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THE TALE OF LAL

A FANTASY

BY

RAYMOND PATON

AUTHOR OF "THE DRUMMER OF THE DAWN"

BRENTANO'S CHAPMAN & HALL LTD.
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AN EXPLANATION AND AN APOLOGY

Upon behalf of Ridgwell and Christine the author has been urged to explain that three things—facts, common-sense, and probability—have of necessity been throughout entirely omitted in relating this story. The children, however, have comforted the author by declaring that these particular things are not required at all in any book of the present day, but are merely an old-fashioned survival of the past, which is gradually dying out.

One of the sole remaining examples we possess of fact, common-sense, and probability being the celebration of the 5th of November, which has somehow become a day of national thanksgiving, and is without doubt one of the most important dates in the calendar, and very dear to the hearts of the English people.

A PREFACE

The aspect of Trafalgar Square, like everything else in the world, depends largely upon how it is viewed, and through whose eyes it is seen.

A Japanese artist, for instance, visiting London, immediately selected Trafalgar Square seen by night-time as a subject for a picture. He thoughtfully omitted any suggestion of either omnibuses, taxi-cabs, or the populace.

He likewise decided that all the statues were most unpicturesque, and the varied and flashing electric advertisements to be seen hung up on high around the Square were not only hideous but impossible.

Consequently this imaginative being flung upon his canvas a mysterious blue space, void of anything save the brilliantly coloured lanterns of his own land, swung upon bamboo poles, trembling in the darkness at picturesquely convenient distances. The effect was quite beautiful, but of course it could not in any way be considered as a reasonable likeness of this particular Square.

A French artist also selecting this portion of London for a picture, determined at once that it would be more becoming, not to say diplomatic, to paint only one end of the low stone wall surrounding the Square; yet entertaining doubts afterwards that it might not perhaps be recognised, he added the central stone cupola of the National Gallery, appearing over all like a hastily bestowed blessing, but covered the remaining space upon his canvas with imaginary stalls of glowing flowers, and even more imaginary flower-sellers. His picture was greatly admired, and very much resembled the Market Square in Havre upon a Monday morning.

A Spanish artist chancing to pass the same way, likewise hastily completed a picture of Trafalgar Square as he wished to see it, adding by way of a decorative effect a lattice-work of trellised vines like unto his beloved vineyards of Andalusia. Dwarf oranges grew in profusion and hung their coloured golden globes over the squat stone walls. A brilliant Southern sun beat upon both, baking the walls red-hot and ripening the oranges at one and the same time. This picture the artist named Trafalgar Square when the Sun Shines.

A Cubist painter, not to be outdone with regard to his point of view of such a subject, covered an immense canvas with wonderful heaving squares of ochre and green, viewed from a background suggesting endless mud. This suggestion, however, may have been in the nature of a small tribute to the usual condition of the London streets. This production which the Cubist artist was optimistic enough to name simply Trafalgar Square, was instantly bought by a famous geologist, who to this day indulges in the beautiful belief that he possesses the only indication of what this particular portion of the world was like before ever the earth was made.

Last of all arrived a Futurist painter, who painted *everything* in Trafalgar Square, and nothing that did *not* appear in it. The painter, however, selected a really wonderful aspect of the Square, seen from a most strange angle, a sort of bird's-eye view of it, which could only have been obtained from a balloon. So remarkable was the perspective that the entire Square, as seen in the picture, appeared as if it were being gradually drawn sideways up to Heaven. The great Nelson column and all the four lions could be viewed simultaneously, and the artist had painted *all the four lions alike*.

Now a Writer whose chambers overlooked Trafalgar Square, and who was acquainted with its every aspect, by night as well as day, knew full well that the Futurist artist was wrong when he painted all the four lions *alike*. The Writer knew that one Lion was totally different from all the others; so the Writer smiled and kept his own counsel.

I will wait, said the Writer, until somebody else has made the same discovery that I have made. I will remain completely silent concerning one square patch of fairyland placed within the very hub and centre of the Universe, within the busiest part of a great city. When some other traveller finds the key to the mystic place, we shall both discover it is possible to talk about something which nobody else understands, and be enabled to compare notes.

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BOOK I

WHAT RIDGWELL AND CHRISTINE DECLARED

CHAPTER I

THE PLEASANT-FACED LION

Ridgwell always told Christine afterwards that he thought the Lion first spoke to him in Trafalgar Square, the day when he was lost in the fog.

Ridgwell never knew how he became separated from the rest, but like all other unpleasant experiences it was one step, so to speak, and there he was, wandering about lost. The fog appeared to have swallowed up the friends he had been walking with a moment before; he could only hear voices as if people were talking through a gramophone, and see looming black shadows which did not seem to be accompanied by any bodies; then whack—he walked right into something big which did not move. At this point Ridgwell was seriously thinking about commencing to cry.

"Stop that," said a gruff voice.

"What?" faltered Ridgwell.

"Going to cry."

"I am not sure," said Ridgwell, "that I was."

"I am," said the gruff voice. "I saw the corners of your mouth go down. Now can you climb up? No, of course you can't, you are too small. Here, catch hold of my paw! There you are!" grunted the Lion, when Ridgwell was seated safely. "You just fit nicely; all the children fit in here. Knock those rolled-up policemen's capes off, they annoy me every day when they put them there. They tickle me, and I can't scratch about with my paws either."

Ridgwell was now lost in amazement, and regarded the Lion in open-mouthed astonishment.

The Lion purred contentedly. It was a nice homely sounding, domestic purr, and many times deeper and more impressive than that of a cat. "What's your name?" demanded the Lion, whilst Ridgwell was still gasping.

"Ridgwell."

"Very appropriate too," said the Lion. "Here you are sitting in safety on the Ridge with me, and you are Well, aren't you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"There you are then," said the Lion. "*Ridge-Well*, what more do you want? Now I suppose you wish to know who I am? Well, I don't mind telling you. I am the Pleasant-Faced Lion. I am the only real Lion of the four, consequently I have a more intelligent expression than the others. The other three are only just common lions, and are always asleep. Now *I* come to life once in every generation and have a talk to the children, or to any one grown up who is imaginative enough to understand me. I like children, they are a hobby of mine. I am not in my usual spirits to-day," continued the Lion, "I have caught cold."

"Have you?" said Ridgwell. "I am very sorry."

"Yes, they washed me for Trafalgar Day in some beastly solution which was most unsuitable to me. I cannot shake off the cold. Hang on!" shouted the Lion suddenly, "I am going to sneeze, and I may shake you off the pedestal." Whereupon the Lion grabbed Ridgwell gently with his paw to steady him, and after sneezing heavily, proceeded. "After washing me for Trafalgar Day, which was most unnecessary, they hung a ridiculous wreath round my neck with a large N in leaves upon it. To add to the injury, an absurd person stood staring at me and explained to her children that the N stood for Napoleon. Bah!!!" growled the Lion. "Bah!!! Ignorance!"

"What did it stand for?" asked Ridgwell.

"Nile," grunted the Lion. "Short for Battle of the Nile."

"But I am so astonished. I did not know that you could talk, Mister Lion."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't call me Mister Lion, call me Lal."

"Why Lal?" inquired Ridgwell.

"Short for Lionel," whispered the Lion. "Lionel is my proper name."

"Oh, I see, but, Mister——"

"There you go again," said the Lion. "Call me Lal and be friendly."

"Indeed I am very friendly, Mister—I mean Lal; but there are so many things I don't understand."

"Common complaint of little boys," grumbled the Lion, "and you are going to see a lot more things in a minute that you will find most amazing. For instance, would you like to see a tournament?"

"Rather, Lal, I've always longed to see a tournament, but they never have such things now, do they? Aren't they all ended in England?"

"On the contrary," declared the Lion, "one is about to begin."

"Where?"

