;
For now knaves find dull dupes to aid their tricks,
And stab the State, and call it "Politics,"
Whose noxious branches, growing down, take root,
And, cropping, fill the land with poisonous fruit,
That whoso eats thereof becometh mad
With the fierce madness the berserkers had.

TITANIA.

O, this is dreadful!

MOTHER SHIPTON. Nor is it only manner that
hath changed;
Respect, truth, gratitude, are class-estranged
Under a sham equality which craves
To pile up millions with the greed of slaves.
The age is smitten with a leprous itch,
A pitiless, irritant fever, to be rich.
Money, the deity, is all the same
As Moloch, the Greedy-god—

TITANIA. O, what a shame!
'Tis time we fled. If we knew where to go.
Do tell us, Shipton. Surely you must know.

MOTHER SHIPTON. The only vacant land is
Congo-land,
A stretch, I think, of Afric's darkest strand,
A land of jungle, forest, sand and fen,
A land, they say, of lions—

OBERON. Ho! my men,
Shall we go hunt the lion?

MEN. Count us in!

OBERON. I fain would slay a lion for his skin.

TITANIA. The land you speak of seems so far
away;
The balance wavers—shall we go? or stay?
Should we remove from this o'erpeopled place,
What means of transit? what toils must we face?

MOTHER SHIPTON. Ere you reach any land of
plains and thickets,
You scheme for berths, and pay for passage tickets,
To feed five times a day in long saloons,
And watch the captain take the sun at noons;
And loll about on quarter-deck; and then
You meet conditions and all sorts of men—
Modern Oresteses pursued by duns;
Levanting cashiers; shipped-off, black sheep sons;
Fincal persons making summer jaunts;
Brisk business agents, and bluff emigrants;

Which would be disagreeable for fays—
I think you best had go as stowaways.

TITANIA. Never! no, never! Dame, we have
decided

That what cannot be helped must be abided.
We'll try our country still. We could not bear
To leave her bracing, fresh and wholesome air,
To see no more her hedgerows white with may,
To trip no more her swards in galliards gay,
To chat no more with friendly rustic folks—
Milkmaid or peasant—'neath the village oaks,
To leave the friendly woodland creatures wild,
That each we've known as playmates from a child;
Though other home invites, far, vast and lone,
And fair to see, yet it is not *our own*.
Here were we born, and here we best had die,
Content if kindly hearts regretful cry—
"Once o'er the gladsome meads the fairies flew,
We grieve for them, alas!"

Good witch! adieu!

(Mother Shipton bestrides a broomstick, and exit.)

CHAPTER XV.

MAGDALEN.

ALTHOUGH I do not know much about it myself, I am told there are women and women. In like manner there are fays and fays. Some of these are as artless, yet feline, as kittens. There was, before my time, such a woman-fay in Fairyland. She married the Chevalier de Bulrush, according to the fairy ceremonial of hand-fasting across a fountain, and a daughter was born to her, about as big as a midget. The prettiest child.

Biographers usually begin their narration by giving some account of the ancestry of the subject of their biography. Following this custom, I would say that baby belonged to an old family settled in Fairyland as early as the time of the Emperor Tantalabute, but Court scandal, that spares not the whitest, whispered of a *més-alliance* that had introduced a taint of mortal blood into the race. The strain was probably Hibernian. The infant's pet names were Mag and Len and Lenay. Allowing, therefore, no more latitude than philologers allow themselves, we are justified in supposing that the name to which she was entitled by ancestry was Mag

Delaney. Be that as it may, Mdlle. de la Force justly observes that parents cannot be too cautious in selecting names for their offspring. Think what dire jealousies arose in the Wood of Wonders from a too fond king and queen naming their little daughter Fairer-than-a-fairy!

Magdalen was a coquette from her birth up. I am at a loss how to describe her. Perhaps the nearest approach to description would be to call her a Rogue Baby. For she was a little rogue. When old Aunt Favourable, a fairy of a school, alas! rapidly passing away, rocked her in her cradle of shell and sung "Hush-a-bye, baby," the little imp would look up and smile. When all the young fays of the neighbourhood would cluster about the bassinette with that singular longing that all young females have to pull babies about, she would purse up her lips to be kissed. One of the delights of her infancy was to lay hold of gentlemen by the beard, and remark "Goo-oo, goo-oo-o-o-o-o" in a tone like the cooing of a dove. Woe's me! as she grew up this was one of the habits that she did not wholly relinquish.

When Madge could toddle, her delight in herself was wonderful. "Me pretty, me pretty," was a remark but too common on her pulpy lips. She would say to inanimate things,— "I love oo, I love oo," although she had never read Lytton Bulwer's love-letters. She was subject to no rule of guidance. Such a little Quilp has never been seen since the nonage of time. She would make

cheeses till she was as squat as a toad and then, springing up bright as a sunbeam, dance around with her skirts whirling out, and her shapely legs, cross-gartered like Malvolio's, twinkling beneath. She was a pet, a partially-draped love, a thing of beauty, a duck o' diamonds and a joy forever. Wherever she went and in whatever she did, she sought for adoration. Even in the child's game of Little Bo-Peep, referring to the person who unfortunately mislaid his sheep, she always conveyed the impression that she was looking for the absent shepherd.

Thus did lovely Mag de Lena grow into girlhood, increasing in attractiveness and mischievousness day by day. I remember as well as if it were yesterday, when posting up my Annals, being disturbed by a splash and a yell, and found it was my gay Madge who had shown herself to Squire Dump's cub of a son and induced him to follow her until he fell into a horse-pond, when she abandoned him with shrieks of merriment. I fear, too, she nearly perilled the soul of the spotless young curate of Tithem-cum-Pig. The details never clearly transpired, but they seem to have borne a resemblance to the pranks of the White Lady of Avenal. Among our own fairy folk she reigned supreme. Not a youth but pranked himself to gain from her some distinguishing smile. *She distinguished them all!* even to the breaking of hearts. In the melancholy twilight time such a congregation of man-fairies would sit cross-legged all in a row,

like howadjis, on a fallen poplar that spanned the brook called Runnel-that-sings, and such the suspirations they drew in their despair, that the tree was appropriately spoken of as the Bridge of Sighs. It was whispered that King Oberon himself was taken with Magdalen.

Among the many admirers of the seductive fay, Nip was the most gallant and best. He followed her like her shadow — only, it is true, fairies have no shadow. If she had ever heard of Peter Schmeyl (which she never had) she would doubtless have got rid of her wooer as Peter got rid of his shadow, by rolling him up and selling him. Nip made a point of falling on his knees and beseeching her every time he met her from home. Quite in vain.

"I am such a wicked thing," she said; "I don't deserve you to care for me, so please don't. I am a good-for-nought."

Then Nip became jealous. Jealousy, they say, sharpens wit. Now, the gallant Nip had observed that whenever the fair Magdalen absented herself, she took the way towards a hamlet at no great distance, inhabited by clodhoppers. Moreover, beyond the hamlet lay the preserves of a great lord, and Robin Roughead was his keeper. Beyond that again stood the ruined church of Allhallows. As Sidonia, the sorceress, says,— "The chawbacons of that county 'are Christians, but they, in some sort, worship the devil." In truth, they were God-forgetting knaves, more apt to respond to the kale-bell than the angelus. Nip

upbraided his wayward love with habitually straying towards this miserable collection of huts. Magdalen responded, and gave him the final mitten. Then Nip went to the wars, and has not come back since.

About this time a change, not for the better, was perceptible in our fay's attire. She had always had a taste for the little vanities of her sex. From the time of the early fathers, through Savonarola and John Knox to modern times, divines have always railed without effect against the adornments of women. Magdalen had never heard a divine, and was therefore excusable. She however constructed a cage-work of rose-petals and hid it under her skirt, giving her a ridiculous appearance, and causing her to wobble as she walked. Not content with the golden cataract of her hair, she snipped it semi-short in front, like unto a Skye terrier's, and out of the fringe her eyes looked wickedly. She would have worn high-heeled boots, but they crippled her so. At her waist she placed a sunflower. Low in stature, she was loud in belongings. All this was very sad. It was a subject of general regret when Magdalen took to dressing like a mortal.

Ye who frequent Courts know that there are as many spies as there are pairs of eyes. The fierce light that beats around a throne, enveloped Magdalen. All the pairs of eyes took notice of her dress, and as they could not discover any bachelor fairy who was exceeding his legitimate

expenditure, the conclusion became general that she must be running hopelessly ears over in debt that would bring a crisis some day. The spies further discovered that she was becoming subject to long fits of reverie. Paul Prys climbed up trees and concealed themselves to spy; they dived under gnarled roots, they hid under drooping shrubs. They discovered that the belle of the Court, the tricky girl, the spoiled child, the rogue baby, often wept. They put this and that together, and were at no loss to know why she absented herself so often, and took the road to the hamlet of clodhoppers.

Two young imps, who had strayed out of bounds, reported that during one of Magdalen's mysterious absences, they had seen a seemingly young peasant woman, extraordinarily like Magdalen, leaning over a fence in earnest conversation with Robin Roughead the keeper.

This Roughead, as his name imports, was one of those coarse, healthy persons who are irresistibly suggestive of bulls, boars, brewers' horses and the like, and who seem to have been made expressly to show how near the biped form can approach in characteristics to the mere muscular beast. He was massively built, with brown, curly hair, blue eyes and nut-brown cheeks, and could crack a walnut with his teeth, and all the milkmaids were in love with him. He was free with his fists. His laugh was loud and long, and voice high, but both equally showed vacuity of mind. In short, he was a fine animal speci-

men. Stories were told of his selfishness and cruelty. It was even said (but one can scarcely credit such atrocity) that he would shoot a hare sitting. Such was Robin Roughead, the good-looking animal who was keeper to the great lord.

The tittle-tattle that the imps set afloat grew into a scandal, and at length reached the long ears of the leaders of society.

Now, in every Court there is a matron who is responsible for the virtue of that Court. At that of Oberon, as in the harem of that Sultan whom Byron wrote about, was one with the title of "the Mother of the Maids." We have seen her in her milder mood, in Chapter XI., fulfilling the easy duty of chaperoning Vivien in that high-toned fay's matrimonial campaign at Newville-on-the-sea; and in Chapter XV. conferring with the Queen. Ordinarily, she was very terrible. People did say that she was as stony-hearted a stepmother as Oxford Street was to the English opium-eater. Of that I am not a competent judge. At all events, her virtue was something stupendous. She found out, or thought she had found, with the intuition of a duenna, that Magdalen's life-history was becoming, or had become, like that of Undine—but without Undine's beautiful aspiration for a soul—an acquisition that Magdalen did not have the slightest ambition to attain. Then Virtue personified, poured out on Frailty supposed all the vials of social ire, the biting sarcasm, the scornful slight,

the insulting inuendo, the shameless assertion, tailing off into pointless invective. The scene would have been more inexpressibly painful had it not been for oil cast on the stormy tide by good Aunt Favourable, who is probably known to some of my readers, for in her youth she was Little Red Riding-hood. Most persons will remember the tale of her really exacting grandmother, who was so deceitfully made away with by the too diplomatic wolf. Her own narrow escape on that occasion formed the subject of her most prosy stories, and always wound up with a warning against wolves, men and other raveners. Good aunty's gentle twittering was, however, powerless to check the torrent of the mother's vituperation, until as a climax that guardian of virtue told her untrembling victim to *Go to Coventry!* Uprose Magdalen like an embodied tempest, and with a look at the virtuous tyrant that had murder in it, gathered up her skirts, and in the words of that agreeable cynic, Trois Etoiles, "walked off with the long strides of a Scripture-reader," until a turn in the road hid her from view. Evidently she took Montesquieu's advice, "If you are accused of stealing the towers of Notre Dame, bolt at once!" The only thing that softened Lena's grief was that sweet Winnie Peg, a fairy of her own age, ran after her and told her not to cry.

Perhaps the strain of human blood in her ancestry predisposed her to hanker after an affection deeper than the life of the butterfly. Cross-breeding is dangerous, and unless conducted on the finest

physiological and psychological principles, may produce Frankensteins. But these be Eleusinian mysteries. We are privileged to follow poor Magdalen in her exodus. No moon came up that night ; in fact, it was the first night of new moon, and the stars looked very cold and unsympathising. What became of our errant fay until the clock on the distant church struck midnight, no one knows. About that hour she passed along the street of the hamlet when the clodhoppers were asleep and dreaming their un fanciful dreams, and came in sight of the farm. On the farmer's roof was the warbling of cats. Sonorous in the farmer's barn arose the snoring of the hired men. In the farmer's first-floor front was his daughter Bella, packing up two gowns and a chemise in a hand-bag, preparatory to descending a rope-ladder to cast herself into the arms of young Beechin of the Leas. On the farmer's staircase was Susan Py the housemaid, with her apron at her mouth, surreptitiously peeping with intention to betray the elopement ; and sniffing at the farmer's door was his mastiff Towser, prepared to give tongue and bite the elopers as they came out.

Our fairy passed the farmhouse with its little world of intrigue to carry on an intrigue of her own. Entering the preserves of the great lord, she came to the keeper's lodge in the shadow of two giant trees that covered a large space of greensward with their arches. Here she took her stand in the gloom of the boughs, and whistled like a woodcock as a signal. Again and again. At length an attic

window was violently thrown open, and Robin Roughead's rough head, with a red night-cap on it, appeared, and his rough voice bawled,—

"Go away, you baggage. I have done with you! Get out of this."

The window was shut with a vicious snap, and in a few minutes Magdalen could hear her human—not humane—lover snoring like a trombone. She turned away distractedly, not caring whither she went.

Woe's me, for poor Lena!

Here the moral comes in. You cannot construct a silk purse from an ass's ear. A pearl had better commit suicide than cast herself before a swine. The plays of affection are lost on a dull clod. Like is necessary to like. Even when the most elevated spirits—embodied as women and men, or partially disembodied as fairies are—come within love's influence, the affair is risky:—

"Alas! how easily things go wrong;
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
There follows a mist and a weeping rain."*

A stream of which the name is not as mellifluous as its flowing waters, is an error and a grievance. In the other hemisphere fluvial appellations such as Cow, Sheep, Dog, Dirty, are not names to provoke respect. Imagine romance excited by the banks of Dog! English meads by the shores of rivers with sweet names are the haunts of English fairies. The

* George Macdonald.

Tees, the Dove, the Avon, Derwent, Ribble, Trent, Thames, Severn picture themselves to the fancy. So do the Scottish Tweed, the arrowy Rhone, father Rhine, Volga, and Vistula, the rushing Guadalquiver, the yellow Tiber, and the blue Danube, which is not blue. It was on the left bank of a moss-brown run that might well be called the Dirty that Magdalen sat down at dawn. Like the daughter of Agamemnon, she buried her face in her robe and wept.

All the world seemed to her as dirty as the stream. No Maiaoumé, or stream-sprite, came out of the turbid water to ask what ailed her. With a pure Minnehaha of a brook other water-ladies might have sat on the stepping-stones and soothed her, but not on the Dirty. So she choked and sobbed sadly for a long time. The sleepy lash of the water on the pebbles made her shudder. A raven lit on a blasted bough and croaked sarcastically, at which she was frightened. It was very eerie. She walked slowly away, and for some months that was the last that was seen or heard of wilful Magdalen.

Mary, Queen of Scots, poor soul! was accomplished in all the graces of the gay Court of France, and herself an especially graceful dancer, therefore, when she came to stern Scotland, had it not been for the sour fanatics around her, she would never have issued an edict forbidding "women to sing or dance around trees." Such an arbitrary interference with the liberty of the subject would not for a moment be tolerated in Faëryland.