"Here in front of your eyes, and if you like you shall stay and see it. St. George outside Westminster has challenged the Griffin at Temple Bar to fight. All the really important Statue folk will be present. King Richard I from outside the Houses of Parliament will ride up to see fair play. Charles I. will come over from Whitehall across the road; Oliver Cromwell will most likely put in an appearance, if he can only make up his mind to leave his mound outside the Commons in those big boots of his."

"But, Lal," questioned Ridgwell, "surely Charles I. and Cromwell won't come to the Tournament together? Will they speak and be friendly?"

"No, no," confessed the Lion, "we still have great trouble with those two, they never speak. You see Cromwell is jealous of Charles, because Charles is mounted upon a nice horse, and rides past Cromwell and never notices him at all. Now Cromwell has to go about on foot, squeaking and squelching in those big boots, so that he never gets up to Charles, which annoys Cromwell very much."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, Cromwell wants to shout out 'Ha!!!' at Charles, and he never gets a chance. Cromwell gets left out very much in the cold," continued the Lion, "Richard I. never notices him either."

"Why is that?" asked Ridgwell.

"It's like this," said the Lion, "and it's only reasonable when you come to think of it. Richard I. spent nearly the whole of his time fighting to preserve a shrine, whilst Cromwell spent most of his time destroying them. Of course that annoys Richard, so Richard simply looks through Cromwell whenever they meet. Nothing would induce him to notice Cromwell."

"I should think that must annoy Cromwell," debated Ridgwell.

"It does," agreed the Lion, "but Cromwell always shouts out Ho! at Richard; he thinks Ho! is more appropriate to Richard's period. Richard, however, with perfect self-possession which is beyond all praise, never appears to hear him at all. Cromwell will always keep turning his head round to stare most rudely at Richard and Charles as they gallop past, hoping that Richard will hear him shout Ho! and Charles will hear him shout Ha!, and that irritating habit of his, together with Charles's treatment of the matter, was probably the origin of the terms, 'Roundhead' and 'Cavalier.'"

"Really!" said Ridgwell.

The Lion coughed slightly. "Not really," said the Lion, "only perhaps."

"But, Lal, if the statues of London move about and are coming here for a tournament as you say, won't people miss them?"

"Good gracious goodness, no," exclaimed the Lion. "Why! the people of London wouldn't miss them in a year, let alone a few hours! Then perhaps some person might notice something wasn't in its usual place and would write to the papers asking what it meant, and the London County Council would hold an inquiry."

"But, Lal, will General Gordon, George III. and Nelson take part in the Tournament?"

"Bless me, child, how you mix up your history," observed the Lion, "of course not. They are only moderns, the others are ancients. Two Kings waiting to see fair play between a Griffin and a Saint who are about to have a fight, belong to quite another time. George III. and General Gordon are moved out of the way before the combat starts; and as for Nelson, he was frozen long ago up there; it is a ridiculous attitude for so great a man, and a worse altitude, but there he is, and you cannot alter it; however he is frozen and mercifully doesn't feel anything or see anything that is going on."

"But if they are going to fight and charge one another, won't the fountains be in the way?" inquired Ridgwell anxiously, as he looked up into the Lion's good-humoured face.

"If you look again hard," grinned the Lion, "you will find that the fountains and the stone lakes around them have disappeared."

Ridgwell immediately looked in the direction the Lion indicated, and was amazed to find only a big, wide, open space of stone, one of the largest spaces in London.

"But how did they——" commenced Ridgwell.

"Hush!" said the Lion, "you really mustn't chatter any more. Here they come, and I have to be Judge of the Tournament, also the Referee; and to be a Referee," sighed the Lion, "is always a thankless task."

At this moment, amidst a clatter that was indescribable, the Griffin, looking a most ungainly object, came gallumping into the open space.

The Griffin appeared to be all wings, and scales, and claws, yet this somewhat grisly appearance was entirely misleading, for he possessed an amiable, although foolish disposition, whilst his expression owed much of its peculiarity to a habit he had acquired of breaking into broad smiles of astonished self-appreciation. The Griffin was very vain, and the one thing he craved for was notoriety.

"Good evening, Lionel; where's George?" demanded the Griffin. "I don't see him."

"You'll see quite enough of him before he's finished with you," retorted the Pleasant-Faced Lion, loftily. "However, here he comes."

St. George at this moment entered the wide stone space immediately in front of the Lion, to whom he made a profound salute.

St. George looked very handsome in his scaly armour, and his short bright sword glistened blue in the half light. Ridgwell had little time to notice other details, for two horsemen came galloping in.

Both were in armour and both were mounted upon beautiful horses.

"Who are they?" asked Ridgwell.

"Don't you see?" whispered the Lion. "King Richard I. and King Charles I. Ah," sighed the Lion, "what a noble figure Richard is! He is my special favourite; you see," explained the Lion, "he is named after me."

"Is he?"

"Of course. Is he not called Richard Coeur-de-Lion? I am de-Lion," announced the Lion proudly. "He carried a picture of me on his shield once. You may notice," proceeded the Lion, "that King Charles unfortunately rides slightly upon one side. It is not his fault, but owing to the fact that he has no girth to his saddle."

The horsemen wheeled one to either end of the arena before bringing their horses to a standstill.

The two opponents, St. George and the Griffin, stood facing each other in the centre, waiting for the combat to commence.

"Before we start," announced the Lion, "I am the Judge. There is, of course, to be no bloodshed; indeed," he added, in his wisest and most judicial manner, "bloodshed is impossible. The Griffin is almost over-protected (if I can use such a term) with scales, St. George is fully covered with armour. The Griffin possesses his remarkable claws, St. George a flat sword, so both are well matched. Therefore the contest resolves itself into a trial of skill and strength. Both shall be weighed in the scales."

"He! he! he!" sniggered the Griffin, "if my scales cannot crush the scales of George's blatant armour may I live to bite my own nails. Why, I will squash him as flat as an empty meat tin."

"Swank," murmured St. George, nonchalantly.

"The reason of the contest," continued the Lion in a loud voice, as if he were reading from some document which he had committed to memory, "is owing to a ridiculous assertion made by the Griffin. The Griffin claims to be the older established of the two. St. George laughs at this claim derisively. The Griffin sorely provoked to it, unfortunately fell back upon dates, and his memory being very weak he hoped to conceal his shakiness about dates, with phrases. He therefore declared that Temple Bar where he now stands, once possessed two gates which have since been removed. Nevertheless the Griffin contends that he is still there and Temple Bar is still there; in this he is undoubtedly right; yet, not content with this, he further asserts that this is the whole cause and origin of the phrase, 'Two to one, Bar one.' St. George here present, who knows something about horses, immediately called him a—well, it is not a nice word," broke off the Lion in parenthesis, "anyway St. George intimated that the truth was not in the Griffin. Hence a trial by combat. Are you ready?" roared the Lion; "then commence."

From his quite comfortable seat between the Lion's paws, Ridgwell now watched the strangest combat he would ever be likely to witness.

The Griffin advanced towards St. George with about as much grace as a dancing camel would possess. His excessive angularity was accentuated by his extraordinary clumsiness. St. George did not appear at all disconcerted by the flapping of the Griffin's wings, but managed to avoid his clumsy clutches with great skill. Had St. George not slipped upon a piece of orange-peel, inadvertently left upon the floor of the arena, it is doubtful if the Griffin would ever have touched him. As St. George slipped, the Griffin hugged him tightly. Ridgwell held his breath, for it almost seemed as if St. George's armour must indeed crumple up.

"Meat tins," shrieked the Griffin.

"Break away," commanded the Lion.

"Here, I say," snorted the Griffin, "I'd only just got him."

"Break away," ordered the Lion, "no hugging."

The Griffin retired to his corner pouting.

When the second bout started, Ridgwell noticed that there was something like a smile upon St. George's face, and he soon understood the reason of it. St. George had found out his adversary's weak spot.

The Griffin advancing with a rush upon his hind legs, with his front claws doubled up reaching high over St. George to pull him down, was brought to a sudden standstill.

There was a rapid sound of "Whack! whack! whack! whack!" four times.

St. George had hit the Griffin with the flat of his sword upon the most tender part of the Griffin's claws. The Griffin's mouth trembled.

"Whack! whack! whack! whack!" came four more swashing blows, whilst the Griffin hesitated. Then the Griffin broke down completely, and wept aloud bitterly.

"He's broken my knuckles," sobbed the Griffin.

"Do you give in?" asked the Lion.

"Oh yes," sobbed the Griffin. "Oh! my poor paws."

"Shall he chase you round the arena?" demanded the Lion.

"No," whimpered the Griffin; "I'll go home quietly."

Thereupon King Richard raised his sword and saluted to indicate that the fight was over, and followed by King Charles, who still swerved slightly to one side in his saddle, the two Kings rode out of the Square.

"Shake hands?" asked St. George of the Griffin, before he departed.

The Griffin shook his head dolefully instead, whilst great tears coursed down his cheeks.

"Oh no," sniffed the Griffin, "I don't think I shall ever shake hands again."

When everybody had gone, the Griffin slowly hobbled to his feet, and moving towards home, half sobbed and half sang in a way that was intensely comic—

"Oh! Temple Bar, Oh! Temple Bar,
With broken knuckles you seem so far.
And all my claws are broken too;
Oh! Temple Bar, what shall I do?
To *hit* me with a sword held flat,
'Twas grim of George to think of that."

"Now you have seen the tournament," observed the Lion to Ridgwell, "I suppose you will have to get home somehow."

"Yes, please, Lal."

"And of course," said the Pleasant-Faced Lion, "you will want to come again."

"Rather," laughed Ridgwell.

"Well, to-morrow night there is a very different sort of entertainment. I and the Statue folk are going to give an evening party, the grandest you have ever seen, or will ever be likely to see."

"Oh, Lal, can I come and bring Christine?"

"Who is Christine?" inquired the Lion, cautiously; "you know we cannot admit everybody."

"Christine is my little sister. At least," added Ridgwell, "Christine is older than I am, but she is little all the same."

"I see."

"And she would so enjoy it, Lal," pleaded Ridgwell.

"Very well," said the Lion, "both come just this once. Now for home. Come," commanded the Lion, "jump up. I learned that common expression from the people who every moment of the day mount upon the horrid Buzz, Buzz, things."

"Don't you like the Motor Omnibuses then?"

"The Buzz Buzzes you mean, child. No, I dislike them intensely, they make such a noise both day and night that I cannot hear myself purr even. Jump up. Where do you want to go to?"

"To Balham, please, Lal."

"Ah, that's the man with the Ass, isn't it?" demanded the Lion.

For a moment Ridgwell looked quite shocked. "Oh no, Lal, you are thinking of Balaam."

"Spelt the same way," snapped the Lion, who did not like being corrected upon historical matters.

"No, Lal, there is an H in Balham and people never drop it."

"Glad to hear it," grunted the Lion. "I only wish the people who collect the pennies from the passengers upon the Buzz Buzz things would say the same. Day by day," added the Lion in an aggrieved tone, "I hear them shout out the expressions—'Olloway, 'Igate, 'Arrow. The Board Schools," continued the Lion in his wisest tones, "are responsible for a most imperfect system of education."

"But, Lal," pleaded Ridgwell, "you will take me to Balham, won't you? I do not know how I should get home if you didn't take me there."

"Yes," said the Lion, "of course, I shall take you home, but you mustn't come to see me too often, you know, it's outside the four-mile radius. However," concluded the Lion, "I shall follow the tram lines. Jump up," once more commanded the Lion, "and hang on, because you know I go at a good pace when once started."

Whereupon Ridgwell clambered upon the Pleasant-Faced Lion's back, and convulsively hugging him half round his great neck, buried his head in the Lion's mane and shut his eyes, whilst the Lion took a bold jump from off his pedestal, and started in a brisk trot for Balham.

When they had arrived at their destination outside Ridgwell's home, the Lion stood in the road and wagged his tail contentedly.

"Thank you for bringing me home, Lal," said Ridgwell as he clambered off the Lion's back.

"Good-night," whispered the Lion hoarsely, for after his long run he was almost out of breath. "Mind you close the hall door safely after you."

The Pleasant-Faced Lion, who appeared to be pleased at having brought his little charge home, stood in the road and purred quite loudly for some time.

But none of the neighbours, who heard the deep sound echoing through the quiet road, thought of looking out of the window. They merely believed the sound proceeded from some powerful motor car which had stopped in the vicinity.

Then the Pleasant-Faced Lion jogged home to his pedestal in Trafalgar Square, well pleased with his night's work.

CHAPTER II

BY ORDER OF THE LION

"Hullo, Lal!" said Ridgwell, as he looked up at the Lion the following evening.

"Hullo!" rejoined the Lion huskily. "Who is that you have brought with you?"

"This is Christine," said Ridgwell.

"How do you do?" said the Pleasant-Faced Lion, and he seemed to look even more pleasant than usual. The Lion stretched himself, descended from his pedestal, and held out his paw to shake hands with Christine: Christine responded to these greetings shyly.

Ridgwell really thought the Lion was one of the most amiable creatures he had ever met.

"If you do not mind," the Lion observed to Christine, "you might walk upon the other side of Ridgwell and not next to me."

"Oh, Lal, why?" asked Christine.

"Who asked Christine to call me Lal?" inquired the Lion, as he lifted his head up with an intensely comical air of self-importance.

"I did," said Ridgwell; "you told me always to call you Lal."

"Quite right," replied the Lion. "But do you always do exactly alike, you two?"

"Yes, always," said Ridgwell.

"Humph!" grunted the Lion. "Suppose there is only one apple and you both want it, what happens?"

"We exactly divide it," said Ridgwell.

"Mathematically correct," said the Lion. "Good."

"But please why can't I walk next to you, *Mister* Lion?"

"Ha!" shrieked the Lion, "there she goes, Mister Lion. You taught her that too, I suppose."

"Hush, Lal," said Ridgwell, "don't get excited. Christine will soon get out of the habit and call you Lal, directly she knows how pleasant you are."

"You haven't answered my question, Lal," objected Christine.

"Well, little Christine, it is like this," and the Lion pondered deeply for awhile. "If you walked *next* to me and rested your hand upon my mane as you are doing now, anybody who saw us might take us for Una and the Lion, otherwise Beauty and the Beast, and oh! my dear child," implored the Lion, "you surely could not wish me ever to be called a *beast*."

"Of course not," said Christine; "we wouldn't hurt your feelings for worlds. So, Ridgie, you walk next to Lal, and I will walk the other side of you."

"A most reasonable child," muttered the Lion, "really quite reasonable."

"Did you bring the sulphur tablets?" asked the Lion mysteriously.

"Yes, here they are. Christine has them wrapped up in a packet," explained Ridgwell; "but, Lal, what can you want with sulphur tablets? You promised me we should both be asked to the party, but sulphur tablets do seem such an odd thing to want as a start. I have thought over it, and Christine has thought over it, and we cannot really think what they can be for."

The Lion chuckled his most pleasant chuckle.

"Give it up?"

"Yes," nodded Ridgwell.

"So would any one else," grinned the Lion, "except me. Have you ever thought how the thick yellow London fogs come?" inquired the Lion insinuatingly. "Do you know what causes them?"

"No," said Ridgwell. "I don't think anybody knows that."

"I do," replied the Lion.

"What causes them, then?" asked Ridgwell.

"The yellow fogs are caused solely by the habit the other three lions have of sucking sulphur tablets whilst they are asleep," declared the Lion. "They are always sleeping, and directly two sulphur tablets are placed in the corner of each one's mouth they go on sleeping and breathing, sleeping and breathing. The result is a thick yellow fog."