For it was the late close of an autumn day in

Keats' season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. The forest leaves had scarcely yet put on their crimson, but here and there in patches had turned to dead gold. A balmy air alike removed from the crisp and the sultry, and that in inhalation seemed to be perfumed with apples, had pervaded all the afternoon. A new dance had been put on the verdant *tapis* by Signor Velocidito, the Ballet-Master Royal, and had become quite the rage. The measure was a happy combination of the *glissade* and the leaping step of the fauns. It was performed in a wide, revolving circle around a tree, and beneath an umbrageous umbrella of growing boughs. The music was vocal, accentuated by the joining in of flutes, and at stated bars the toot of a trumpet to reverse the figure and prevent the dancers from flying into space from centrifugal motion. As it was, the living circle whirled like the rings of Saturn. They had practised this agreeable pastime till fatigue called for a respite. Meantime the field of golden sky had turned to a faint shade of violet, and then to haze. Imperceptibly a mist rose slowly out of the dells and crept along the vistas of the woods. Small globules of damp gathered on the gossamer spiders' webs and threw out prismatic colours. The mist intensified until it became a drizzle.

Now, if there is anything the fairies detest, it is a drizzle. It damps their spirits and spoils their gauds; and well it may, for if aught can thoroughly depress the mind, it is the precipitation of moisture that soaks and yet has not the courage to be rain. Fairy folk are but ill-provided against wet grass,

for the most audacious imagination cannot fancy fairies squashing about in goloshes. So when mists come up or rain comes down, they run away and hide under leafy eaves, beneath gnarled roots that roof in violet-paved caves, or inside the dry, mossy hollows of old trees. So they had done on the present occasion. None were visible. Their favourite haunt appeared as if dancing feet had never there beat time.

But, as becomes a royal camp, there were videttes and outlying piquets all around. These guardians were wont to signal the coming of intruders by imitating the cry of the owl, who is not really a bird, you know, but only a "bust in feathers." Suddenly a note of alarm was heard, repeated from post to post, and two scouts came running in with news that caused all the fairies to leave their hiding and crowd around, despite the drizzle. For wearily and painfully a young peasant woman (as she seemed), with a bundle in her arms, and clad in hodden grey, made her way into the circle. It was the unfortunate Magdalen. Laying her bundle on the wet grass, she cried,—

"Kill it—I cannot!"

And the horrified crowd saw it was a new-born babe. Consternation seized on all. Fairies are not noted for collective presence of mind. They do not act as of one mind on the spur of the moment as do men of the barricades. So they ran about screaming. When at long and length they timidly approached, Magdalen had fallen on her face, and was not only dead, but had exhaled. Her aerial body

and spirit had returned to the elements from which they jointly had sprung. Nothing remained but a little heap of grey clothing, which Zug, the handy gnome—who always had a tinderbox about him—quickly reduced to ashes. The child was stone-dead and cold. As soon as they discovered that the animating spirit of the infant had fled, the fay Myrrha took a wand and flew over a neighbouring hawthorn hedge into a farmer's garden, where was a range of bee-hives. There she sped from one hive to another, tapping them gently with her wand. The bees, thus disturbed, made a grave, humming sound like a psalm. This was a custom the fairies had learned from the Sussex peasants. It was called "the awakening of the bees," and was meant to speed the soul on its way, wheresoever flown. News of the sensational occurrence was conveyed to our lord the King, who directed that as near an approach to a Christian burial as they could should be given to the dead child on the morrow; and meantime, that a sentry should be placed over the remains. They laid a wreath of rosemary on the little corpse, and covered it over with leaves. The gnome Zip was detailed for guard. He passed his watch agreeably by perambulating his beat with long strides, occasionally bringing up suddenly in attitudes of the most renowned statues of antiquity. Now and then he would dance a double-shuffle, and relieved the monotony of sentry-go, by standing on his head and walking about on his hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FAIRY FUNERAL.

THE King was up and away a-hunting with his merry men by the light of stars. He mentioned he would meet the funeral procession of the child at the Hunter's Rill. By starlight, too, Zug and Tug, the industrious gnomes, set about their task. To bury the child, however, it was first necessary to commit burglary, so they broke into a farmer's tool-house and stole a pick-axe and shovel, themselves invisible. Had any mortal eye witnessed, it must have appeared singular to see a shovel and pick-axe suspended in air at about the height of a boy, gravely proceeding along the road. Arrived at the ruined church of Allhallows, the gnomes dug a grave in the dry, gravelly soil, and lined it with sward, so that it was very snug indeed. They then constructed a litter of the sweet-smelling evergreen boughs of the white cedar (*cupressus thoyoides*), which they abstracted from the great lord's shrubbery, and having done so returned to camp.

There was a general feeling of excitement as of a *fête* to come when the fairies one after another opened their eyes, which they did long

before the usual *réveille*. Anxious looks were turned to the eastern horizon to see if the signs presaged a fair day. The fixed stars, those centres, perhaps, of systems, were waning, and the planet of morning hung low. From these astronomical observations the people were recalled by the tap of a drum, summoning them to dress. Considerable discussion had previously taken place as to what they should wear. For fairies have no "mourning," nor do they need to mourn. Such death as is their lot—or rather cessation of life—has to them nothing sad; thus habiliments of woe are unknown. So they decided to go in their prettiest walking costumes. Fairy ladies whose eyes look on these true pages, and who have wardrobes and stupendous trunks wherein to pack their belongings, will wonder where the women-fairies kept their "things." I answer, in a wardrobe with which the treasure-house of no princess on earth could vie. Their haunt, which had been occupied by the race from time immemorial, lay along the base of a range of oolitic limestone hills which descended to the plain in a succession of green mounds, like the lines of some giant circumvallation of old. In places the bare backbone of rock protruded through the turf, showing entrances to caves. In the mouth of one of these, a deep pool of pellucid water had formed beneath a low-browed, natural arch that spanned it not a yard above the surface level. Within the hill was the women-fairies' bath and dressing-room. When

they wanted to go in they skimmed under the arch, and lo! they stood in a marvellous hall, stretching interminably—the floor of particles of glittering quartz, the walls of many-coloured spar, and the roof groined with stalactites that threw a kind of light. On points of spar hung the fays' dresses. It was a ravishing sight to note the frocks, cymars and mantillas ranged in order, each retaining some semblance of the form and individuality of the wearer. The men-fairies had, of course, a cave of their own, where, man-like, their appurtenances were tossed higglety-pigglety in heaps—coats, hats, hosen and boots—like the properties of a theatre. Out from under the arch of their dressing-room, on the morning of our tale, skirred the lady-fays, and alighting on the sward made a gay and vivid assembly. It was rather late in the season for their favourite sceptre-flower, the foxglove, therefore many of them supplied its place with lily rods to carry in their hands.

As might have been expected, there was considerable trouble in arranging the order of precedence. All the ladies of longest standing, who were naturally the least attractive, insisted on going first; to which the Mother of the Maids objected, that some staid persons should bring up the rear, to prevent the young girl-fays from misdemeaning themselves. The heralds had a hard time of it. Marshals ran along the line with their wands, tapping delinquents' toes, and getting them into column, causing thereby sup-

pressed giggles. A few skirmishers were meantime thrown out to drive away rabbits, toads, crows and snakes, from the line of march, for fairy folk share in man's superstition that it is unlucky to meet any of these creatures. After much exertion, the procession was formed in the following order:—

I myself—(as the nearest approach to a Christian they could procure)—in my Armenian robe, for, like Jean Jacques Rousseau, I wore that garb.

Behind me the gnomes Zug and Tug, as grave-diggers.

A rosebud garden of girls with garlands.

The Mother of the Maids in lurid propriety.

Old fairies with steeple hats and crutch-handled canes.

Matrons, who attended unwillingly and merely in deference to the order of the King, but feared his Majesty's morality was growing lax, and wondered what the world was coming to.

The bier, on which the corpse, coffinless, covered with a white veil garlanded with autumn crocuses and baby-faced pansies; the trestles carried by four gnomes, and the four ends of the garlands by eight young fays.

Half-grown girls, who thought the whole thing *chic*.

The men, marching four abreast.

The boy populace.

The gnomes Zip and Hurrā, as beadles.

The blare of a trumpet called attention, and

the voice of the commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. Spadille, gave the word,—“Left foot—halt! As you were.—Try again, stoopids!—left foot forward,—slo-o-ow march!—vorwartz—immer vorwartz! Go!”

A bandlet of flutes struck up an air, a composition of Titania's bandmaster, that breathed the very soul of sadness, like some of Weber's almost forgotten music, and the procession moved along the base of the hill, beyond which opened a champaign landscape as fair as the delightful plain of Arene or the enamelled mead over which Latona journeying strode. Among the branches of scattered elms was heard the matin twittering of all singing birds, and what all poets have called the doling of the dove. I do not know what species of fowl a phillipaweeken (*Irish*, some kind of a bird) is, but I have no doubt he was there too. Then across wheat-stubble, where partridges ran all ways like feluccas escaping from a hostile frigate. Next they skirted a marsh full of puddles, a sort of reedy Thrasymene, where they heard the plover and curlew and water-wagtail and sandpipers, with their note of twëet twëet, visitors from beaches. Pitcher-plants grew there, with jugs of water for blooms. Out of the marsh oozed a brown stream, loved of carp, and here they saw a kingfisher on a bough, and on a distant stone a blue heron standing on one leg. Along the rumel bank, ferns stood like palæntologic palms. Beyond this came an interchange of downs, odorous of wild

thyme and gay with plantagenet blooms, and backed by patches of young wood just assuming the shape of trees, and over-topping their ever-green nurses. Thence a daisied turf scarped upwards to the Hunter's Rill, and here, the King with his hunting-train joining them, they called a halt.

The spot was very lovely. Out of a fissure in the top stair of the terrace of a small ledge of rock that protruded through the grass, water oozed and fell in diamond drops on the second stair. From the second it dropped in long pendants upon the third. From the third it fell in a little cascade into a rock-basin of a yard in diameter, with yellow gravel and a dancing spring in the bottom, and thence flowed away in a sparkling rill. Here they laid down the corpse, and King Oberon, dipping his hand in the living water, sprinkled the face and said,—“his child's name is Perdita.”

March was resumed up a winding path that led to the venerable ruin of Allhallows. As the procession curved and counter-curved up the green ascent, it looked like an embroidered ribbon or a beautiful lamia,—

“A Gordian knot of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue,
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson-barred.” *

They entered what had once been the grave-

* Keats.

yard enclosure. Around the church, in the shadow of its grace, lay the dead of five previous centuries, but not of this, for when the cure fell into decay, the clodhoppers of the hamlet turned Jumping Methodists, and when they died, their coffins were taken in a cart with straw to a special God's-acre seven miles off. Fractured fragments of moss-clad stone half-buried in the mould were now all that marked the tribute of successive races to the dust beneath. The procession entered the roofless church. Rural iconoclasts had long ago carried away the slates and rafters for roofing and firewood, so that within the walls was a grassy space the sheep had nibbled and shade had rendered verdant. In what had been the floor of the chancel the babe's grave had been dug. There were no entombments within the walls excepting where a massive table of stone, surmounted by a recumbent, cross-legged figure of Sir Guy du Var, with his nose knocked off, and alongside of him Dame Alice his wife, suffering from a similar deprivation of feature, showed where that knight and his lady reposed, but they slept very quietly and would not hurt the child.

The little corpse was lowered into its resting-place. A thoughtful young fay, with a vague idea that it somehow typified immortality, threw after it a wreath of the flower amaranthus, which in Germany they call, "thousand fair." Then, as fairies have no clergy and have never felt the want of them, the King stepped forward

and dropping a handful of white buds into the grave pronounced words previously adopted by the bard of Avon:—

“Lay her in the earth,
And from her pure and unpolluted flesh
Let Violets spring.”

Zug and Tug shovelled the gravel in. Then the sods were neatly laid and bound with osier, and violets planted on the mound. The band struck up a lively air as the procession dissolved into its gay and scintillating units, and the inconsequent fairies played at leap-frog all the way home.

The incidents of the day were not over. It was generally known throughout the haunt that a military expedition would leave camp two hours after dark. We have already said there was no moon. Messengers were sent to our allies, the Jack-o'-Lamps, for the loan of a sergeant's guard of that fatuous body, and accordingly, at the time appointed, our force, under the command of Yowl, stole away in silence in the direction of the hamlet, where they drew up invisibly before the door of the beerhouse. Robin Roughead was within. Three or four of his dogs were lying about, so our men at once proceeded to twist their tails, pull their ears, and walk them about on their forelegs like wheelbarrows. The poor brutes howled piteously at such inexplicable treatment, which brought out Robin Roughead in a state of inebriety.

Two files of voltigeurs having chevied off the dogs at racing speed, the select *corps de garde* prepared to accompany Robin. When he finally reappeared they leaped on his back by fours and boxed his ears. They pinched him black and blue, tore out his hair and tweaked his nose. They pulled his feet from under him and set him up again. Then the Jack-o'-lamps uncovered their lanterns and dazzled him with dancing fires. For miles they led him out of his way, through swamps and over stones, amid shrieks of eldritch laughter, until he came to where a bluff overhung a deep and sullen pool. There was a heavy splash, and that was the last of Robin Roughhead.

Towards morning the expeditionary force, covered with glory, marched into camp, their pipers playing a Muscovite Hymn of Victory.

CHAPTER XVII.

AMONG THE TOMBS.

RETURN we to the venerable ruins of Allhallows, standing lone and grey in the solitude — an august memorial of the time when architecture was not a jerry job of brick and lath, but a science of mathematical exactitude and of reverential and suggestive thought.

No one, unless a remarkably good spinner, such as Arachne the spider, can twist three threads at once into one. Even the Parcaë could not do it, for one of those fatal sisters had to stand by with scissors to snip the twine when it got ravelled. Modern fiction is full of attempts to spin a complicity of plots into a yarn, but the skein usually ends in a tangle. These Annals are neither fiction nor an attempt to spin, yet in this Chapter the story has three strands of human interest, for on this same summer day three distinct parties of mortals, without concert or knowledge of each other, took their respective way to the peaceful ruins of Allhallows.

The first party consisted of a lady and a gentlemen who came on foot, having left their

rather stylish equipage at a hostelry near. The lady was dressed in some quiet, self-coloured fabric, only noticeable for its simplicity and taste; the gentleman wore that convenient and becoming style of morning walking costume of which the original is the gamekeeper's jacket. Behind the pair trudged a fat footman in livery, groaning under the burden of two sketching-easels, a like number of umbrellas and a brace of campstools, the united weight of which might have been fourteen pounds avoirdupois. Both visitors bore noble names with which I am unacquainted, for they only called each other Reginald and Ada. Of the lady I shall merely say that she was very ladylike and self-possessed, and rather pretty than not. The gentleman with the tawny moustache was a type of the scions of good houses whom one meets every day in clubs, easy in his manners and with pleasant but not intellectual countenance. The time had come for him to marry. Unless he did marry and have an heir, the system of things could not go on. This well-matched couple were, therefore, engaged, and the world, through the county paper and the "Fashionable Intelligence," had been made acquainted with the fact. Ada actually loved him a little—sufficiently for her to wish him to conform to all her habits and opinions. Reginald, on his part, thought there was really a good deal in Ada, and that, on the whole, she was one of the nicest girls he knew. They would rub along in married life very well together. She would be

a success as matron, mother and dowager; he would make a good husband and be fairly liberal in settlements, taking due care of his and her honour, not confiding all his affairs to her, of course, but as much as was judicious; and when they grew old as a model pair, she would come into his particular den or study and read to him party editorials when he was laid up with the gout.