"I never knew that was the cause of London fogs," mused Ridgwell.

"One of them," sighed the Lion; "and who can wonder at it? Just look at the size of their mouths."

"But your mouth is as large as theirs, is it not?" debated Christine.

"Yes," said the Lion, "but there is a particular reason for my mouth being large."

"Why?" asked the children.

"On account of all the wisdom I utter," replied the Lion loftily.

"Anyway," said Ridgwell, "it does seem a horrid preparation for a party to start with a fog. Surely nobody would see what was going on."

"Hush, hush, my children," remonstrated the Pleasant-Faced Lion. "Just gather round and listen, and do not interrupt. You will be amazed at all the things you are about to see and hear, for you are going to be present to-night for a few minutes at the most wonderful party ever given in the whole world."

"That will be lovely," said Ridgwell and Christine. "And oh! Lal, really we have looked forward to it so much."

The Lion patted each of the children in turn affectionately upon the head with its paw, and they remembered afterwards that his paw was as soft as velvet, and really wasn't heavy at all.

"Chatter, chatter, chatter," said the Lion, "just like the magpies and the sparrows, and the fashionable Society people for that matter, but you must not interrupt. I am just like one of those guides that do all the talking, and if I am interrupted I lose my place, get all my thoughts out of order, and all the ceremony will be wrong. Then King Richard and King Charles will both be down upon me, and say the party was rotten, and that I was to blame; and as for Boadicea, she has a nasty temper, and will probably hit me over the head with her reins."

"Oh, Lal, do you mean to say that King Richard and King Charles and Boadicea are coming to the party?"

"Yes, all of them," grunted the Lion. "Now be quiet, and just listen. The sulphur tablets which seem to cause you so much mystification are simply to cause a fog upon the *outside* of Trafalgar Square, and to shut out the sight of the most wonderful party in the world from the gaze of all the other people who have not been invited to it. Imagine the millions of people who would flock to see such a sight, if it were not screened off. Drivers of the Buzz Buzz things they call motor-buses and taxis, loafers, tramps, idlers, City men, work-girls, curious women—and, by the way, remember that women are always curious—would flock in millions, attracted by the lovely lights, which will be brighter than anything you have ever seen, by the jewels, which will be more dazzling than anything you have ever dreamed of, to say nothing about the gorgeous costumes that will rival anything displayed upon the Field of the Cloth of Gold, outdo the splendours of any court, and put the pageant of the grandest pantomime ever witnessed to shame. Follow me," commanded the Lion, "and you will see what you will see only once in your lives, and it all begins with the sulphur tablets."

Ridgwell and Christine followed, and were dumb with amazement. The Lion gently took the packet of sulphur tablets from Christine and thanked her for providing them. Gingerly he approached each of the other three sleeping lions in turn and insinuatingly placed two in the mouth of each lion; one tablet each side between each lion's big front teeth and its tongue.

"It's a dreadful habit," said the Pleasant-Faced Lion, "to suck sulphur tablets in your sleep, but I suppose it's soothing. Now watch," observed Lal maliciously. "Sleeping and breathing, sleeping and breathing, the sulphur tablets will soon commence to work."

Slowly as they watched, thick jets of yellow vapour commenced to rise upward and all around.

"Come," whispered Lal, "the thick fog stops like a wall at the back of their pedestals and all round Trafalgar Square. As I told you," chuckled the Lion, "the fog is only upon the *outside* of where the party will take place."

He now quickly drew the children out of the fog inside the immense charmed circle of Trafalgar

Square, where the atmosphere was quite clear, but as yet quite dark.

The Lion lifted up his head and gave a most piercing and peculiar whistle; once, twice, three times and yet a fourth he repeated this signal.

The signal was answered in a curious manner. The whole space commenced to vibrate with a strange humming sound which resembled violins, violoncellos, flageolets and flutes being played upon very faintly. The sounds were so weirdly fascinating that any one might have imagined it proceeded from a little group of Eastern musicians playing upon reeds in order to charm some snake to uncoil and become sociable after a lengthy seclusion in its wicker-work basket.

"What is that music?" asked Ridgwell.

"The eight Dolphins of the fountains are humming happily. They are waiting to carry out my commands," answered the Lion.

Once again the Lion whistled four times.

Ridgwell and Christine, who were listening intently, could hear the scurrying of flying feet racing along. The sound drew nearer and nearer, until several dark forms were jostling each other immediately in front of where they stood, and they could feel the warm breath of some living things upon their hands. Suddenly in the darkness there was a chorus of hoarse laughter.

Ridgwell and Christine started slightly.

"Are they spirits?" inquired Ridgwell, with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"No," vouchsafed the Lion, "only the four merry laughing little Lions from outside Westminster Abbey. They are the most ridiculous creatures in all London.

"Stop laughing," commanded the Lion.

"Hear me, Gamble, Grin, Grub, and Carry-on-Merry, and hearken attentively.

"Carry-on-Merry, have you all stopped laughing?" demanded the Lion.

"Yes, mighty Lal, we are simply grinning at present, which is as near to being serious as we can ever become. We are only waiting for your commands."

The Lion lifted up his mighty head and called, "Silence, Dolphins."

Immediately the curious sounds of humming ceased.

"The party I give is to be the most beautiful in the world, displaying wonders such as no Emperor can procure. Each of the Four Seasons shall appear before us, perfect in every way, to be followed by the Pavilion of Gold."

"It shall be done, O Lal."

"My guests will be all the stray children of London. Call them from every street and court, from out every by-way, alley, and lane."

"They are all here waiting, O Lal."

"Good. Also gather together all the lost and stray dogs of London, every single one who is wandering about to-night."

"They have all been summoned, O Lal."

"The Royalty present will include Queen Boadicea, King Richard I., King Charles I., and St. George."

"Each has received a royal invitation, O Lal, and the Royal personages will all be pleased to attend."

"Each boy and girl is to be dressed in the most costly costume, according to their taste."

"All is prepared for them, Lal, and even as you desire, great splendour awaits them, and nothing will be lacking for their perfect enjoyment."

"Good; see that all is well done, and be ready to begin when I give the signal. You understand?"

"We understand," laughed the four merry Lions.

"We obey," squeaked the Dolphins.

"Only one thing remains to be done, to dress you, Ridgwell, and you, Christine."

"What shall we be dressed in?" inquired Christine.

"Shut your eyes," said the Lion gently, "and stretch your hands over the lake of the fountain and take what the Dolphins give you. They know what you want, and their taste in such matters is exquisite."

The children shut their eyes and obeyed. The Lion leant over the rim of the lake and whispered to the Dolphins—

"Dress the boy like a prince, and the girl like a little queen. The richest stuff, mind, five guineas a yard. Give her a crown of the whitest daisies with shell pink petal tips for a crown. No jewels, no pearls, no, no.

Take, oh take the pearls away,
For they bring tears, the wise men say.

chanted the Lion in his rich double bass. "Give them both jewelled shoe buckles; give the boy jewelled levée buttons for his satin breeches, a plain gold circlet for his head. A train for the girl from her shoulders, of pure cloth of gold; bring it light, so that it does not weigh heavily. White satin for the boy, with richest figured velvet doublet set with cloth of gold. Hang round their necks now, with all its luminous jewels, the highest order in the world, the Order of Great Imagination," commanded the Lion, "For by the Order of Great Imagination they shall see things that no one else can see, they shall be able to listen to things that no one else shall be able to hear. They shall delight in the exquisiteness of things as no one else can delight in them, who has not received this order. For I declare to you all that a child who has this glittering order shall know of things that nobody else in the whole world shall know of. Everything is ready."

"Let us have Spring," commanded the Lion.

Immediately the words were uttered there came the soft beating of birds' wings over Ridgwell's head. The atmosphere instantly became fragrant with the myriad scents of wild flowers.