The second party that made its way into the grounds of Allhallows that summer noon numbered three individuals, namely, two female relatives and an adult, who, as it did not wear petticoats, was ostensibly of the male sex. I put on record the raiment of this phenomenon, lest posterity should fail to picture the outline of a portion of the human species at the close of the nineteenth century. No doubt coming editions of the late J. R. Planché's *History of Costume* will embalm a class fast dying out from inanition. His shining silk hat had little brim to speak of, but what there was, was curly. An eyeglass attached to a black ribbon was screwed into his eye, from which it frequently fell down. A stiff upstanding shirt-neck, the shape of a dog-collar of linen—or it might have been tin—nearly cut off his ears. His body-clothes were a mystery, appearing inaccessible to get into, and impossible to get out of. His limbs resembled a crane's, terminating in shining boots, long and narrow, suggestive of sheathed claws instead of toes. Coat and etcetera were fearfully and wonderfully built

to show the malconstruction of his person. Over his tight and short fancy vest (under which he wore corsets) was festooned a massive gold chain of the galley-slave pattern ("in this style 5s. 6d., free by mail"), to which was appended a bunch of the goldsmith work of a Birmingham Novelty Company. His watch was ormolu, and he carried a cane with a danseuse's leg for a top. His speech was drawling, his gait a crawl, and his whole aspect effete to the last degree. A few of him still survive at the present time of writing. As to his two female relatives, they seemed to regard this specimen as the ideal and architypal man, and were proud to be in his company.

The third party whom chance drew that day to the seven acres of ground around Allhallows represented a working variety of life, more useful than the ornamental. These visitors heralded their approach by boisterous laughter and good-natured but unpolished jokes, and drew up their hired carryall with loud ejaculations of "Whoa!" behind the wall. Owing to close packing, it was with no little difficulty they managed to extricate themselves and unslung the hamper that had rung a chime of stoneware all the way like rejoicing bells. This hearty party belonged to the Workers (the real sinew of national eminence), and comprised Mrs Ruddles, a stout, matronly person, with her two marriageable daughters, Mary Ann and Julia, and their brisk little sister Pussy, together with their brother Sam-u-el, a vacuous-looking boy. Two respectable young mechanics, Harry and Joe,

who had taken a day off, were their escort. Harry and Mary Ann "kept company," as the English saying is. Julia and Joe were unattached. Ruddles *père*, the breadwinner, had promised to meet his family on the way home when he knocked off work. Lastly, there was Uncle John. Uncle John had seen nothing of the great world. The fine old man had not even been a school trustee, but had spent his long and blameless life wholly in bucolic pursuits, until his wits had gone a-wool-gathering. His habit of conversation was embarrassing to a person who did not know his antecedents.

"I remember in the year One," he would remark, *apropos* of nothing—but meaning perhaps the year 1821.

"Yes, uncle," Mary Ann would reply.

"'Twas the same year," uncle would continue, "preacher brought his new wife home, her as is berried down thereaway."

"Certainly, so it was," Mrs Ruddles would assent.

"Ay, ay, deary me," the patriarch would pursue, "'twas that year Rick Gubbin falled over a toad. Ha! ha! he! Ye remember, Juley? but that was afore you was born."

Julia, in getting the old man to a seat, would respond,—

"I remember it quite well, uncle, but never mind now; take this comfortable cup of tea."

Although this verges on the ludicrous, there is nothing more pleasing—perhaps nothing that

the angels love better to look upon—than youth bestowing care on the physical and mental weakness of age.

Having now brought all the personages on the ground, we must leave them to pursue their own devices until the incident shall occur that will bring these groups and their accessories into one *dénouement*. Suffice it at present to say that the aristocratic pair, Ada and Reggy, did a little sketching, and a good deal of high-flown conversation. The epicene, supported by his two admiring relatives, mooned about; while the wholesome family thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the fresh air, with boisterous gambols, to give them an appetite for luncheon. It need only be further added that on that day a band of boy-fairies under Coquerico, a mischievous lad, as dux, held a half-holiday on the grounds of Allhallows, and having been pledged to good behaviour, had solemnly promised to be innocent and lamblike.

Among the minor features of Gothic architecture none are more interesting than gurgoyles.* They are so diabolically human-like. Often they have horns, and almost always Jewish features, which shows at once the grotesque cast of the mediæval mind, and the feeling towards Israel at the time they were made. One gargoyle of heroic size, called by the rustics Holus Bolus, presided over the Allhallows graves. The original design had been a lofty square tower, with stone masques as spouts

* Usually grotesque, some of them really horrible.

under the eaves, but two walls of the tower had fallen, leaving Holus Bolus perched high in air at the topmost angle, where his original mask of abhorrent features—from serving for generations as a target for boys' stone-throwing—was now pitted as by confluent small-pox. The greyish-white tint of the material, relieved against the dark red sandstone of the wall, made it conspicuous—but of this Pan-like mask we shall speak further anon.

Reginald arranged the easels, camp-stools, and umbrellas at due artistic distance from the tower. In settling to his work he could not help noticing approvingly that his *fiancée's* brown eyes, with their long, dark lashes, were very fine.

"What a lovely scene!" cooed the fair Áda; "the place is full of holy associations."

"Well, yes, rather jolly," said Reginald.

"How can you, Reginald?" returned the lady, with a marked expression of surprise. Then she industriously laid in a basis of red ochre.

"Yes," she resumed after a pause, "think of the holy men who have lived here. Perhaps even on this spot some wearied worldling, repentant of courtly vanities, has knelt in prayerful remorse. There seems to me always an association—almost an actual feeling—of calm and quiet where these old religious have dwelt."

"Those monkish parties," replied Reginald as he squeezed a tube of flake white, "made rather a good thing of it, you see. Always picked out the best site for their buildings and mills, collected lots of tithes and had no end of presents of corn lands

and vineyards, and fish-ponds, in return for which as far as I can see, they taught the people to say their prayers and brew decent beer. I wish I had a cool glass of it now."

Ada looked hurt.

"My dear Reginald," she said, "it pains me to hear you talk in this inconsiderate strain. I cannot imagine any life more noble than the conventual."

"Yes. To be sure. Very true. By Jove! Ada, I think you would make a good sister yourself; you seem to have a hankering that way."

"I might have felt such an inclination once, but not now," said Ada, with a blush that was very becoming.

"Of course not. You are a darling," responded her lover cheerily.

They continued to paint for some time in silence, until Reginald suddenly threw down his brush and exclaimed,—

"Ha! I have him now! Looks like Punch."

"Who? What?" cried the lady in alarm.

"That figure of fun with the goat's face up there," said Reggy, "reminds me of a man I have seen in the city—'*to the nobility and gentry, money to lend on personal security and reversions*'—that's he."

"How you frightened me, dear," began Ada, much relieved. "Yes, it does look very grotesque. The Gothic mind—"

"Remarkable old boys, those Goths. I remember a whole row of carved columns representing the

seven deadly — ahem — but those — ah — um — of course, you can know nothing about. Let us stroll."

Here they were joined by a tall, thin gentleman in black, who introduced himself as the Rev. Athanasius Pyx, perpetual curate of Allhallows, but who now celebrated divine service in a church built on the outskirts of the parish, and where (as he took pains to inform them) a pew was always reserved for respectable strangers. Ada, pleased to have met with a sympathetic auditor, resumed her disquisition on monastic life, adverting, among other things, to the extent of those ecclesiastical remains, and thence educing what a controlling influence the Church must have had on affairs.

"Do you think so, madam?" said Rev. Athanasius, with a very vinegar smile; "for my part, I see in the extent of these ruins but the too wide sway of a bigoted superstition."

"But the prominent place given to religion in the affairs of life," urged Ada. "The regularity of the observance of worship could not but be beneficial; not to mention the lesser facts of the example the recluses set of patient industry; their hospitality; their open board where the pilgrim and wayfarer and even the criminal was welcomed and fed."

"A *table d'hôte* with nothing to pay. Free lunch we call it now."

This remark originated with Reggy.

"Even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," broke out the holy man with some appear-

ance of exasperation—farther instancing the alleged fact that a nun had been built up in the convent of St Gudeale (which the profane of the neighbourhood will persist in calling Sweetheart Abbey). Reginald who had seen the hole in the wall referred to, and had come to the conclusion it was a cupboard wherein the cellarer kept a private keg rather than the vault of a bricked-up nun, said nothing. Space permits only of one more quotation from the worthy clergyman's Jeremiad, as follows:—"From the time of the sainted Henry Eighth, when the sanctuary was cleansed and the idols broken down, what with agnostics and ignoramuses, evolutionists, geologists, Colenso men, destroying Amalekites, disestablishing Achitophels cruel and crafty, and sons of dubiety generally, the spiritual mission is much weakened. Even the temporalities have been rent away, especially by one godless knight, a son of Belial buried in this very spot, and no doubt undergoing the reward of his deeds, one Guy du Var, who seized the Church lands belonging to this very establishment and the unhallowed consequence is that mine is a poor parish."

"It is very sad," said Ada.

They had now made the circuit of the ruins, and returned to their sketching-point, but during their brief absence had occurred a miracle! Need it be said that the tricky elf Coquerico was the miracle-monger. Reginald was the first to discover it. Looking up, he exclaimed excitedly, quite forgetful of the heathen nature of the invocation,—

"Ye gods! look there!"

Ada clung convulsively to her lover's arm. The Perpetual Curate dropped his cane in affright. For high overhead, with a face of livid yellow ochre, lampblack eyes, a vermilion tongue lolling out of his mouth, and a gay, vandyke-brown beard, the inaccessible Holus Bolus leered down at the spectators!

The clergyman was the first to exclaim with a vicious snap,—

"It is boys! I know it is boys! They have stolen your paints and gone up in a balloon or hung on to the tail of a kite to commit this sacrilege!"

Reginald hid his mirth in his handkerchief and tried not to choke. At length the good man, becoming more pacified, said he would investigate the outrage, and have the offenders caned; while Ada, despite her tender heart, hoped he would hurt the profane little wretches very much. Further sketching was now out of the question, so Jeames, who came on the scene by appointment, was dismissed with the easels, camp-stools and umbrellas, and told to order the carriage.

While the amateur artists were thus meeting with adventure, the epicene or Dudean party had been faltering about, taking in ozone in a mild manner adapted to the odic force of the principal.

First Female Relative. "Ain't it lovely, dear?"

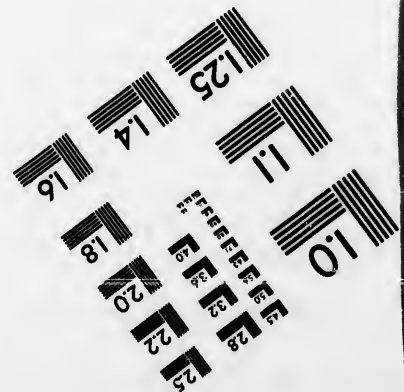
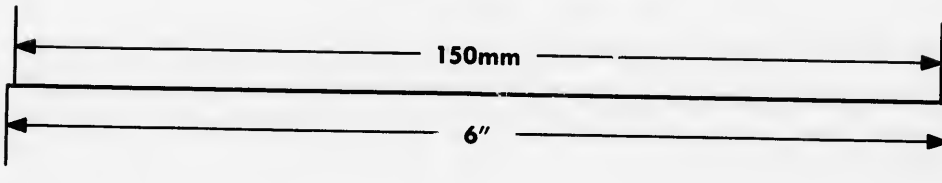
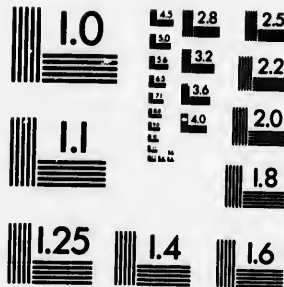
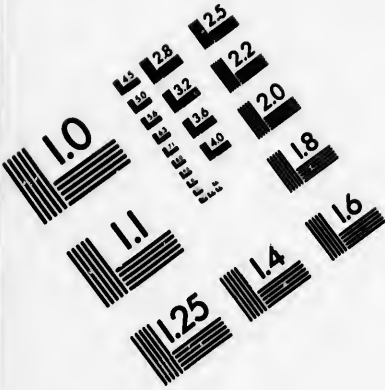
Dude. "Yaas."

Second Female Relative. "You ain't fatigued, are you?"

Dude. "Yaas."



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Both Female Relatives. "Oh dear! what shall we do?"

Dude. "Engine-dwivers and people should come with things and smooth off the gwound. Gwavel would be bettew than gwass. It is exhausting to stwuggle over hills."

Some mysterious incidents had happened even to this trio, as well as to the others, on this eventful afternoon. At one time a bleating as of a large flock of sheep was heard all around in the ears of Dude, but on looking over the wall no sheep were there. Again an invisible ass brayed so close to Uncle John that the venerable man began to remark,—“In the year one I knew a moke”—but was stopped by the attentive Julia. Yet again, when the exhausted youth was leaning languidly on a grassy mound of the broken wall, a sudden roar as of an angry bull broke out behind him, causing him to spring forward two yards with surprising alacrity. Also, a cloud, seemingly of wasps, kept buzzing around Dudius's head, keeping him flicking with his white handkerchief in abject terror. His female supporters could neither see nor hear anything to cause him alarm, and they feared the young man had lost the little sense he ever had. Why should we need to say that these diversitements were likewise due to fairy agency?

Meanwhile, hungry-time having come, the labour party busied themselves in a practical way. Harry, in his shirt-sleeves, bustled about collecting sticks and building a fire to boil the tea-kettle. Joe tossed cups and plates out of the hamper. Julia

spread a fair white table-cloth over a grassy mound, beneath which a man and his wife had slept since Queen Bess's time. Mrs Ruddles took charge of the teapot, putting in one spoonful for each person and one for the pot, with an additional one for Uncle John. Mary Ann took the little print of butter out of a cabbage-leaf and patted it with her own fair palms to make it look nice. Uncle John smiled blandly at the preparations, and the vacuous boy Sam-u-el glared wolfishly at the victuals.

Here little Pussy came running in, exclaiming,—
"Mother! mother! I see angels up a tree!"

Her mother gave her a good shake and told her to get away to play, and not come there with her nonsense. The child retreated with many looks backward. You see, the fairies take an interest in human proceedings, especially in anything like festivity, so the lads had climbed up the shading yew tree where they sat among the branches like monkeys in an East Indian grove. The little girl's mind being unspotted, her bodily eyes may have seen them. How many of a child's visions that grown-up people think nonsense, are reality!

All was hilarity, and no shadow warned that pleasant company of any coming catastrophe. But it happened the fairy boys, having slid down the tree, were playing at Aunt Sally behind the wall, with a skull they had found, when Coquerico noticed Harry's hat lying on the ground. Therefore he deposited the gristly emblem of mortality in the hat,

and covered it with a red cotton handkerchief he found in the crown.

The feast, as I have said, was spread and comfortable, and Dudius and his damsels, who were strolling past, were hospitably invited to join, which they condescended to do, and did, though not without causing jealousy and disquiet to Harry, for Mary Ann could not keep her eyes off a beau so stylishly and fashionably dressed as was their new acquaintance. The pleasure was only temporarily marred for a moment, for as our cheap Adonis was reaching over to pass the muffins, his over-tight small clothes (a little assisted by Coquerico) burst with a report like a pistol-shot and he nearly fainted away. The sympathising women-kind secured the aperture with pins, and he resumed his place at the friendly feast.

Affairs had reached this culminating point when the clergyman with Reginald and Ada, waiting for their carriage, came strolling by, and the two latter looked at the pleasant party with a kindly smile. Harry, to do honour to the approaching trio, whom he designated "the swells," picked up his hat, when the skull fell out, and as it chanced to fall right side up, there it sat in the centre of the tablecloth, wearing on its fleshless countenance a complaisant yet ghastly grin. The clergyman was so scandalised by what he conceived was a premeditated trick of Sam-u-el, that he fetched that luckless lad a box on the ear that sent him sprawling among the plates. The skull incident, with Samuel's mishap, was so unexpected and horrible, yet so closely

allied to the comic, that Reginald burst into a most unaristocratic fit of laughter. The thing was so preposterous that he held his sides and roared again, while Ada stood gazing at him with mingled disgust and terror. The tableau was certainly striking: the parson irate and fuming; Harry with his hair standing on end with affright; Joe with his fists clenched, wanting to hit somebody; the women screaming; the boy kicking among the dishes; the dude in the attitude of prayer; Uncle John smiling and nodding at the *caput mortuum*, and the skull grinning at Uncle John. On the whole the finale was dramatic.

Ada stalked off the scene with her head very erect, followed by Reginald, making vain attempts to pacify her. The dude was taken care of by his women. Harry and Joe after mutual recrimination had a set-to with fists, and Joe having proved the victor, walked off with Mary Ann on his arm and harnessed the horse, while the others gathered up the disjecta of the feast. Uncle John was deposited in the carryall and fell asleep. The reverend gentleman reverently placed the dead relic on a tombstone, preparatory to delivering it to the sexton for Christian burial, but Coquerico, stealing behind him, carried it off, and the lads resumed their game of Aunt Sally.

How mighty a river will flow from the smallest spring! how complicated a current of events from the minutest act! Like those appalling sums in arithmetic where a blacksmith demands several millions sterling for shoeing a horse at a farthing

a nail, the inconsiderate action of young Coquerico produced consequences by arithmetical progression which, in their turn, will result in others to latest eternity:—(1) It caused a worthy clergyman to exhibit so much of the old Adam, that his parishioners lost faith in him and became Freethinkers. (2) It caused an innocent boy to have his ears boxed without cause, and in consequence that boy grew up an Anarchist. (3) It nearly broke off a suitable match between the scions of two noble houses, and when they did marry, left such coldness between them, that both families became extinct. (4) It drove Harry to drink. (5) It induced Joe and Mary Ann to marry, from whom, in time, may descend members of Parliament who may work inextricable confusion in the State. And (6) it led Me to write Chapter XVII. of these Annals, thereby adding another to the valuable historic chronicles of Richard de Devises, Matthew of Westminster, William of Malmsbury and Ingulphus of Croyland.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WATER PARTY.

THE grooms were already harnessing the Sun-God's thoroughbreds, Lampus and Phaeton, to the chariot of the day, and the rosy-fingered Aurora, daughter of Theia, stood ready to appear on the scene. In plain English, the sun was about to rise on the morning of the summer day on which the fairies had promised themselves the diversion of a Water Party. As the rim of his disc gradually heaved above the pines and shot slantwise the first golden arrows of the morn, the young people rushed helter-skelter across the meadow to where a deep but placid stream flowed, and after a course of five or six miles, debouched into an expansion of its waters known as Ydle Lake. The elders and others, who had regard to the *bienséances*, formed a little procession thus:—

Band under Cheeks the Bugler.

A crowd of thick-coming Fancies.

The KING with his Suite.

The QUEEN with her Maries.

Annalist and Chancellor.

Then the people.

At some distance behind came the friendly gnomes, Gnurr, Grymyrg, Houroush, Tumblebug, Xip, Yowl and Zug, a heptarchy of them—seven in all.

Arrived at the natural stairs that gave upon the water, the waiting flotilla lay before them, light, gilded and gay with fluttering whips and pennons. There is nothing miraculous in Nature. Where we do not comprehend, it is simply our ignorance, and that is all. I do not know who was the builder of that fleet, who laid the hulls, or who the rigger that cut the silken sails, or whether it were ever builded at all, or where the vessels lay when not in use. Enough to say they were there now, a showy squadron.

Etiquette demanded that the King should first embark, which he did with due ceremony on board of a bucentaur of birch bark, not unlike its Venetian namesake in form, long and low, with the figure-head of a swan, crowned and collared. On either side of the cutwater was a ringbolt, apparently of gold, for the purpose of harnessing water-fowl thereto to propel the barge in calms. Numerous gondolas attended the royal float, and were quickly marshalled. The respective bands of their Majesties were in separate boats, the King's musicians comprising brass and drums and a pied piper, and the Queen's, strings. Attended by half a dozen of her Maries, the Royal Lady took her place under an awning, while her remaining Maids of Honour found places in attendant boats. But how shall my feeble

pen depict the scene when the pageant began slowly to glide into motion? Titania's barge was as the barge that Mark Anthony saw, and Titania as the Serpent of Nile, only more lovely, for if history belies her not, Cleopatra had a cock-up nose. A low, black, suspicious-seeming craft, that looked like a torpedo boat, held the gnomes and went ahead as scout, or advanced guard or water-uhlan. Next followed the music boats abreast. Then, under various ensigns, skiffs full of courtiers flashed around the King, and in near proximity came the Queen with her train, as before mentioned. As the galleys caught the current the sailors bent to their oars, one manly voice in each boat joining in recitative in admirable time, and the crews taking up the refrain in the following—

ROWING SONG.

Water glowing,
Ripples flowing,

Litherly pull the oar,—

Keep the time in measured rhyme
Of the songs of summer time,
Elf and imp and gnome and mine,

REFRAIN. *From the shore*

Pull the oar,

Oar,—oar, etc.

While the tide reams to the brim
Stretch the chest and arm and limb,
Bonnie chalupe! make her swim,

REFRAIN. *Pull the oar,*

Cheerily oar—oar,

Easy all ! feather oar
REFRAIN. *For the shore.*

Idle Lake spread before them in solitary expanse, and on its shore the company disembarked. A pavilion was quickly spread for their Majesties, and there they passed the time in dignified ease. Oberon, it is true, strolled about, exchanging compliments with the handsomest of the ladies, and (a good deal bored) looked on at the sports of his subjects; but Queen Titania, whose station forbade her to be familiar, had little to do beyond lolling on her cushions or taking little promenades under the shade of a filmy parasol. All the others enjoyed themselves to the full. The presence of the young people's dog, Tycho Brahe, had been strictly forbidden (injudiciously, I think), and a gnome had been detailed to steal a rope and tie him up, but despite the absence of their favourite, the little ones enjoyed themselves greatly in rolling and romping as children will, with whoop and hillaloo, or blowing bubbles, or riding see-saw. Girls in their white frocks ran about playing shuttle-cock with fir cones, or hunting butterflies, or filtering the sand of the beach through their fingers, seeking for semi-transparent pink shells. Bigger girls strolled about in twos and threes, with their arms around each others' waists, whispering of I know not what. Matrons, as is usual with them, sat in groups gossiping. The striplings had great fun in paper-chases, foot-races, flying kites, and throwing the djereed,

but not in swimming, for it must be remembered that the specific gravity of their bodies being less than that of water, they can neither splash nor dive. Mature men grew vastly excited in leap-frog, which is the national game of the fairies, as cricket is of Englishmen, lacrosse of Canadians, and base-ball of Americans. Even the old he-fairies took flying leaps over the younger, in any number of consecutive "backs." Differing from the human race, everyone was brimful of life and gladness, with nothing to regret in the past or present, and no care for the coming.

As a number of the maids were sauntering, a missel-thrush suddenly poured forth such a strain of melody, intertwined, thrilling and pathetic, that sentimental Lalalu put her finger on her lip and said to the Mother of the Maids,—“I think it is a bulbul.” “Think it is a bullhead,” retorted the mother, for she was not *sympatica*. Meanwhile the throstle sang on, until Lalalu began to chirp and imitate him so exactly that the bird, thinking some fowl of his own species was mocking him, became annoyed and flew away, for not even a missel-thrush likes to be made game of.

So the day ran cheerily on. Even fairies, however, must eat, and towards mid-afternoon a refection of honey and fruits was spread on the grass, the repast being enlivened with songs and chatter. Thereafter the literary coterie among us adjourned to the immediate vicinity of the Queen to have a turn at rhyme-in-the-ring.

Fairies' heads not being mathematical enough for double acrostics, rhyme-in-the-ring is an intellectual exercise of which they are fond. The performers seat themselves in a circle, facing inwards, and it is decided by lot who shall be called on for an extempore stanza of what passes for poetry. On this occasion the Chancellor, being officially the highest, took on himself to address Titania:—

“Would your Gracious Majesty deign to invoke the Royal muse and honour us, your subjects in love and duty, with a stanza?”

The Queen smiled that ineffably sweet smile of hers that lights up her lovely countenance as a sunburst the landscape.

“A distich will do,” said she,—

“Good friends, my fairies all, 'tis my behest
For the poetic crown you strive your best.”

Great applause.

The lot fell on Amina of the sharp tongue, who gracefully enough recited,—

“With flowery world to fly about,
With long, long life of glee,
Without a care or carking doubt
Who happy are but we?”

“There are three more lines,” continued she, meaningly,—

“Oh, who would be a mortal lout
To be so out of place in the rout
Of the Court of Fa-*s*-rie?”

All eyes were turned sarcastically on *me*, but I cast down my looks in pretended unconsciousness. One would need a keen lance to tilt with Amina.

Belted Will had the reputation of a troubadour among us, and was known to be much addicted to the society of Zuzu. When his turn came he slid forward with a dramatic slide, and catching up a guitar struck it till it twanged again, as he sang,—

“Though I shut my eyes, within them beams
The lovely lady of my dreams ;
Though I close my ears, her dulcet voice
Whispers contentment with my choice.”

(Cries of “Good!” “Bravo!” “Not a doubt of it!” “Another stanza, Will.”)

“My love is like, oh my love is like
All charms that do the fancy strike,
A pearl, gem, star, sunlight, moonray,
All beautiful things of night and day.”

Here Zuza was observed to be blushing violently, and our troubadour continued,—

“The wealth of imagery fails to tell
The worth of the lady I love so well ;
She is all that gracious or joyous shows,
Oh my love is like the red, red rose.”

Excitement among the girl-fays grew unbearable. There were cries of “Who is she?” “Name!” “We all know,” “Now for the moral,” “L’envoy,” etc.

"And if you think earth can disclose
Anything lovelier than the Rose,
You may take your affidavit flat
I would liken my loveliest Love to that!"

3 "Three cheers for Will!" croaked the gnome Zug from behind a tree, which, with the Queen's permission, were given, and our son of the Gai Science retired, looking as modest as a young poet usually does when he thinks he has made a hit.

A willowy miss in white now stood up and repeated—with a running commentary—in as charmingly mincing a voice as if she had just graduated from a ladies' seminary where the education is thorough,—

"When days are short and nights are cold,
And snow besprinkles field and wold,
Robin (Robin Redbreast, don't you see?) seeks the farmer's
hold (for crumbs, you know),
For lack of grubs hath made him bold. (For he couldn't
get any in winter, could he?)"

"He! he!" laughed the fairies.

Babëe next stood up, blushing like a delicate rose, and leaning over me in her coaxing way (I did like that girl), faltered,—

"Dear Mr Annalist, I have two such lovely lines, would you, please, continue them for me?—

The nightingales sing through my head,
The nightingales, the nightingales.

But I would like to say something about white lilies—nodding, you know."

And she looked so beseechingly that I *did* finish the stanza for her, although poetry is not my forte.

"The nightingales are all nid-nodding,
With their yellow beaks among the white
Lilies, in a contemplative mood prodding
For the worms that have been out on the loose all night."

This was received with acclamation. Even the Mother of the Maids deigned to say, "How true!" probably with reference to the dissolute behaviour of the worms.

Other members of the joyous company tried their poetic powers with more or less success, until none remained but the Chancellor and myself. The former gentleman's verse was—

"The Searcher learns, the Wise discerns,
The Proletarian thinks he knows ;
The Council reigns, the King go-vérns,
And doth not care a dump for those."

Nobody clearly understood this, therefore we accepted it as very wise.

It now came to MY turn, and I, stretching forth my hand in rhetorical attitude, pronounced these words, *ore rotundo*, in dog Latin :—

"Vah tenues Umbræ! clara de stirpe Virorum,
jactatis vos! ridiculi Mures tamen estis!" *

Being pressed to translate, I mentioned that the apophysis could not be literally rendered, but by free translation it lauded the fairy people.

* Oh, thin shadows! who think yourselves men, but are ridiculous mice.

Need I add that the poetic crown of parsley was unanimously awarded to the Chancellor.

When sunset approached, preparations were made for the return voyage. Old salts—by whom is meant those who had been on like previous fresh-water excursions—bustled about with great expenditure of misapplied nautical phrases, but not in the strain of him whom Thackeray calls the blasphemous mariner; for imprecation is to the fairies unknown, and surely it is more pleasant to hear their mild, Black-eyed Susan patter than it would be to hear them execrate their eyes, or pray for blight on their thoracic vicera, or invoke condemnation on their alleged souls, as tars do. Yet the grizzled sea-dogs of Queen Artimesia's quinqueremes at Salamis must have thought the yachtsmen of Cleopatra's galleys a lot of Nilotic lubbers.

Again the flotilla was put in motion with the prows pointing homeward. Music played from the boats like Ariel's dispersedly. A gentle breeze was blowing, sufficient by the aid of sails to make the ships glide against the current, and a short, wiry person, by name Jeanpetit, assumed the rôle of a Canadian voyageur to guide the skiffs over the stronger swifts. At the sound of the bo'sun's whistle, the person equivalent to the English First Lord of the Admiralty, equipped in a colossal cocked hat, and with an enormous speaking-trumpet in his hand—which last was really unnecessary, seeing that there was no possibility of meeting any other craft—took his place on the foredeck of the state buccen-

taur, uplifted his voice in a fine contralto, and gave the words of command,—

“Up-hoist the rose-red sails, ahoy !
Rig out the level sweeps,
And be our course the silvery wake
On which the moonlight sleeps.”

Instantaneously the slender masts and spars were clothed with rosy-tinted silken sails, and the oars simultaneously fell into the water with a splash all along the line. Then at another signal the fleet moved on. The rowlocks groaned, the gondolas following in the wake of the sails, the voices of the rowers singing, in time with the oars, this catch from a barcarole :—

“Join voices as we bend
Above the sweeping oar,
And joyously a good-night send,—*Good Night!*
To Echo on the shore.”

Taken up by the boats at various distances, a volume of broken sound sped to the land and split into spray on the projections of the shore, astonishing the nymph Echo, and putting her to her mettle to return suitable reply. Her voice, in different intonations, came to the ear as if there were many echoes, broken in upon by a succession of quick, joyous yelps, as from behind a rock dashed the dog Tycho Brahe with about four yards of rope trailing from his neck where he had broken loose; and the faithful animal, uttering glad remarks, accompanied them along the bank, to the great delight of the children.

Thus in pleasant voyage they reached the landing stair.

When the last passenger had debarked, the gay flaunting colours of the fleet gradually dimmed, then the hulls and spars grew fainter and fainter, as if vaguely formed of mist, until they disappeared altogether. I rubbed my eyes, but could see nothing save the surface of the river shimmering in the moonlight. The fairy fleet was gone.

An agreeable walk across the meadows and the Haunt was reached. Their Majesties, with a pleasant leave-taking, retired, whereupon a knot of the most gamesome ran to the top of a knoll and lifted up their voices in song—

“Up, fays ! draw nigh,
Come let us fly.

Pitter, patter, as with wings, like the gnats in spiral rings ;
Come ! from sward and flowers and leaves,
In balmiest this of all the eves.
A hall ! a hall ! a fairies' dance
Upon the floor of elf romance.
All in this sweet, soft summer time,
When nights are bright with moonlight rime.
Though, indeed, the time for loving is the all and only time.