A mist seemed to swim for a second before their eyes, and, as it cleared away, they were standing together with many other children knee-deep in unending banks of bluebells and primroses.

They were in the midst of the most perfect wooded dell they had ever beheld.

Thousands of delicate flower-stems thrust their tiny spears from earth and emerald moss, blossoming with flowers before their wondering eyes.

The spiral hedges slowly shook out dappled clusters of white hawthorn.

The interlaced trees above them, amidst which all the birds in Christendom appeared to be carolling simultaneously, gently outspread friendly arms, overladen with powdered red and white may blossom.

Butterflies with gaily painted wings hovered tenderly overhead, and tiny silver thistledown balls sailed across the blue sky spaces, like little wayward balloons without anybody in charge of them.

"You can all pick as many flowers as you like," suggested the Lion. "Flowers were meant for the children to pick, so make yourselves nosegays, garlands, and crowns galore. There are no notices *here* to keep off the grass. You can also chase the butterflies if you like, but I warn you that you will never catch them. As a matter of fact that is the one thing I don't permit. Any butterfly with really nice feelings objects most decidedly when a pin is run through its body, as much as a happy fish hates to be caught upon a hook. I sympathise with both of them, and consider such practices ought to be stopped."

Ridgwell, well-nigh immersed in a bank of bluebells, listened in a semi-enchanted condition to the Lion's words of wisdom, and watched the brilliant-coloured butterflies chasing each other in the pearly spaces above him.

Christine, grasping a great yellow bunch of primroses in each hand, ceased picking flowers and watched the bright-eyed squirrels and rabbits gambolling everywhere around.

"Ridgie, have you noticed all the rabbits and squirrels are quite tame?"

"Of course they're tame," agreed the Lion, "Nobody here to hurt them; why, they will come and eat out of your hand."

"Why is that?" asked Ridgwell.

"No guns or traps," chuckled the Lion. "Any animal respectably brought up is indignant at the very thought of a gun or a trap; consequently they keep themselves to themselves, and seldom go out into society."

Ridgwell's gaze roamed over the lovely spring landscape, and rested upon the masses of flowers the other children were picking.

"Everything here is just as it ought to be, isn't it, Lal?"

"Every single thing," answered the Lion. "But it is going to change, you know, almost directly."

"Change?" echoed Ridgwell. "Why, Lal?"

The Pleasant-Faced Lion chuckled softly, and lifting his head, called out, "Summer."

Immediately the Lion said "Summer," everything around commenced to alter most strangely.

Banks of primroses became stretches of sparkling golden sands, and the great masses of bluebells, after swaying once or twice, dissolved themselves into the misty rippling waves of a summer sea.

Christine and Ridgwell, looking hopelessly perplexed, found they were each in a tiny boat with a pearly sail, skimming over shallow blue waters that sparkled like sapphires.

The sky over their heads had changed to the burning blue of a summer day. The air was filled with the sweet salt spray of the sea, which descended in delicious showers upon all of them.

"Have all the children got boats?" demanded the Lion.

"All," shrilled the Dolphins. "Their boats can't upset, Lal, and the waters are transparent, and shallow enough for them to fish up coloured shells, coral, and mother-of-pearl. There's a sunken treasure-ship half buried in the sands far upon the other side, Lal, if they sail for it."

"They'll all make for that safe enough," answered the Lion. "Push their boats off, Dolphins, and help them all to land upon the far shore."

The Dolphins, splashing the water into little white frothy waves, accompanied the little bobbing fleet of pearl-boats, and sang gaily as they swam alongside.

"Blue and gold on the summer sea,
Each little mast with a sail of pearl,
Each dipping boat holds a boy or girl,
A most enchanting argosy.
A ship one's longed for most perhaps
That cannot anyhow collapse.

We'll sail away to the golden strand,
And maybe discover No Man's Land;
Each one of us will get a peep
Into the wonders of the deep,
Dredging for shells of brilliant hue,
And discovering mermaids too.

Sing ho! for a galleon of Spanish gold,
With jewels and ivory in the hold.
What treasure we'll find upon the main!
What triumph when we sail home again!
The wonder of every lad and lass
Will be the booty we amass."

After a short but entrancing voyage, and even whilst Ridgwell and Christine stood with the other children waist-deep in the great carven hold of the sunken Spanish galleon, shovelling out golden doubloons and precious jewels, the sound of Lal's voice came across the water to them.

"Autumn, ahoy!" shouted Lal.

* * * * *

"Isn't it bewildering, Chris?" lamented Ridgwell. "Only a second ago we were enthroned in a castle of golden coins and precious stones, and now, without any sort of warning whatever, we are standing upon the top of a waggon-load of newly-mown hay."

"Yes, Ridgie, and look at Lal across there, laughing about it like anything."

"He certainly does play tricks with us, Chris. See, he is sending all the children racing across to draw our hay-cart with those ropes of acorns and leaves they are holding. Hullo!" broke off Ridgwell, "somebody is throwing things at me, and if they continue doing it I shall jolly well start throwing back again."

Christine looked up from the stack of loose hay surrounding her in the cart upon which they stood.

"Why, it's apples," announced Christine.

"Where?" inquired her brother.

"Look, Ridgie, overhead, hundreds of them hanging from every tree. We can reach them quite easily."

There could be no doubt about the matter. Rosy apples ripened by the sun dangled in clusters overhead, and gently fell down at the very moment when any one felt disposed to eat them.

Within easy reach grew trailing brambles smothered with ripened patches of fragrant blackberries.

The Pleasant-Faced Lion lifted up his voice and inquired if the company present desired anything better, at the season they were now passing through, than unlimited apples, blackberries, and hay.

"No," came a simultaneous chorus from all the children.

"Good," replied the Lion. "After you have all eaten as many apples and blackberries as you want, the battle of the new-mown hay will start. I shall be the umpire. If Ridgwell and Christine can throw enough hay from their big cart to bury all the children around them, they will have won. If the other children can throw up enough hay to completely smother the cart, Ridgwell and Christine will have lost. Now start," laughed the Lion.

"Look here, Chris, we must get to work, so here goes."

Whereupon Ridgwell seized a big armful of loose hay and awaited the attack.

"We have the advantage of height," observed Christine, as she hastily gathered as much hay as she could hold, "and you know, Ridgie, it is much easier for us to throw down than it is for them to throw up."

"How about numbers?" objected Ridgwell; "why, it's two against hundreds, Chris."

Then the battle commenced. That engagement was a memorable one amidst the scented hay. Not infrequently it happened that only a laughing eye, or the tip of a small nose was anywhere visible to show who might be the victor. Nobody will ever be quite sure who won, and it is doubtful if the point was ever decided.

Ridgwell, feeling very smothered up, was remarking to Christine in muffled tones that he thought they must have lost, when the voice of Lal announced "Winter."

"Don't you feel buried, Chris?"

"Yes," came the unexpected reply, "I am. I'm simply buried in furs and snow!"

"Furs and snow?" repeated Ridgwell incredulously. "What on earth do you mean, Chris? Oh, good gracious, Chris, I've got an extraordinary feeling I'm falling over a sort of precipice."

"So we are," rejoined Christine philosophically. "Don't you see, Ridgie, that Lal has changed everything again. We are on a toboggan sleigh, and just starting down no end of a steep hill."

Ridgwell rubbed the finely powdered snow out of his eyes.

An entrancing winter scene lay below them. Giant blue-green pine-trees were dotted about over the glistening snow which flashed with a million diamond sparkles. All the children were clad in beautiful furs.

Some of them were sliding and skating, others snowballing and tumbling in the snow.

"Hang on, Ridgwell and Christine," shouted the Lion, "your toboggan has started at a pretty good pace. Hold tight."

Ridgwell and Christine shut their eyes, and as neither of them had any breath during that wild descent, they could only compare notes afterwards as to the amazing sensations they experienced during these moments.