Moonlighters we
Who gladsome be ;
And our lightly-tripping heels, skilled in rapid rounds and
reels,

Pit-a-pat will whirl and bound
In many a graceful merry-go-round ;
While stars shall wink their lanterns' light
Aloft, and all the livelong night
The fairy bells shall ring the chime

A Water Party.

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That pulsates all life's loving time,
The throbbing life of nature's prime.
For, indeed, the time for loving is the all and only time.

Call in those fays
Who cause delays,
Splishing-splashing 'mong the lilies—joy betide the thought-
less sillies !

They to-night must foot the sands
In toe-twinkling sarabands,
Till a flush from out the sea
Shall enrosy gradually
The fresh, sweet face of morning-prime,
In sunburst time, in loving time,
For mete of time is but love's rhyme.
And, indeed, the time for loving is the all and only time."

The vocalists came down from the knoll, and all the fairies formed a circle, which, from the practice they had in round dances, was as perfectly circular as the *O* of Giotto, and took hands. Then Bloë, the wind soloist, with Pans, pipes, and Tinkatinc, with a zel or pair of cymbals that made a sound as soft and not much louder than the tinkle of a tray of champagne glasses, took their places, while the chorus, with all manner of instruments, scattered themselves here, there and everywhere to strike in at the bolder passages of the rondo. The ornamental stars on the foreheads of the fairies, scintillating in the moonlight, marked out the circumference of the circle of terpsichoreans with a gleam of living fire. At a given signal the wheel set itself in motion and began to revolve on an imaginary axis. There was no vulgar stamping or shuffling.

Silent as the orbit of the suns—nay, more silently for the planetary system they convey an idea of *whirling*—their feet fell on the sward. Slowly at first, but gradually increasing in rapidity, fast, faster, fastest, until the individuality of the links was lost, and the circle seemed but one large diamond hoop throwing off coruscations of prismatic light. At a signal the rapid wheel would reverse its motion, flinging the rays from left to right in silvery spray. And when the pace became too break-neck even for fairy feet, the music would slacken and the dance be again resumed with recovered breath.

While the fairies were thus gladdening themselves with ziralet and rigadon, my eyes grew heavy, and incontinently I fell asleep, awaking just in time to see the revels done and *exerunt omnes*.

CHAPTER XIX.

SWEETHEART ABBEY.

ON the day to which this Chapter relates, two distinguished men met by chance as tourists in the ruined chapel of Sweetheart Abbey. Both were churchmen, and perfect types of their respective persuasions. In my official capacity I do not know the names of the reverend fathers,* therefore would prefer that kind readers will imagine them their own pet divines. Although there was little difference in their years, or perhaps in their habits, one was of a notably portly presence with a *bonhomme* in his manners and features that eminently marked him as the popular preacher and writer of Good Words for Sunday Reading. The other had the pale spiritualism of the courtly and polished ascetic, but qualified by a mild and benevolent expression. The sportive *badinage* of the learned is caviare to the multitude and blasphemy to the fanatic. Let not the intelligent peruser of these Annals view it as either.

* Could they have been Dean Stanley and Norman Macleod?—*Annalist*.

"The acoustic properties of these old churches are wonderfully fine," said the first, "The appropriateness of the pointed arch, its vibration and resonance is, in fact, demonstrated. You, whose service is in vaulted halls, must find it so. For me, I have a fine field for investigating into how many dissonant angles air *can* be broken in an edifice in the shape of a packing-case, and further deadened by heavy galleries and whitewash."

"Yes," replied his companion, "the voice seems more symphonious; more solemn when it soars high among the resonant arches. A fanciful mind might picture aërial beings undulating on the air-waves of the organ, and bearing the tribute of praise heavenwards."

Said the first,—“When I was in the East on a mission for my Church, I heard much of the class of intermediate aërial beings. Such may be. *Apropos* of such intelligences, this abbey is said to be a haunt of the fairies.”

The other replied smiling,—“In the archives of the Chapel Royal are many records of trials for dealing with evil spirits, but none for commerce with the gentle fays—*animulæ, vagulæ, blandulæ*. Revelation, though it does not state their existence, leaves it to be inferred. Man's observation, which we call tradition, has outlined the features of their character, intelligent and, on the whole, good. A place such as this might well dispose to give fancy the rein, dismounting reason for a while, and assume their presence.”

“Brother,” said the stout divine, “St Anthony

preached to the fishes, Arion thrummed to the dolphins. Let us try the acoustic properties of this old church. As intelligences superior to theirs, let us preach to the fairies! A word fitly spoken may reach even a congregation in air."

Two such men might do what weaker brethren dared not do. They preached to the fairies.

The fairies who—as it happened—were skylarking around the building at the time, heard the proposal to preach to them, and came flocking around invisibly. They perched on every available projection, and gravely composed themselves to hear.

The Dean in a musical voice that came without apparent effort, and, although low, seemed to penetrate every nook and cranny of the old walls, addressed his aerial listeners in an ethical strain to the effect that as they are an intelligence unburdened with the grosser bonds of body, the perfecting of that intelligence, after which they should strive, would produce increased intensity of happiness, which happiness is worship. This was somewhat above his audience, who remained perfectly still.

The stout divine, with his robust, cheery speech, then spoke in a warm tone of human affection, as he might have addressed an audience of loved parishioners. The fairies heard and approved; but when he called on them so to order their lives, that if there were any chance of future reward, it might be theirs, a shade of displeasure

came over their brows. The worthy exhorter had fallen into the fundamental error of Islamism and other systems—that *it pays* to be good (premiums for piety in the nature of prize competitions)—forgetting that Goodness is its own reward, and that Fate is passionless.

The conduct of the fairies themselves during these discourses was grave and becoming, until a little incident occurred, for which I confess myself to blame. The day was sultry, and I was sitting (invisibly to the preachers, of course) on the edge of a tomb, wherein some old knight lay under his cross-legged effigy, when drowsiness stole over me, and I toppled full length in an attitude of abasement on the floor, whereupon the young fays tittered. Laughter was not actually heard audibly, nor were the offenders patent to any of the human senses, but the preacher felt that there was merriment in the air, and stopped short under the impression that his viewless audience was laughing at him—so easy is it to reason from imperfect premises.

The two divines strolled away arm-in-arm to their respective carriages, and just then several groups of visitors, casually meeting, entered by the great portal. They were of the usual types of holiday strangers, of different classes in life. One feature they mostly had in common—they were young and in pairs. The most noticeable were a couple whom I overheard call each other Harold and Queenie, and by these names shall

speak of them. Accompanying these two was the official guide, an average specimen of that tolerated nuisance, whose twaddle puts sentiment to flight and destroys veneration for the most venerable places. Considerably modifying the provincialism of his speech, this official's description of the interesting old abbey ran thus:—

"Lady and gent', these here ruins have been built a many years, and were the scenes of great to do in old times bygone, as you can read in histories and church missiles. The ruins belong to Lord Grabemall, and he thinks a heap on 'em; but Master William, that's his son, has spoke of removing of 'em when he comes to his own; and a fine stone quarry they will make, sure-ly, to build his new stables. The ruins was given by King Harry, the Eighth King of England, to his forefathers which went before him, and was inhabited by papists which he was down on, and brought about the blessed Reformation. That 'ere hole is where they builded up a nun that had been a misbehaving of herself, but I don't see as any regular brick-layer would have took the job, but mayhap they gave it to some of them travelling free-masons to do it. The small windows high up all along the side of the chapel wall is the gallery where the abbot used to walk invisible in his slippers, and when he saw any of the congregation asleep, he sent down the beadle with his wand to wake 'em up. Step this way,

lady and gent'. Thank 'ee. That fearsome face on a pillar, with horns, is a portrait of him as we call Squire Voland* in these parts, but you will know him better by his t'other name o' The Old Gentleman or Old Stratch. It is reckoned a good likeness. This font in the wall has letters on it (the lettering was—*νιψον ανημια μη μουον εψιν*) which they do say means, 'Give my face a wash as well as my sins.' That long range of broken pillars is the clysters. That deep crack in the floor is called St Pol's purgatory, and you sometimes hear groans, specially when the wind blows from the nor'-east, and when folks hereabouts hear it, they say, 'Hark, the souls!' This is the draw-well where they tried to lower the abbot into when a godless baron swore to have his head; but the diameter of the abbot being greater than the diameter of the well, he could not be got down, and the baron, who really had an affection for the church, let him off on condition of dancing a jig with his mitre on. This here stone statue is St Eloi, and that there stone flame like a ham is meant for the soul of King Dagobert," etc., etc., etc. Thus the wretched creature ran on till he passed into another room with new visitors.

The youth called Harold stayed behind the other sight-seers, and remarked to his companion
 "What a pity this fine place has no legend of
 later date."

* A local name in some rural districts for the Devil.

"I beg your pardon," said, politely, a young man whom they had observed writing rapidly in a note-book, "there *is* a legend of modern date in connection with this part of the abbey, and which I think is interesting. In fact it could be worked up for the stage with a little change in the third act. With your permission, I will relate it."

"Pray do," said Harold, touching his hat.

"Every family of consideration," said the young man, "has a skeleton in the cupboard, which it is a point of family honour to keep more or less carefully locked up. In process of time the skeleton comes out and takes its place in the history of the house. My tale is of a skeleton so recent that the bones have scarcely yet had time to dry; in fact, it happened in my father's time, and is connected with that apartment high up in the south tower, the arched doorway of which you see from here, and from which the stairs have fallen, rendering it inaccessible, otherwise we would go up and visit it. The family that owned the particular skeleton of which I speak, was the respectable one of Thorpe, of Thorpe's Thorpe. Those grey gables, which you may observe rising above yonder trees, are the residence of that ancient name. Feud had long existed between the Thorpes and the rival family of Vavassour. What would you have? The only son of the house of Thorpe loved the only daughter of the last lineal descendant of that Gilpin le Vavassour whom William the Norman knighted for having lent him a change of linen.

They say the course of true love never does run smooth, an assertion I take the liberty to doubt. It is *after* true love has run smoothly into matrimony that anxieties arise respecting the butcher and baker. In my legend the course ran so far smooth that Gaston de Thorpe stole away his hereditary enemy's daughter Cleanthé Vavassour. When he got her he did not know what to do with her or where to put her, so he fitted up the chamber you see high up in the tower, and visited her by stealth. Unfortunately he was laid up with brain fever, caused by getting his feet wet in his nocturnal visits, and his prisoned dove was left without food for a fortnight. One night the sick man's father was restless, and, looking from his window, saw a light in the tower of the old abbey. Confident it was poachers, he armed his retainers and sought the turret stair. There, in the prime of youth and beauty, but pale as statuary marble, and as thin as—as anything, lay the Lady Cleanthé, she who ought to have reigned in state in the halls of Thorpe—prostrate at the foot of a crucifix—dead—dead! The old Thorpe, stricken with compunction, cut off his son with a shilling, which he raised on mortgage, the estate being already heavily plunged, and forbade the young man ever to see his face again. Gaston went to the wars, and so distinguished himself that he rose to the rank of Deputy-Assistant Paymaster, and fell in the moment of victory. Mr Thorpe, senior, soon faded away, a broken man,

and the lands passed to a distant relative of the same name, in whose hands they now are. The ghost of Cleanthé is sometimes perceived in the archway of the door, as if looking for the staircase, and in stormy nights a light is seen to glimmer from the loop-hole of the turret. Gentles, my tale is told."

Here the young man bowed dramatically, and took himself off.

"Who is that young gentleman?" asked Harold of the sexton, who at that moment came up.

"Oh, *him!*" replied the official, "he is a writer of serials for the Sunday papers. He is always spinning some fool's yarn or other. If he has been reeling you off any story about the abbey, be sure he made it up out of his own head."

"That can hardly be," said Harold, "for the legend is closely connected with the family of Squire Thorpe, whose house you may see over there among the trees."

"Thorpe! Thorpe!" exclaimed the sexton, "there never were no Thorpes in these parts, and that there house belongs to Mister Gubbins, the malster."

Queenie looked disappointed. Whether or not the *feuilletonist* invented the legend, I cannot say.

Our lovers, for such they evidently were, strolled into another apartment and sitting alone on a grassy mound, resumed their conversation.

"You are chagrined," said Harold to his fair companion, "that the legend we have heard

rests on slender foundation, but I will tell you a true story of an abbey, and this is it:—

“It is not often, my dear Queenie, that when a mighty prince and a priest lay their heads together, they knock out much for the benefit of the human race—”

“Stay!” interrupted Queenie, “you have read this in a book. You should tell me the author’s name. Do I know him?”

“Not likely. His name?—let me see—his name has escaped me;* but, as I was saying, these two, the priest and the prince, laid their heads together, and determined to found an abbey on new principles.”

“Oh! how delightful!”

“Yes. They built it, and it is called the Abbey of Theleme. The establishment is both for ladies and gentlemen, and none are admitted unless they are young and handsome”—(“Oh! indeed!” said Queenie) “—and virtuous. Full dress is insisted on. Costume varies with the season, but in general the ladies dress in a pretty kirtle or varquin of silk, covered with a tabby vardingale, above that again a gold-embroidered jacket, and, over all, upper coats of satin or velvet—”

“How nice!”

“Yes. And their garters are the colour of their bracelets.” (Queenie looked conscious). “Their hats are from Paris and Spain and Tuscany. The winter furs that are most in

* Rabelais.

fashion are hynd-wolves, or speckled lynxes, ermine, martlets of Calabria, sables and other costly pelts, and, of course, sealskin. Jewellery is much worn—diamonds, carbuncles, rubies, baleas, sapphires, emeralds, garnets, agates, berilles and excellent margarites.”

“It must take a fortune to dress.”

“It does. But dress and jewels are provided out of the abbey funds, as being necessaries of life. The building itself is superb and commodious, and each inmate has a drawing-room, an oratory and a boudoir lined with looking-glasses.”

“You describe a palace.”

“Oh no! my dear, you forget that all the abbey residents are virtuous. The men do not make guys of themselves in black coats, but appear in cloth-of-gold jerkins and velvet trunks, each man with a jewelled dagger which he chiefly uses for peeling water-melons and pine-apples. The motto of the abbey is—‘Do AS YOU LIKE HERE,’ and the Church Father from whom I quote says,—‘For this reason when the time comes that any man of the said abbey hath a mind to go out of it, he carries along with him one of the ladies, namely, the one whom he had chosen for his sweetheart, and they are married together. And if they had formerly, in Theleme, lived in good devotion and amity, they do continue therein, and increase it to a greater height in their state of matrimony, and do entertain that mutual love till the very last day of their life

in no less vigour and fervency than at the very day of their wedding."

Here the narrator assumed an aspect of the blackest despair, and added,—

"But why do I tell you this? Alas! *my* fate is foreordained to shut myself up for the brief remainder of my cheerless existence, in the austere and silent monastery of La Trappe, with nothing to eat and drink but disgusting black bread and snow-water, which I am sure will disagree with me, and nothing to wear but a horse-hair dressing-gown that must tickle dreadfully, and no amusement but to hew my own grave in the rock, and no one to we-c-ep when I drop into it."

Queenie started to her feet.

"Oh don't, you horrid! Why should you do this?"

"Because, my dearest Queenie," said the subtle youth, falling on his knees before her, "because I love you! Have you not long seen that my heart is yours? With one word you can change the tone of my life from despair to joy. Queenie, dearest, will you be my Queen, my loved, my honoured wife? Breathe but the one little word 'Yes!'"

The maiden looked down blushing, and musingly.

"Is it true," she said, "that in this place, on new principles, the inmates do entertain mutual love to the very last day of their life?"

"True? of course it is true—true as anything."

"Then, dear," murmured she, "let us go into the Abbey of Theleme."

The loving couple imagined their ears had deceived them, for they certainly thought they heard the clapping of hands all around them as if in applause. And so they did. It was the fairies rejoicing, as they ever do, in the successful issue of true love.

"Hist!" whispered the now engaged Queenie, "I hear voices. Strangers are near, and indeed seem to be occupied much as we are, love. Listen!"

Here through the open gap of the wall two clear, honest voices were overheard."

"—And will you really, really be a good wife to me, Jenny?"

"That I will, John."

"Then that's settled. Give us a bus, old girl, to bind the bargain."

A sound followed, indescribable in type, but which was no doubt the bond required. Just then came from another part of the ruins a clear but somewhat rollicking baritone, carolling,—

"When we dwell on the lips of the lass we adore,
Not a pleasure in nature is miss-ing."

A good many love anthologies were said and sung in Sweetheart Abbey.

CHAPTER XX.

PIPPA'S WEDDING.

As everybody who is anybody has, no doubt, faithfully done his ruins by the aid of a guide-book and a more or less stupid *cicerone*, he or she has most probably visited the remains of the monastic church of St Gudeale, to which I have already referred, and which the vulgar of the neighbourhood persist in calling Sweetheart Abbey.

At the risk of being thought prosy, a word here on ruins. With the prehistoric remains of the Seven Empires and of India and China we have nothing to do, nor with the graceful forms of Greek architecture, any more than with the ruder designs of the Latins. Our remarks are confined to those edifices still standing, whose history stretches back through the Middle Ages. Their vestiges may be briefly cited as the ecclesiastical and the lay. The square, massive keeps and battlemented walls, frowning from almost inaccessible positions and dominating the country around, are typical of the age of oppression and of the mail-clad barons who were the oppressors. Those noble ruffians, whose names and deeds are connected vaguely with heroic story, contented

themselves with house accommodation that would be considered severe in a modern jail. Plunder was the sole object of their lives, and their castles were but as the eyrie of the vulture and the eagle. It was otherwise with the builders of the vast religious foundations, the ruins of which offer a mine of interest to the artist and antiquarian. Always located in the midst of cultivable land where the dependents that clustered in the shadows of the walls might till the soil and advance the arts of peace, these monastic and ecclesiastical establishments were the nucleus around which grew the settled state of society that has come down to our time. While the secular knight or baron was destitute of personal cultivation or refinement, his highest development being but a barbaric ostentation, the spiritual lord was usually cultured in all graces of his era, and his personal tastes and habits were refined. The inmates of the castle lived in the rude *camaraderie* of the robbers' cave; life in the abbey was ameliorated by the refinements that intellect and its amenities produce. While the successful warrior showed his prosperity by adding another line of defences to his stronghold, and increasing the number of his armed retainers, the priest decorated his house with all the adornments of current art. Hence the distinction between the two classes of ruins,—the rude right-angled pile of the laic, and the romance in mortar and stone of the clergy.

The particular abbey among the ruins of which

our scene is laid, is of comparatively recent date, being not more than six or eight hundred years old. Its early chronicles are amissing, for towards the close of the fourteenth century a mob seized and burned the charter-chest, in which were sundry bonds and notes-of-hand of theirs, which they took this summary way of retiring. Being remonstrated with by Abbot Ingulphus, whom they looked on as their chief creditor, they slew him by way of settlement in full. After ransacking the chartulary, they adjourned to the cellars and drunk all the wine—a task which took them a week—besides drowning the cellarer in a butt of wine of Guienne which was too acid to please their palates. A number of Fathers of no importance met their death at the same time, and the spoil (*ex crucifixes and beads*) in horses, mules, cattle, hawks and greyhounds was great. In one of the chambers was found an assortment of women's gear—Calais shawls, Carcasonne fans and vizards, together with tunics of various stuffs; and it has never been clearly explained how they came to be there. The abbot who succeeded Ingulphus laid a fine on the district, and the abbey's strong-box again became plethoric with bonds and mortgages. This Abbot Hilarius was a foreigner who had his nomination from the Pope at Avignon in defiance of the laws of the realm, which circumstance did not so much matter as the king had other affairs to attend to, having just sent the regalia to the pawn-brokers to raise money for invading France, so

that, had the French king captured the English monarch, instead of the English monarch capturing him, the former could not have got the crown of England, but only the pawn-ticket for it. Abbot Hilarius was a sportsman as well as theologian, and was the first to train a caste of owls for night-hawking. He it is who walks, and, it is believed, may be seen about midnight pacing the chapel in a surcoat with hanging sleeves, satin knickerbockers, curled hair with a pigtail, and a hawk on his fist. It need only be further mentioned that the edifice had originally two tall towers, in outline like the twin towers of Notre Dame in Paris; but time had greatly razed them, and the *débris* had fallen on the arched roof (still partly standing) of the chapel, and a sward of short grass had grown on it about forty feet above ground level. This elevated grass plot was a favourite playground of the fairies. I have been thus particular in describing the abbey because of the other events narrated in these Annals which took place therein. But to our tale. It was the hour of noon in the royal fairy bower, in a pleasant locality a mile or two distant from Sweetheart Abbey. Their Majesties were unattended. Oberon lolled on his favourite bank of thyme. Fair Titania reclined, the ideal of grace, on an American rocking-chair that had been made for her by the gnome Xip from a pattern that took first prize at an exposition. A red moss-rose bud and a poet's narcissus, looped together by a spray of smilax, lay on her lap,

where some of the young fays had thrown it in passing (for they all loved her), and an unfinished triangular piece of Berlin wool work, representing Malmaison roses on a turquoise ground, and with a needle sticking in it, with which she had been stitching, had fallen from her slender fingers, for it is an amiable error of her sex that all males have an insatiable craving for worked slippers, a longing that I have only observed among curates. Great, chuckle-headed bumblebees with orange sterns, of the kind recently exported to New Zealand, bummed sleepily about, and the scent of mignonette and jasmine, hanging heavily on the air, made it a perfect nook of drowsihead. The unseen plash of water that was vomited by an absurd leaden image of Dutch extraction into a basin where the open cups of the nymphæ lilies lay made a restful undertone. Trumpet flowers, Antwerp pipes, and other climbing vines, plaited around the stems of half a dozen leafy trees, kept the place in shadow.

"By the way, what is this I hear?" said Oberon. "Little Pippa wants a husband! Lito is the man, of course. Bless me, how those children do grow. I remember having been asked to plant a tree when she was born—an oak, I think—and it cannot be more than thirty feet high. I suppose she is marriageable?"

"I have long seen her pure heart expanding into bloom," replied Titania.

"Dear, dear! how time flies, to be sure. *You* look as young as ever, Titty."

"Don't be foolish," said the Queen, blushing.

Oberon resumed,—

"I can't get over it. Little Pippa of all things. Everything is right with them, I suppose? Parents' consent, and all that? Everything as befits our Court. They will make a plodding kind of a couple."

"All is *en regle*—could not be more so," rejoined the Queen. "As to plodding, Pippa is a romantic puss, and wants to be married in Sweetheart Abbey—that is, if your Majesty assents."

"Of course, of course, my dear," said Oberon, "whatever you wish"—(Titania smiled)—"in reason"—(Titania frowned)—"but you never do wish anything unreasonable"—(Titania gave a little laugh).

Their Majesties continued their conjugal chat, in the course of which Titania observed,—

"How stiff and unchanged are the marriage customs of a certain class. Hundreds of years have taught them nothing new. Really, they are very stupid in love-making. Your Majesty remembers the troubadour tale, how Count Archimbaut wooed the Lady Flamenca?"

Oberon could not say that he did.

"Says the troubadour, 'Here is your bride, Count Guy,' quoth the lady's father; 'take her if you like.' 'Sir,' said Guy Archimbaut, 'if she does not gainsay, I never was so willing to take anything in my life.' Then the lady smiled at Guy and remarked to her parent, 'Sir, one can see that you hold me in your power, as you

give me away so easily; but as it is your will I consent.' Then Archimbaut retired and Flamenca showed no pride, but bade him good-night, saying, 'God be with you.' How like is the same thing after the lapse of seven hundred years or so. One of my Maries overheard an aristocratic couple in Sweetheart Abbey the other day, and these were the exact words of proposal and acceptance,—

"'If such are your sentiments you had better speak to papa.'

"'I have already the duke's sanction.'

"'Then, in that case, of course I must submit.'

"'Thanks, Lady Jane, I daresay we shall rub along very well in double harness.'

"Now, I daresay Lito and Pippa will rub along very well in double harness if your Majesty will indulge their little romance, and let them be married in the abbey. It would gratify us all."

"Certainly, certainly, my dear," said the King, "we will be there."

The summer day waned and evening came. Visitors having all departed, the abbey lay in solitude so far as human presence was concerned. Out of the corn lands to the east rose the full moon, a ball of red fire like a Chinese lantern, and slowly ascended, clearing in colour as it rose, first to amber and then to silvery whiteness—a large round burnished shield, so bright that the shadows it threw were black. The area of greensward, already mentioned as overlying the roof of the chapel, lay in the full light of the

moonshine and shimmered like a sheet of polished silver. Here the fairies had assembled for Pippa's wedding. To a mortal eye the scene would have appeared fantastic. Graceful figures that threw no shadow, moving and shifting gaily on a sheeny platform, high up between the grim old towers, was like nothing actual, but rather seemed a fantasy evoked in an artist's or visionary's dream. It was, however, an assemblage very much alive and very interested in the little drama going forward.

The official ceremony was simple. The Marriage Herald, in his professional tabard, blew a blast on the trumpet, and in a ringing voice called,—

“Stand forth, O Loving Ones!”

At the word, twenty couples, involuntarily acting on the spur of the moment, took a step forward, but remembered in time to retreat bashfully. Then Lito advanced, leading his bride, who sank gracefully at the Queen's feet.

“Rise, child—come, let me kiss thee,” said her Majesty kindly.

The King, who happened to be in one of his pleasant, breezy humours, chucked the blushing bride under the chin and said,—

“Ha! you little rogue, is this what you have been about? Nice girl. Lucky lad, Lito. 'Pon our sacred sceptre, if we were not Oberon we would be Lito, for this night only—*cæteris paribus*—hem!”

I do not think the Queen altogether relished

these remarks of his Majesty, but was too well-bred to show it.

Suddenly recollecting his official character, the King, who, it will be remembered, is also Flamen or High Priest, put on a look such as I have seen in the Courts of country Justices of the Peace, and sternly demanded,—

“Which be the parties?”

The bride and bridegroom were led forward by their smiling maids and grooms, and took their respective places modestly hand in hand. Then his Majesty, in a solemn voice, repeated the marriage service:—

“*Dearly beloved,*

Hand fest ! Live your best !

You, Lito, all your life love your wife !

And you, Pippa, don't be chary

To increase the folk of Faërie !

“Now take good heed to this, both of you, lest it *end in amazement.*”

With this simple but impressive ceremony, Pippa took her place in the matronage of the land.

I have already so fully portrayed the sports of the fairies that I need not describe how on this occasion everybody kissed everybody, and how troops of friends slapped Lito on the back and slyly poked him in the ribs, and quite made Pippa blush by calling her “Missus.” Nor how the pipers piped and the blowers blew, and fiddlers strummed and the drummers rub-a-dubbed. Nor

how the night flew on swiftest wing, and the revels were prolonged joyously till the day broke and the red dorking on the farmer's roof-tree shrilly crew. May the pair be happy! which they will probably the rather be that they were not hand-coupled by a rescript from Geneva or Italy, nor on the strength of a hypocritical document costing five pounds and purporting to come from the Archbishop of Canterbury, greeting, but were united heartfest-and-handfest, in view of their own people, within the hallowed precincts of Sweetheart Abbey.

CHAPTER XXI.

MY NOVEL.

ON one wet, disagreeable day which confined us all to the haunt, it occurred to me that I would write a novel. The task is easy, and, from the proverbially facile nature of publishers, the profits to authors are large. I felt myself qualified for the undertaking. Before I accepted my present position of Annalist, I lived in the capacity of nephew with a relative, and in return did odd jobs about his place. The gentleman was by profession a dealer in waste-paper, and in the course of his business had amassed a large collection of modern fiction, which he had saved from the pulpmakers, and which I read with avidity. The various schools of composition were therefore familiar to me. As a novel is, or ought to be, a premeditated work of art, I proceeded in my design *secundum artem*, according to art, by making a list of the leading styles that have brought fame and fortune to their writers. Of these were—the Goody, not applicable to real life; the Adventurous, “played out” (so to speak) in boys’ papers; purely Historic, never a success; the Religious involved the question, “Which religion?” the Notable Numskull,

adapted only to the serious elderly; the Atheistic, difficult to prevent being at once dull and blasphemous, and mostly written by college girls; the Political was not to be thought of; the Nigger, oppressively prevalent among boot-blacks and newsboys, but among them only; the Detective, so simplified by overdoing that any schoolboy can follow the scent with his nose, and unwind the clue as if from a reel; the Gynarchian—*Eureka!* I had found it. I need seek no farther. The Chivalric tone has had its day; funny men have utterly extinguished wit in the Humorous; the Natural has ceased to exist since syndicates revived Grub Street; but Gynarchy, or Government by Woman, including Gush, is exactly suited to the tone of the time, and in every way adapted to the taste and range of the average typewriter. To her, therefore, I would address myself.

From the fact that I myself was the loyal servant of an Irresponsible Dynasty, it was natural for me to look around for a republic in which to lay my scene, and, need it be said, I found one looming colossally across the Atlantic. Therein lies a city, the rise of which is the most astonishing event which history has produced—namely, that within the brief period of less than three centuries, on the foundation a handful of Dutchmen laid, has arisen a metropolis of commerce and intelligence that excels in magnitude the capitals of Continental Europe founded we know not when, and has outrun them a hundredfold in energy. Here was a magnificent setting for the incidents of My Novel,

and in no other part of the world could those incidents have eventuated with any show of probability, or with such brilliant success.

In carrying out my design, I made my heroine "the elder of the two daughters of a drunken father by an angelic mother. This elder maid, just entering her teens, was Alinda, and her young sister was Fluffie. The father, on his sudden demise, was found to be deeply indebted, chiefly in taprooms, and his elder daughter formed the noble resolution of wiping out these old scores out of her earnings. Backed by her mother (but reading somewhat amiss the adage that 'labour is honourable'), the daughter would not go into domestic service; yet the honest parent, voluntarily and praiseworthy undertaking an amount of household drudgery worse than any slave's, started a men's boarding-house, while Alinda, prescient of the future, held aloof from degrading toil, and continued to cultivate her mind. Fate, however, is the stronger. The bloom faded from the hard-worked mother's cheek, and she died; and Alinda, now in full consciousness of the omnipotence of Cultured Womanhood, felt herself capable of coping with fate, and kept on the boarding-house, although the rent was six months in arrear."

[Having got thus far with my tale, I read it aloud, according to a habit I have, and on looking up saw before me the gnome Tumblebug, seated on a ledge, and listening intently. This is the only gnome who has really some superficial acquaintance

with English literature, though where he picked it up I cannot say, excepting that he has a taste for lurking near educated mortals, and invisibly listening to what they say. At all events he is the last person whom I should wish to have for a collaborator.]

To resume,—“When Alinda took the head of the table, and served out the soup for the first time, it was instantly obvious that there was something ideal in her eyes, which showed a new phase to be opened in the boarders' life history. They felt themselves exalted and refined by the spell of Womanhood. With her advent a new condition of things inaugurated itself—higher, holier. Her bills, made out on gilt-edged paper, were placed in addressed envelopes every Saturday night, and were expected to be promptly paid. Tobacco in any form was put under ban, and if any of the ‘guests’ (as the boarders were now called) wanted beer, they had to go round the corner for it, and eat cinnamon to kill the immoral odour. Wiping boots on the mat was strictly enforced, and, in short, Alinda's establishment ‘combined with refined society all the comforts of a home.’ Her advertisements said so.