When the toboggan had finally brought itself to a standstill Ridgwell extricated himself and viewed the snow-powdered spaces in front of them a trifle apprehensively. Bounding along towards them raced a pack of animals. Their eyes were glistening and their tongues hanging out.

"Wolves!" muttered Ridgwell. "Oh! I say, Chris, I don't think I quite care about meeting wolves. Do you? They don't look very friendly either, by the way they are coming along."

"It's the stray dogs," shouted Christine; "and look, Carry-on-Merry is putting little teams of them into sleighs to draw us along."

"Sleigh races about to start," called the Lion. "Take your seats, shake the reins and you will hear the silver bells tinkle. The first sleigh to reach the farthest pine-trees wins the race. Off you go."

Away flew the dogs, drawing the children over the powdered snow tracks.

After the race Carry-on-Merry collected all the children together.

"I propose a snowball match," grinned Carry-on-Merry. "Gamble, Grin, Grub, and myself upon one side, against all you children."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the Pleasant-Faced Lion. "My goodness, what a beating all you children are going to have. Why, Carry-on-Merry and his lot can manufacture snowballs as quick as lightning."

The battle commenced without delay, and it was a terrific conflict.

Hundreds of little snowballs whizzed through the air.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Pleasant-Faced Lion, "the children are retreating. Carry-on-Merry, Gamble, Grin, and Grub, I believe you are the champion snowballers of the world. I think myself you must have acquired the gift from some unusually impish urchins whose methods you have closely observed round Westminster way. I consider your skill quite in accordance with the best street traditions."

The children were eventually snowballed to a standstill, and flinging away their remaining ammunition rolled themselves over on the snow to avoid any more of the unerring missiles of Carry-on-Merry and his band.

"Give in," demanded the Lion pleasantly.

"Never!" laughed the children.

"But you're beaten, you know," insisted the Lion. "Carry-on-Merry, you can take them all prisoners and escort them to the Pavilion of Gold."

Even whilst the children were tumbling in the snow the atmosphere became inky black.

The darkness was not in any way alarming; it had taken place so gradually that they scarcely noticed it, which only intensified the marvellous change which was to follow.

CHAPTER III

THE GOLDEN PAVILION

Christine and Ridgwell never forgot the sight that met their eyes when the strange transformation took place. It was dazzling in its beauty and it was some seconds before they could realise the full wonder of it. The dimness of the light changed to the most exquisite illuminations imaginable.

Christine and Ridgwell realised that the party was to take place in a gorgeous golden pavilion.

The fountains, which had slid to either end of the pavilion, shot up brilliant globes of changing light which hovered in the air like tiny coloured air balls, whilst the tops of the fountains spraying a golden mist, were echoed again in the lustrous glow of walls and roof.

From the pearly dome whose outline was only faintly suggested overhead, and upon every side, hung myriad stacks of flowers, which now and again fell in fragrant jewelled showers upon the children, just as soon as each blossom had grown into perfection.

Upon a golden dais at one end were King Richard and King Charles clad in glittering silver armour, with Queen Boadicea arrayed in purple, in the centre; whilst St. George stood beside them in shining golden splendour.

Ridgwell and Christine stood beside the Pleasant-Faced Lion upon another dais immediately facing the royal personages. The Lion was no longer a dull, copper green hue; his whole body had changed to the colour of burnished gold and his great mane shone like a sun.

Forty children dressed in the vermilion and black of Beef-eaters from the Tower with halberts in their hands, lined the way up the shallow golden steps to each dais, twenty upon either side.

The Lion gave his last orders for the ceremony—

"Gamble, Grin, Grub, and Carry-on-Merry, sound the Merry Fanfare on your silver trumpets!"

The four little lions gaily arrayed in scarlet and gold advanced into the centre of the great space and executed a remarkable fanfare, which without being entirely a march, or wholly a waltz, was nevertheless delightful to listen to.

Immediately a procession of the most lovely children entered, dressed in every brilliant costume imaginable.

The delicious fragrance of the scented golden mist, diffused from the two fountains, filled the air as the happy and beautiful children, boys and girls, danced into the pavilion. They all paused to bow to the Royalty present, and St. George; then they advanced to where Ridgwell and Christine stood beside the Pleasant-Faced Lion.

They greeted the Lion as an old acquaintance and blew him kisses as they passed.

As they moved along, glittering in costly silks and satins, winding in and out with the changing colours of a rainbow, Ridgwell spoke to the Lion—

"Lal, Christine and I have never seen so many lovely children before. Surely these are not the stray ragged children of London? Why, their faces are the colour of the new roses that are falling everywhere about us, and look how bright their eyes are!"

The Lion smiled, then pointed to the scented golden spray being showered from the two fountains.

"They look lovely as you see them," said the Lion, "because perpetual health, and love, and happiness are being diffused upon them from the fountains. Outside they were different," continued the Lion; "but here the dark circles disappear from beneath their eyes, which become bright and full of love, as they ought to be, the little puckers of care and want are sponged out of their faces by the spray from the fountain. The pallor of their faces changes to rosy health and beauty as it should; the pinched look many of them wear, gives place to roundness and the happy laughing curves of childhood that doesn't know or reckon of any care."

"But, Lal, where do all these wonderful things come from?" questioned Ridgwell; "the great canopy, the golden carpet, all the costumes and the jewels?"

The Lion chuckled. "They all come out of the fountains, straight from the warehouses of the merchants. The Dolphins bring them. Everything comes from the fountains."

"You see," proceeded the Lion, "there is going to be plenty to eat and drink and everything of the best." Once again the Lion pointed towards the two fountains: "See the eight golden dolphins with their golden trays, they hand up delicious cakes, the best fruit, ices, lemonade, chocolates, sandwiches, anything you want."

"Shall we have some of those delightful things to eat too?" asked Ridgwell.

"Oh, be reassured, my child," smiled the Lion, "the Dolphins won't forget either you or Christine, they will dance up to you with their trays filled with everything you want."

"If all those other children look so very beautiful, what do *we* look like?" Ridgwell asked the Lion in a whisper. "You see there are no looking-glasses, are there?"

For the first time the children remembered to look at one another.

Christine was the first to speak, and it was with a cry of great delight she turned to Ridgwell—

"Oh, Ridgie, you are lovely," said Christine.

"Course he is," said the Lion.

"I don't know about that," said Ridgwell hesitatingly. "I think you have made a mistake in the excitement."

"I've not," insisted Christine; "why, you look like a beautiful little Prince."

Here Ridgwell, who, overcome with modesty at these tributes, had been examining his jewelled shoe-buckles with downcast eyes, looked up at his sister.

"Well, how about you?" exclaimed Ridgwell. "Why, you look like a lovely fairy queen——"

"Course she does," said the Lion.

"Don't be silly, Ridgie," said Christine, severely.

"I'm not," asserted Ridgwell. "I've never seen you look like that. Perhaps," added Ridgwell, "these glittering orders we wear round our necks have something to do with it."

"You're right," said the Lion, "the priceless Order of Great Imagination enables you to see everything that is beautiful as it really is, and, of course, everything here is beautiful, so," added the Lion logically, "why should you both be different from anything else?"

The Lion beckoned to one of the Dolphins.

"Here," said the Lion, as the Dolphin approached them, "hold up your burnished golden tray and let the boy see himself."

The Dolphin held up the polished tray and Ridgwell looked into it wonderingly.

"My goodness," said the Lion, "I thought girls were vain, but boys are worse!"

"That *can't* be me," said Ridgwell.

"Well, it isn't me," grumbled the Lion, "that's certain."

Christine peeped over the shoulder of Ridgwell's golden tunic.

"It's like us," said Christine, "but yet it isn't us at all."

"That is what people always say when they see their own photographs for the first time," observed the Lion wisely. "Ha!" broke off the Lion, "here come the dogs."

"Have you placed the two long troughs at the far end for them?" demanded the Lion.