“Among the resident guests was a wholesome, broad-faced young man, Rodolph Plowshear by name, from the rural districts, but who had a situation in a shop, where he was esteemed by his employers for his business steadiness and obtuseness to all the finer emotions. He was a silly, good-natured lad, somewhat given to telling long,

pointless stories, at which no one laughed much but himself. On one memorable occasion he was in the middle of one of his prolonged laughs, when the Irish help—whom her new mistress had recently dignified with a French appellation—I do not know whether it was *ici! suivante* or *hold! quelq'une*, but it sounded like that—tapped him on the crown of the head with a spoon, and notified him that Miss Alinda required his attendance in her boudoir. Roddy (as his fellow-boarders called him for short) blushed all over, pushed back his chair awkwardly, grasped his hat from the sideboard, and followed the *souvante*.

“Arrived in the boudoir up three pair back, he found the lady of the mansion gracefully reclining in a rocking-chair. Motioning him with a queenly gesture to a seat, she fixed her calm, contemplative eyes on him, as he sat with his tall hat between his knees, and feeling in all his bones that if he had not been conscious his board was paid up to date, he would have sunk through the floor.

“‘What is your salary, Mr Rodolph?’ said she at length, with a masculine firmness of mien.

“‘Fifteen dollars a week, miss,’ replied Rodolph, meekly.

“‘I have decided to change my condition, and have done you the honour to select you,’ continued the glorious creature, still fixing him with her eyes.

“‘But, miss,’ stuttered the terror-stricken youth, ‘I have—not—made up—my mind—’

“‘That is of no consequence,’ said Alinda, sweetly; ‘may I trouble you to touch the bell?’

“Like one in a dream he obeyed, and Bridget appeared, to whom the lady remarked,—

“‘Go to the clergyman next door, and request him to step here.’

“In very brief time a dissolute-looking man appeared, who tied the knot, pocketed the fee, and disappeared. Then Alinda, with that fine administrative talent that is inherent in the cultured of her sex, took Rodolph’s arm, and leading him downstairs to the apartment in which the boarders still sat chatting, introduced him as her husband, and further intimated that wedding gifts would now be in order.

“From that date began Rodolph’s experiences of the realities of life. The spoons, knives and forks, crockery and table linen, were handed over to his care; he was shown the coal-hole, the ice-house, and the pump, and was instructed to build the fires each morning, because Bridget, being a domestic and not a servant, refused to do it. He was sent on errands, and rated if he lingered by the way. In short, he fell into the groove which Providence in its reconstruction of society intends man to fill. What with his daily ten hours at the shop, and several hours night and morning at home, his whole time was occupied with household drudgery. What he took the most unkindly to was being forced to hand over his salary of \$15 a week to his liege lady every Saturday night. Formerly he had paid her \$6 weekly for board, and now it cost

him thrice that amount, with galling tasks imposed on him besides. He could not in his own mind see the propriety of this. Alinda, however, was a generous creature, and allowed him half-a-dollar a week to expend in works of art.

“Relieved from the minor cares of housekeeping, Alinda, still under her maiden name, made a dash at public life. Her first venture was, as a matter of course, recitations:—‘Come into the garden, Maud,’ and ‘Enoch Arden.’ Equally, of course, she next essayed the Prohibition and Women’s Rights platform, whereon she made a triumphant success. Money flowed in on her. She dressed superbly, and denied herself nothing, and sold the boarding-house. Thereafter she instituted a psychotheurgic salon, and twice a week gracefully received the fashionable world, who wanted to know what that study meant. Woman’s flight in her own empyrean could go no higher. She never allowed Rodolph the *entrée* to any of her receptions, but made him sit up for her on her evenings out, which her servants would not do. Fluffie was entered at the Conservatory of Music, with the intention of bringing her out as Signorina Lila-bulera.

“Leaving Rodolph at home on board wages, Mdme. Alinda went to the recent gathering of women of all nations at Chicago, U.S.A., and was there unanimously elected to a conspicuous post. Thereafter, her fame was world-wide. The only disappointment she met with was, that when she tried to run Roddy for Congress, on the ground that

he was *her* husband, he failed to receive a nomination. The Advanced Sisterhood, however, took the matter up, and by dint of lobbying and other political arts in which they had become experts, petitions with many thousand signatures were poured upon the Government, demanding that a lady-nominee of the Woman cause should be appointed to the command of the army, and the nominee's young sister, aged seventeen, who had so highly distinguished herself on platforms as champion of Compulsory International Arbitration, be given the navy, with rank of Grand Admiral. The measure, however, *for the present*, was not carried, but received a large legislative vote, and confident hopes are entertained that another session may see it become law.

"Having now full time to devote to platform and committee work, her splendid intellect and magnetic personality gave her an influence far exceeding that of any empress, or queen, or reigning duchess on earth. Men feared her—at which she rejoiced—but no other lady ever so reigned in the hearts of her countrywomen."

[The number of pages allotted by publishers being nearly exhausted, it became necessary to wind up my story with a dramatic finale—which I did in this wise:—]

"Bridget confessed to Rodolph that when she was sent to fetch a clergyman, she could not find one, but took the first man that came to hand. He chanced to be a travelling tinman, who undertook the job for the sake of the fee. Consequently there

had been no marriage and the supposed husband was free as air. Rodolph leaped up with a joyful shriek, kissed Bridget, seized his hat and rushed from the premises. He never came back. When last heard of he had taken passage for Corea, intending to run the blockade. How dreadful must have been the moral state of a man who could so throw off woman's beneficent guidance!"

Here ended my Gynecian novel. Having carefully sealed the manuscript and hidden it in the cleft of a rock that served me for *escritoire*, attendance on his Majesty occupied me for some days. On again being at leisure, I sent the packet by the hands of a countryman to the nearest post-office, addressed to a publisher, and with stamps for return postage, should it (which was unlikely) be deemed unsuitable.

Time hung heavy on my hands for weeks, with great anxiety of mind, until at length the same countryman brought me from the post-office a package seemingly of equal bulk with the one I had sent. Opening it nervously, my eye fell on a printed slip which said,—"*Declined with thanks. It is understood that this evasion is not founded on the literary demerit of the MS. Our Reader's report is enclosed.*" The fatal enclosure was as follows:—

(Marginal notes pencilled on MS.)

"MS., page 185. The incident of Alinda hitting her husband on the head with a frying-pan, is perhaps more infrequent in domestic circles than the writer would make out in the context.

"Page 201. To enlarge that the heroine's uncle was a pawnbroker does not seem essential.

"Page 367. The writer ought to have consulted the Dress Reform Association before exposing his ignorance. The divided skirt is not put on over the head. Quite the contrary.

"Page 403. Here is one of those lapses that genius higher than the writer's inadvertently falls into, but very corruptive of public morals. Rodolph's salary had been raised from \$15 to \$17 a week, yet he deliberately conceals the fact, handing over only the former amount to his wife, and applying the balance to his own uses. This is teaching so insidious a lesson to married men in shops and offices, that the publication of this MS. cannot be recommended."

I was paralysed. The shock inflicted on my feelings by this heartless scroll was very severe. I was completely mystified by these references to passages that I was confident I had never written. Truth at last flashed on me. During my necessary attendance on the King, that villain Tumblebug had opened the parcel and added several chapters!

CHAPTER XXII.

MIDSUMMER EVE.

ON a rugged coast, the latitude and longitude of which need not here be specified, but where the long roll of the North Atlantic is smashed into spray that flies three hundred feet high on the granite cliffs, a round-topped head juts like a promontory. Here engineers, not by faith alone but by dynamite and other superhuman powers, are engaged in performing the miracle alluded to in Scripture, and are casting a mountain into the sea. Locally the head is called the Tor.

The formation of the Tor is peculiar. In form it resembles a giant knob of treeless green with a bald crown. The body of the hill up to the bald spot is covered with a short sheep-sward, so shallow, that were you to dig a turf you would come to the underlying rock, yet flocks, belonging to the farmers below, find sustenance on it during the summer. Half way down, the hill is terraced naturally into stairs or plateaux, while towards its base it becomes still steeper and broken with ravines in which brooks, which occasionally swell into torrents, tumble, and along their banks larches grow. Midway up, great excavations

have been opened, baring the rock's bones, and at their base black pools of water accumulate. All day at intervals, horns sound, followed by explosions from which avalanches of stone hurl down the slides to the plain beneath, whence the blocks, partly prepared or in the rough, are hauled to their destination. Enormous rocks piled in confusion, heaped-up *debris* and mounds of splinters make the quarries look like the scene of a battle of Titans among "the tumbled fragments of the hills." The men who work there are a race of giants. No others could endure the severe physical toil. Stalwart, bearded men are they who swing their ponderous hammers and drills as if playthings. Their rude dwellings of one low storey of undressed stone are built on a higher plateau, out of the range of flying splinters.

Several years before the opening of our tale, a respectably-clad woman of middle age, who held by the hand a child of about four years of age, whom she called by the pretty English name of Bessy, came to the quarrymen's village at the foot of the Tor, and took possession of a deserted two-roomed cottage which had been secured for her by the itinerant Methodist preacher who served the spiritual wants of the locality. She was a respectable person, but profoundly silent as to her antecedents. Some pittance of an annuity came to her quarterly, but as the rent of her cottage was less than two pounds per annum, she managed to eke out a living by knitting and other woman's work. From the

age of four years, little Bessy had a sweetheart in the shape of a sturdy, round-faced boy called Bill, without other name, employed in the quarries. From the first glimpse he had of the little maiden, love's refining influences permeated that boy. Her first toy was of his manufacture—a go-cart constructed on the model of the massive trucks with solid wheels used for hauling huge blocks of stone. A few years later he bought her a canary in a cage, the price having been accumulated by putting saved pennies down the chimney of a tin save-all house with the word "Bank" painted on the door. At the age of ten or twelve Bessy had become useful by guiding tourists to nooks on the hill where "rare" ferns grew, which were afterwards found to be common to all parts of the country. Thus she lived until the age of eighteen, helping her mother and leading a blameless life. Then the mother died, her annuity dying with her, and the young girl was homeless.

Bill meantime had got on in the world. At first he had a small charge to keep tally, serve out powder, and keep the blasters from smoking pipes in the magazine, give account of the quota and repair of tools and see to things generally, but at the time of this story had risen to be foreman. His old mother lived with and looked on him still as a boy. In many respects, such as simplicity of character, ingenuous truthfulness and warmth of affections, he was, in truth, all that boys should be but seldom are. When Bessy's mother died, there

was no affectation in that primitive community that the orphan should mourn her loss for a year. Bill was the girl's beau, and therefore he ought to marry her out of hand. Accordingly, nothing loth, he sent for the preacher, who spliced the pair in a trice. The bridegroom's comrades slapped him on the back and shook hands, while the bride's friends gave her little presents of nightcaps with enormous frills, cotton handkerchiefs, aprons, and ends of ribbon; one elderly dame, more provident than the rest, giving a pound of tea; while another old lady, ahead of her era, anticipated time by bestowing a pin-cushion which said in solid-headed pins, "Welcome, little stranger." Arm-in-arm the young couple walked up the hill to the cottage where the bridegroom's mother kept open house for the day in a way that outdid anything that had ever been done on the hill. The thirty-two printed lines of this page would not suffice to catalogue the varieties of cakes—short, long, round, square, rhomboidal, polygonal, fruit, sugar, treacle and criss-cross buns—not to mention a barrel of ale on tap in the corner, free to all comers. When day fell, and the quarrymen had knocked off work, they came in a body around the door of the new-married couple and demanded a speech; which was given, and as it possessed a quality not common in contemporary oratory (that it carried the audience with it), it is worthy of preservation:—

BILL'S SPEECH.

"Mates! and you women over there! I'm not much of a jawing man—but I've gone and got me a wife—(*laughter*). And a good wife she be. (*Cries of "True for you, Bill!" "Bonny lass!" etc.*) Mates! and you women over there! me and my wife is glad to see ye—(*applause*). Men, there's a plenty of good lasses adown the vale; and you go and ask 'em, and see if they say No. Not they!—(*laughter*). Mates! me and my bonny lass is glad to see ye. Men! I'm not much hand at a jaw nor yet a heavy-drinking man neither, and the ale's done—clean cup cut—(*marked symptoms of disapprobation*). But when ye next go to the town you go to the 'Quarryman's Arms' and you drink a brace o' pots apiece and score it to me—(*joyous manifestations*). Mates! all on you! and you wenchers over there! me and my lass is glad to see ye." (*Cries of "Good enough, Bill. Let's gi'e him a hup—hip! hip! hooraw! hup!" in the midst of which popular ovation the married couple retired, both covered with blushes.*)

The pair lived happily and in due time a daughter was born to them, whom they named Bessy, after the mother. The growth and development of that baby punctuated the parents' life. The first time it "took notice," the first time it grasped a coral, the cutting of its first tooth, were all epochs, and the memorable time when the infant toddled across the floor to its

father, an era looked back to and dated from. An infant is generally "mother's child" or "father's babe." Little Bessy was essentially father's child. The whole soul of the male parent was wrapt up in the small friend whom he had left at home, when he went to his work on the hill.

When the little girl grew big enough to stray about alone, her favourite resting-place was a stone bench at the cottage door, facing the direction in which father would come. Here she would await patiently, amusing herself with her toys or peering over the steps she had traversed in the thorny path of literature—"Pa-pa, papa; c-a-t, cat; d-o-g, Flora," for that was the name of a pretty King Charles spaniel that some tourist had lost, and which the quarryman who found it had given to Bill's little lass. As soon as she saw her father's hat topping the rise about a hundred yards off, she would run to him with all speed and climb up on him as on a tower, and be carried back to the cottage in his protecting arms. Under the watchful care she met with she ought to have thriven, but had grown somewhat languid of late, and there was a want of elasticity in her motions. She never complained of illness, and with the blindness that over-affection sometimes produces, the fond parents observed nothing amiss. Some of the Goodys shook their heads and said she would never make old bones. There was a weary, wistful look in her eyes, which at length became habitual. She would often sit for a long time silent and motionless, as in what, in an older

person, would be called reverie. When asked if anything ailed her she would answer she was sleepy. Had old Dr Doss, who had attended her mother, been alive, a glance would have told him that Bill's little Bessy was fading away.

On one midsummer eve the child, from some inexplicable whim, insisted on being dressed in her white frock. The mother, ever indulgent, gratified the harmless fancy, and decked her in her pretty white dress, smiling to think what a surprise it would be to father to see his pet in holiday costume. About a quarter of an hour before sunset, little Bessy, so attired, took her usual station on the bench to watch for her father's return. The mother, knowing that the dress was thin, wrapped her carefully in a shawl and returned indoors. Flora, the spaniel, lay beside its young mistress. Precisely as the sun sank below the horizon the familiar burly form appeared, but no little maid ran to meet him. Disquieted, but not alarmed by her absence, he quickened his pace, and, on reaching the threshold, was met by his wife, who asked,—“Where is Bessy?” “Is she not here?” cried he, vaguely fearing he knew not what. Explanations ensued, and the distracted father rushed forth, exclaiming,—“Great God! the child is lost!”