"Yes," chorussed the little lions.

"What have you filled them with?" questioned the Lion.

"Finest mutton and chicken bones in one," laughed Carry-on-Merry, "water in the other."

"Have you remembered their special strip of comfortable carpet?" asked the Lion anxiously.

"It's there," grinned Carry-on-Merry.

"Why are the stray dogs to have a strip of special comfortable carpet?" asked Christine.

"Because they like to pick the bones afterwards upon the carpet," said the Lion; "it's a little habit of theirs, and they are not so highly trained as we are."

A most extraordinary procession now made its appearance before them. The children might have thought it was a Noah's Ark, only the dogs advanced in fours. Newfoundlands, St. Bernards, Mastiffs, Retrievers, every conceivable dog down to tiny fox terriers, Spaniels and Yorkshire terriers. They all looked very happy and their coats shone as if they had been lately washed and had afterwards dried themselves in the golden rays of the warm sun, which even now seemed to linger over them.

"Lovely creatures," said Christine.

"Ripping," said Ridgwell, "they are dears."

"Started to munch their bones already," grunted the Lion. "Well, they're not so highly educated as we are. A party to them is a party, and they don't wait for anybody, which, after all, is the proper thing to do. Where's the Griffin?" demanded the Lion of Carry-on-Merry, after that intelligent creature, having acted like a verger (a habit he had probably acquired from a life-long proximity to Westminster Abbey), had shown all the dogs to their places along one side where the comfortable carpet formed a sort of aisle.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Carry-on-Merry, "the Griffin is late."

"He's always late," grumbled the Lion, "his head's weak, and he never can remember what time a party starts."

"Here he comes," grunted Carry-on-Merry, "and, oh! my goodness, what *does* he look like?"

"Absolutely ludicrous as usual," said the Lion.

The Griffin presented an intensely comical appearance. Wishing to keep up the dignity of the City, he had chosen for his party-dress a scarlet Lord Mayor's robe, edged with fur, which he had folded around himself in an exceedingly ridiculous fashion.

Upon his head, as he believed it to be becoming, he had placed jauntily sideways, an immense green dunce's cap from one of the children's giant crackers, which the Griffin had pulled as he entered the doors.

The Griffin had decided to adorn his front feet with strips of scarlet flannel, because he declared that he had chilblains, and furthermore, his paws were exceedingly tender after his encounter upon the previous evening with St. George.

It was thus that the Griffin ambled in trailing his Lord Mayor's robes behind him, and smiling aimlessly from right to left upon everybody present.

"Has everybody missed me?" sniggered the Griffin. "I fear I'm late!"

"Nobody has missed you at all," retorted the Pleasant-Faced Lion.

The Griffin looked hurt for a moment.

"Oh, surely, Lal," entreated the Griffin; "*surely* some one missed me!"

"No," said the Lion firmly.

The corners of the Griffin's mouth trembled.

"Now then," said the Lion, sternly, "no emotion."

"No! no! Lal," faltered the Griffin, "but when I think of that lovely saying, 'Everybody's Loved by Some one'——"

"There are exceptions to every rule," snapped the Lion.

"Oh," sniggered the Griffin, "then it does apply even to me, for I myself am an exception. There is only one of me," ended the Griffin eagerly, "only one in all London."

"Some things don't bear repeating," said the Lion.

The Griffin's weak memory came to his aid at this awkward moment:

"That must particularly apply to your last remark," simpered the Griffin.

"You have heard somebody else say that," objected the Lion.

"True," sniggered the Griffin, "and it will not be the first time that the remembrance of other people's sayings have passed for wit; and I have always so longed to be a wit," sighed the Griffin. "Don't you think, Lal, that I might one day be a wit?" inquired the Griffin anxiously.

"No," said the Lion, "I don't; you have none of the necessary qualifications."

Once again the Griffin's mouth trembled piteously.

"Oh, Lal," implored the Griffin, "think, only think again."

"I couldn't," answered the Lion, "some things don't bear thinking about."

The Griffin, with two tears trembling in his eyes, clasped his flannel-wrapped foreclaws together beseechingly and changed the nature of his supplication:

"Very well, Lal, then perhaps as you have never seen me act, I might arrange some theatricals and amuse the children and the company present. Of course," simpered the Griffin, "I should play the chief funny part myself; wouldn't it be wonderful if I played the chief funny part myself?"

The Lion looked at the Griffin contemplatively for a second: "You will never be funnier than you are now," remarked the Lion, "and we are not going to have any theatricals at all, the children are going to dance."

"The very thing," agreed the Griffin. "I will lead them; I dance so beautifully."

"No," said the Lion firmly, "if any one leads them it will be Carry-on-Merry, but they won't want any leading at all. The best thing you can do is to keep quite quiet and make yourself useful."

"Oh, Lal, don't ask me to be useful," shuddered the Griffin. "It is such a dreadful word, and *anybody* can be useful."

"You think so," said the Lion, as he smiled his wisest smile.

"I must be something far better than that," remonstrated the Griffin, "and it has just struck me that I had better go round and find out from everybody what they would like me to do," and the Griffin moved off eagerly to gather the opinions of everybody present as to this most interesting point which concerned him so closely.

"Always dying to show off," grunted the Lion. "You can see in the Griffin the absolute type of one who being weak in the head and totally unable to do anything, is nevertheless always longing to show off before others, who are cleverer than himself."

"Perhaps he will find somebody who wants him to do something," suggested Ridgwell, hopefully; "but why didn't he want to be useful?"

"Because the poor Griffin believes himself to be extremely ornamental, and therefore, like all conceited people, he will never be able to see himself as he is in reality. He wishes to lead before he has been able to learn."

Carry-on-Merry, Gamble, Grin, and Grub had by this time fixed up a strangely decorated Maypole; it was nothing less than St. George's Pillar, but so bedecked with hanging flowers and brilliant silken corded ribbons that the children had some difficulty in recognising it again.

Then the four laughing lions could be seen racing along with a most wonderful piano-organ, into which Gamble, Grin, and Grub were harnessed, whilst Carry-on-Merry turned the handle.

It must at once be admitted that this particular musical instrument differed very considerably from any piano-organ ever heard in the streets, and it could never have come anywhere from the neighbourhood of Saffron Hill.

It discoursed the sweetest music in the nature of a dance tune that was irresistible, and the feet of all the children present started in time to it simultaneously.

"Now, Ridgwell," said the Lion, "take Christine and dance with her. Or would you sooner stay here and look on at the sight?"

"I shall do both," asserted Ridgwell, "dance first and look on afterwards."

"Good," assented the Lion; "an able definition of eating your cake and having it at the same time. Off you go then."

"Won't the Kings, Boadicea, and St. George dance too?" asked Christine.

"No, George doesn't dance," said the Lion, "neither do the Royalty; they graciously look on. I don't dance either, I do not consider it dignified, so I sit here, conduct the ceremony, and beat time to the music with my paw."

That dance was the wildest, gladdest, merriest thing the children ever remembered, and the threads of golden light filtering through the flash of the coloured costumes as they wound in and out, added tints of splendour as of an ancient pageant.

Who could keep from dancing to such an exquisite tune, and who could help being glad when ropes of lovely flowers were being twined round lovelier childish faces, flower-like themselves, flushed with gay excitement, with perfect health, with gladness?

Ribbons of changing light they threaded in and out, round and through, no one could tell how many times, and over all the golden scented dew of perfect health and beauty fell from the two fountains upon the up-turned faces.

It is true the Griffin made several ineffectual attempts to break through the laughing, whirling ring, under the impression that the circle was incomplete without him, but Gamble, Grin, and Grub were always at hand to pull him back, and prevent this amiable but mistaken intrusion.

From the piano-organ which he turned so gaily, Carry-on-Merry found it was necessary to caution the Griffin after his last frantic attempt to break through the ring of dancing children.