Instant alarm was conveyed to the nuts, and instantly the whole population turned out. No one had seen the missing child. Yet only twenty minutes before she had been sitting by the door singing softly to herself. She could not have

wandered far in the short time that had elapsed since her disappearance. The sympathising men of the quarry scattered in all directions, calling on the child's name, while a few of the women went to the cottage to comfort the bereaved mother with their presence. They were practical fellows, those quarrymen, accustomed to act in concert; therefore it took no time to organise in gangs, each to take a different space, and to signal by blowing a horn if any trace of the lost was discovered. The face of the Tor was (as already described) diversified by terraces covered with green sward, on the highest of which the workmen's huts were built. The terrace next below held no habitations. The third or lowest overhung the quarries, and was seamed by blasting, with deep, dark pools at the base, and so steep that no living thing might fall over and live. The day had been of that close, sultry atmosphere which causes the twilight to be dark, and the stars seem to give less than their usual light. An hour of anxious search had passed when the heart of everyone thrilled at the sound of a horn, that being the signal of any trace of the lost child, alive or dead. Following the sound and rapidly closing in, the searchers found themselves on the second plateau, and there beheld, not the child, but her little dog, whining piteously and scratching at the base of a mound that rose from the level. The creature's behaviour was inexplicable. Other dogs had already been put on the search, but they seemed unable to find a

scent, and barked aimlessly. Lanterns were now brought, and parties under experienced leaders set out to examine every inch of the ground. Some even ascended to the summit, although there was no probability that she could have wandered so far. All night lights moved along the face of the Tor, and the shouts of men continued to call to each other, but no sound of a horn to give hope that the lost one was found. Fear deepened into certainty that her body lay at the bottom of one of the cruel pools.

Leaving the men to continue their search, we must here make a digression respecting the remarkable incident that really did befall the child. The attentive reader cannot fail to be aware that my office as Annalist necessitates residence at headquarters in close personal attendance on the King. Consequently I was not one of the company on the occasion of the little maid's adventure; but it was faithfully related to me by a reliable gnome who was there, and I crave leave to describe it as if I had myself been present and seen it. Heaven only knows what are illusions and what are realities—or, to put it in plainer language, what illusions are, and wherein do they differ from realities. Can the most observant mad-doctor vouch that the fantastic and unseen company that his patient converses with are not present in actuality? Who shall unriddle the mystery of the events of dreams? No weak mind should even pursue the inquiry whether we ourselves *are*. So many

things had better be taken for granted. I do not know whether the things I am about to describe were or were not. All I can do is to tell the tale as 'twas told to me.

An encampment of fairies, then, under a prefect, subject, of course, to King Oberon, had from time immemorial held the Tor as their home. When the hill was first invaded by engineers, the hammering and blasting alarmed them much, and they prepared to emigrate; but finding the disturbance was confined to one part of the steep, and, moreover, that the men who made the turmoil were simple, ignorant people, who believed in fairies, and would not willingly offend them, they concluded to stay, and soon became as accustomed to explosions as are vine-growers on the slopes of Vesuvius. Midsummer Eve is a high festival with the fairy folk. On this eve there was gala in an immense granite cavern, glittering with crystals of feldspar, in the heart of Tor. Artificial illumination there was none, but light seemed to emanate from the crystals, even as a diamond which has been exposed to the sun's rays will for some time emit light when taken into the dark. On ledges that here and there jutted with surfaces of glistening quartz the prismatic colours glowed or threw patches of silvery sheen as moonlight on the water does. The air was equable and cool, and the *tout ensemble* at once dazzlingly beautiful, chaste and delightful.

In this palatial hall were assembled many of

the society fairies of the district. His Excellency the Prefect was in presence in full feather, consequential and pury, as well as the stately dame, his spouse, who bears the honorary title of Archiwif, and is addressed as Your Goodness. Both were making themselves vastly agreeable, as it is the duty of the great to do. A group of fair young fays were conversing with the lady patroness, and one said,—

“May it please Your Goodness, % is the loveliest child! Alas! that the rose already in bud will bloom on her bier.”

“Woe for poor mortality,” sighed the lady, gently.

“Woe, indeed,” returned the fay, “for this child is so bound up in human affections. Her father—a strong man—dreams not of the impending sorrow. It will kill him. May it please you, we have sent for the child. Have we your forgiveness?”

“Good girls!” said the lady, “you have done well.”

A little buzz of excitement here arose as two lovely fairies advanced, leading the lost little Bessy by the hand. The child in her white frock herself looked like a fairy, but to the prescient lore of the aërial people death was written in her dark, wistful eyes. Her cheek had not altogether lost its roundness, but the complexion was of that semi-transparency that indicates the wheels of life are lagging to a standstill. The lady looked at her compassionately, and extended her hand.

“Welcome, little one,” she said. “Is it well with thee, child?”

"I want my mama," said Bessy.

"Thou shalt have thy mama. Wilt thou love me?" continued the lady, looking very motherly as she said it.

The little mortal took one of those shrewd glances that show in a child, however young, an instinctive appreciation of character, and replied,—

"Yes, ma'am, please."

Here the Archiwif nodded to a group of fairy children who were hovering with great curiosity about the stranger, and they immediately closed around her and bore her off, well pleased, in their midst.

Having, according to programme, from sunset to midnight unbroken for amusement, the assembly separated into festal groups and followed their various pleasures without restraint. The children, with Bessy among them, were especially merry. Fruits acceptable alike to fairy and mortal mouths, and that had been abstracted from the glass-houses of a mortal market-gardener, were in abundance, as well as drinks compounded from the honey of bees and the ichor of flowers. Banks of wild blooms set in moss were likewise there, with wealth of hot-house exotics borrowed from a florist without his leave. Then there were rocking-horses so like real ponies that they ran about of themselves, and dolls that not only squeaked when you compressed them, but did it voluntarily. And such games! goosey gander and eight white mice and cat's cradle—the eldest girl among them relating a rather doubtful story of a cat who went

to a shoemaker and ordered two pairs of topboots, and had many adventures in them. Dancing, however, was the main amusement of these indefatigable little persons—in fact all the company danced. The Archiwif and her set mainly confined themselves to the stately minuet, which they walked through with all the suavity and grace of the *haut cours*, but did not disdain to take part in contra dances. The young buffos of the party hauled out partners, and flung their limbs about in eightsome reels and jigs, the while the couples who had reached the age of deportment revolved in the orbit of slow valse. His Excellency was a model patron. Blandly laying aside the terrors of his official position, he moved among the company, saying a kind word here, patting a young hoyden's cheek there, exchanging gallant compliments with the ladies generally, and slapping the men on the shoulder as if he had not a care. *But he had.* One would think the lot of a fairy of such high rank would be exempt from anxiety; but no! nothing lives that is completely void of care. Care is the penalty for being. Perhaps the bird on the bough, when it sees the woodland turning first golden and then sere, has a natural anxiety as to how it will pass the winter, or may have doubts whether its wing is strong enough for the long migration to summer lands. Even the flower may have to think twice before putting forth its bud in view of coming weather. The gnawing anxiety that tortured the worthy Prefect was, *he was afraid he was growing fat!* In his youth he

had been noted as a successful lady-killer, which he rightly attributed to the agility of his figure and the slimness of his waist, not to mention his moustachios, so sharp and stinglike; but now, oh, horror! his waist had disappeared, and threads of grey were mingled with his hair. Himself sensitively conscious of these misfortunes, he had the fatuous idea, common to elderly gentlemen, that no one perceived the change but himself. As his agility waned he became the more solicitous to display it. Hence it was (and being really a personage of much *bonhomme*), he selected Bessy for his partner in the dance, and led her to the floor, calling loudly—"A hall! a hall!" and ordering the musicians to "strike up!" Great applause followed the pleasant whim, and a ring was quickly formed to witness the performance. Bessy had no idea of "steps," but ran about in the circle like a young fawn, the Prefect gyrating around her in a rapid *deux temps*, she occasionally stopping to laugh up at her pursy partner, who thereupon would leap perpendicularly a yard or so high, and come down with a thud scarcely to be expected from one so light of substance as a fairy. The little maid enjoyed it immensely, and would have danced till now (as we read that mortals do when they tread a measure with a fairy), had not failing breath induced the elderly terpsichorean to bring the exercise to a close, which he did with a graceful bow, amid prolonged congratulations. One matron in a turban, who would have been sorely offended had you not deemed her still young, remarked, "Really, for a man

of his time of life, the dear Prefect dances well. I remember I opened a ball with him in the year that some nation or other, I forget which, fought some silly battle somewhere, called, I think, Trafalgar."

At this point the cheery bustle gradually subsided, and a certain degree of solemnity seemed to steal over the assemblage. The musicians took post on the upper projections and coigns of vantage, while the scattered groups drew together in the centre of the hall. Imperceptibly, and without any mustering of marshals, the company arranged itself in the outline of a seven pointed star, the Vice Court in the centre, and awaited. Fairies are so free from engagements that they do not carry watches, yet precisely at the moment when midnight began to peal from the clocks of cities in that latitude, and at the exact instant when Time had climbed the apex of the year, and his future course would be downward to its close, the pury Prefect pronounced these words in a tone at once solemn and glad,—"*All good spirits, praise the Lord!*"

Then the music sounded, and from every throat swelled the cadence of a glad choral hymn, a grateful anthem. I cannot tell the words of this song of praise, but it expressed a joyous thankfulness to the Maker and Lord of all. The strain swelled into a volume of adoration, that rose and broke in a spray of sound on the vault of the roof, whence being thrown back into mid-air, it undulated and reverberated, awaking echoes that seemed the voices of other sympathising

beings joining in the rite. This was true worship, all joyous, nowise sad. An outburst of thankfulness for life and happiness enjoyed, and a humble acknowledgment of gratitude that they were indeed the creatures of the one Creator, and the cared-for work of His hand.

The rite was over and the sports of the night were resumed. Little Bessy, knowing nothing of the words or object of the hymn of adoration, had joined in it with her childish treble, and was now drooping and tired. The kindly Prefect observed this and gruffly demanded, "What d'ye mean by keeping the child out of bed at this hour of the morning?" At the word, two or three gnomes disappeared, but ere long again became visible with a sackful of soft moss, besides sheets and a coverlet and pillows, that some family would doubtless miss. With these materials, a number of the young matrons made a snug bed in a niche of the wall for sleepy Bessy, and tucked her in, with a filmy veil belonging to the Archiwif looped up for a curtain. Then, one after another, they kissed her, in the midst of which she fell asleep, and who shall say that her dreams were not rosy?

The fairy revels continued with unabated pleasure until the first slanting ray of the rising sun struck the top of Tor—which in that latitude and longitude was precisely fourteen minutes and thirty-three seconds past four o'clock—when in an instant the music ceased, the company disappeared, the light went out and the whole pageant vanished like the fabric of a dream.

Meantime, the searchers had spent the whole night in traversing the hill, but the wheels of labour cannot stand still, and in the morning the men had to return to their work. The wretched father was in a state of distraction that rendered him unfit for anything. Actuated by kindly motives, some of his fellow workmen accompanied him to his dwelling, but when they came within sight of it, they stood still with astonishment as if turned into the granite of Tor itself. For there on the bench by the door lay little Bessy in her white frock, wrapped in her mother's shawl, with the first level ray of sunrise shining on her calm sleep, and her little dog curled up at her feet! Joy succeeded amazement, and was testified by blasts of horn-blowing that might have awakened the seven sleepers. One old workman, the Nestor of the quarry, but quite able to give odds in a game of fisticuffs, absolutely shuddered with awe as he uncovered his head and whispered, "Midsummer eve, she has been with the fairies." Father and mother rushed out and caught their recovered darling to their hearts. The little maid looked dreamily up and said, "Mamma, where are the children and the angels?"

A few days and the life of little Bessy closed peacefully. The too early flower had faded. On the green mound where she lies are always mourning violets, planted by no mortal hand, and if you visit the hill, you may see the cyclopean wall of granite that fences the grave of the little girl who was taken by the fairies.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THUS pleasantly flowed my life in Faërie. My position as Royal Annalist, being a Government office, was virtually a sinecure, and left a good deal of time loose for my own pursuits. Study in the sciences was unattainable, unless it might be in botany, for which there were facilities; but I question if the flower-loving fairies would have permitted vivisection of their floral favourites with no better reason to offer for such cruelty than that a child dissects her doll to see if it is stuffed with sawdust. Therefore I was driven into other fields of research. In the course of my official duty at Court, I had large opportunities of observing the human race, and, from my observations, came to the conclusion that where the proletariat are dragged off the streets and forcibly educated under one ironclad system they are trained down to one dead level of smartness, from which grow, as plants from seed, self-conceit, sham, falsity, greed, venality and dishonesty, especially in public affairs, for all sense of honour is educated out of them.

Such being the case, I naturally turned my attention to political economy with a view to frame a social constitution which would preserve the best features of historic experience, and render impossible any dangerous innovation. Herein, at length, was scope for my powers. My theory assumed as a basis the Commonwealth of Plato, but under a chief officer, to be called the To-Agathon, or Tyrant. The principle of heredity was also provided for in a manner that would preclude any break in the dynasty. Fully impressed with the evils that arise from a people attempting to govern themselves, my scheme provided a common-sense remedy, for, inasmuch as the *phrenesis* and *dikaïosyne* of young and ardent rulers are apt to range through a wide latitude, I proposed giving the Sovereign Rule to

THE OLDEST INHABITANT,

with succession to the next highest in years, who, on the now recognised principle of the Survival of the Fittest, must naturally know more of the affairs of the realm than anybody else, and whose *sophrosyne*, resulting from age, would necessarily tend to that state of doing nothing which is, after all, the perfection of government, and which is so closely acted on in the subordinate departments of existing administrations. I drew up this theory in a little *prolegomena* and sent it to the opposition organ in a rising nation, where, I am told, it was received with much acceptance

by thinkers. Thus, as I have said, my life was gliding pleasantly, when the Chancellor (whom I always hated because he was jealous of my superior attainments) summoned me to instant interview with the King. Let me be candid enough to admit that the faults of Oberon are only those of a governing mind; that is to say, he instantly decides from imperfect premises, and acts thereon with a promptness that closes the case. Arrived in presence, his Majesty was pleased to ask, in a very crusty tone of voice, what the deuce I meant by sending stuff (he called it stuff!) to the papers? I respectfully attempted to explain to him the true bases of the solidarity of peoples, but he merely made a gesture showing an intention not to be convinced, and exchanged a shrug with the Chancellor, on whose crafty countenance it pained me to note the grin of triumph so characteristic of a vulgar mind. Finally, the King deigned to add, that if my resignation were sent in within an hour it would be accepted—casually mentioning that he had appointed as my successor a college professor, who had lost his chair because he declined to admit the Mosaic cosmogony. The resignation of my post as Royal Annalist of the High Court of Oberon was sent in within the time specified. I think his Majesty afterwards regretted my dismissal, for he bestowed on me the white ribbon of the Order of Gloriana, which decoration, on the few occasions I wore it on earth, caused me to be mocked and asked sarcastically if I were a

King's Daughter? He further tendered a testimonial under the seal of Chancery, which I respectfully declined, as it would only have lowered me to the level of advertising soap-sellers.

The affectionate leave-taking and hearty good wishes of my Faërie friends of the Common Class will never be forgotten by me. Sadly taking my staff and scrip, I turned a last fond look on Faërie, with its interesting people, whom I shall never see again, and plodded on my way towards my native vale. The next thing I remember is that I awoke as if from a dream, and found myself lying under the plane tree in the scallop-shaped dell where I had first met the little gentleman. Meantime, in my quiet way, I am happy. I shall never marry. The surpassing loveliness of the fays has blunted my taste for mortal beauty. Sometimes, in my wanderings, I meet the fairies' dog. He knows me, but is afraid to testify acquaintance; so, when I say to him "Tycho! poor fellow! poor fel!" he gazes at me with a mournful expression, and with a long howl takes to the woods. The brute evidently thinks I am under the ban of the empire.

THE END.

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