"I want to dance," urged the Griffin.

"I think you want a keeper," grinned Carry-on-Merry, "or a policeman or something, to keep you in order."

The Griffin turned pale.

"Oh! no," implored the Griffin, "not a *policeman*."

"Well, then, behave," grinned Carry-on-Merry.

"Very well," sulked the Griffin, "as I am not wanted I think I shall go home and give a party to myself."

"Don't go," grinned Carry-on-Merry, "I have thought of something you could do presently."

The Griffin flushed with delight.

"Will it be something grand?" asked the Griffin breathlessly, "something that will show me off, something that will make me talked about, something so big that it won't be like anything else?"

"Rather," grinned Carry-on-Merry; "you bet it won't be like anything else, at least," added Carry-on-Merry truthfully, "it won't be like anything else I have ever known."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," gushed the Griffin. "I could swoon with joy, I feel so overwrought that I shall go to one of the fountains and ask the dear Dolphins for some light refreshment."

"No, you don't," instantly objected Carry-on-Merry, "the dance is nearly over, and the children are all going there immediately; you would only be in the way, but," added Carry-on-Merry, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes, "I have a much finer idea than that."

"Really?" inquired the Griffin. "Really a fine idea?"

"Ripping," responded Carry-on-Merry, as he mysteriously produced from an inside pocket of his royal scarlet coat a big white damask dinner napkin.

"What *can* it be for?" simpered the Griffin; "and will it help to show me off to advantage?" he anxiously inquired.

"Rather," said Carry-on-Merry. "Listen! Put this dinner napkin over your face, sit in a corner and go to sleep. Now the *most* remarkable thing you could do in an assembly like this to attract attention, would be to go to sleep."

The Griffin for a moment looked dubious. "Then," said Carry-on-Merry with a still more wicked gleam in his mischievous eyes, "I will tell every one that you are 'The Sleeping Beauty' and everybody will immediately want to see you."

"How lovely," sighed the Griffin, "and I shall look the part and be the part; in fact," added the Griffin, "I shall be *the* thing of the evening."

"*You will*," rejoined Carry-on-Merry enigmatically, "but that is not all. When I wake you up at last, of course all the children will laugh."

"What at?" inquired the Griffin suspiciously.

"Why, for joy at the discovery."

"Humph!" debated the Griffin, "only joy—not admiration?"

"Oh, yes," glibly replied Carry-on-Merry, "admiration, of course, and the sheer beauty of the thing. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes, yes," eagerly interrupted the Griffin, "sheer beauty sounds better, sounds more like me."

"Of course it does," laughed Carry-on-Merry. "Then perhaps I shall ask you to sing."

"Oh! Carry-on-Merry," faltered the Griffin in a broken voice, "you have touched my heart—that is the very thing I was waiting for somebody to ask me to do. To sing," rhapsodised the Griffin—"to be like one of those great singers out of the opera, to pour out one's heart tones, to be gazed at by every eye, to be listened to by every ear, to be the adored of all. How can I thank you? How can I repay you?"

"Don't, please," implored Carry-on-Merry, who appeared to be choking inwardly, "don't thank me any more now, I can't bear it—some other time."

"Yet stay," cried the Griffin, with unexpected and dramatic suddenness, "who is going to kiss me?"

"Kiss you?" echoed Carry-on-Merry blankly, "kiss you? Good gracious! I give it up."

"Yet," pondered the Griffin, "somebody had to kiss the Sleeping Beauty!"

"You won't find anybody to do it," said Carry-on-Merry decisively.

"Why not?" asked the Griffin sharply.

"I mean," amended Carry-on-Merry, "nobody could be found for the moment of sufficient importance."

"Oh, I see," replied the Griffin, "yet perhaps Boadicea would oblige."

"Out of the question," said Carry-on-Merry. "Besides you know she never takes part in any—any—er—*festivities* at all."

"True," lamented the Griffin, "and yet assuredly I must be kissed for the thing to be natural."

Carry-on-Merry turned away his head, for Carry-on-Merry almost felt that he could not trust himself to speak at that moment. Then one of his many bright ideas occurred to him. "I know," rapidly explained Carry-on-Merry, "I have it; I will find some important personage present to give you a rap."

"Where?" moaned the Griffin, "not on my knuckles. You know I cannot stand anything of that nature on my knuckles."

"No—no——" grinned Carry-on-Merry. "I mean a tap, just a little tap."

"I see," agreed the Griffin. "Very well, one little tap, a tap as dainty as if a feather had brushed me in my sleep."

"Or a floating piece of thistledown," laughed Carry-on-Merry.

"Oh yes," said the Griffin. "Thistledown sounds more romantic, and then I shall wake from my dream."

"I don't think myself you ever will," observed Carry-on-Merry, quite as if he were thinking of something else.

"What!" said the Griffin. "Never wake?"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Carry-on-Merry hastily, "but you have to go to sleep first, you know, and you had better hurry up whilst the children are eating, then you won't be observed."

"But I want to be observed," objected the Griffin.

"Of course you do," insisted Carry-on-Merry, "but that comes later on.
Go at once."

The amiable Griffin departed accordingly to carry out his part of the programme, and forthwith lumped himself in a distant corner, with the grace of a camel who had found sudden and unexpected opportunities of benefiting his health through sleep. From this slumber the Griffin found it necessary to rouse himself after a little while, upon hearing the children all shouting his name. The entire party having partaken of the delightful refreshments provided according to the various requirements of their constitutions, were watching a moving series of cinematograph pictures of London.

One of the great golden spaces of the walls formed the screen, Gamble, Grin and Grub, full of laughter, manipulated the cinematograph machine, whilst Carry-on-Merry gaily pointed out the pictures with a big golden wand.

All the children loved the pictures, for they were faithful portraits of themselves as they appeared every day in the London streets, when they were not arrayed in gorgeous robes for a Princely Party.

The streets they knew only too well but yet they loved them. Were they not always in the streets—were they not passing every day of their lives the very scenes they were now watching flung upon the screen? The picture being shown at the moment the Griffin heard his name called, was a Royal Procession passing Temple Bar.

Instantly the children recognised the Griffin and called him by name.

The Griffin awoke, saw himself being shown upon the moving picture film, and gave a shriek of delight.

"Stop! oh, stop!" shrieked the Griffin, as he ambled across to Carry-on-Merry and seized the Gold Wand. "Please don't hurry past this beautiful picture. Of course," cried the Griffin with a silly laugh, "of course it's me, *ME* with Royalty passing me. Is it not beautiful?—you can all see for yourselves. I am sitting higher up than Royalty itself. Notice the way the Royal personages bow and laugh as they pass me."

"They laugh right enough," agreed Carry-on-Merry.

"Eh?" said the Griffin suspiciously.

"The Griffin ought to have been a showman," observed the Pleasant-Faced
Lion.

"Now we pass on to the next picture," called Carry-on-Merry.

"Oh, *don't* hurry," implored the Griffin. "Don't pass the most beautiful of all the pictures in such haste."

"*Next* picture," laughed Carry-on-Merry.

The Griffin, after bestowing a hurt look upon Carry-on-Merry, retired, and again composed himself for sleep.

His slumber this time was not destined to be of long duration.

A grey sombre figure suddenly strode into the brilliant flower-draped pavilion; a slouch hat made the figure look very sinister, and a sword clanked at his side.

The figure strode on and scowled darkly at King Richard sitting gracefully upon his charger. "Ho! ho!" called the sombre man in a loud voice. "Ho! ho!" he repeated with a mirthless laugh.

King Richard neither moved not took the faintest notice.

On strode the figure towards King Charles seated upon his charger, and who was regarding the children with the pleasantest expression possible.

"Ha!" shouted the figure as it strode along. "Ha! I say, Ha!"

King Charles still smiled gravely and took no notice. The striding figure that shouted "Ha!" might never have uttered a word for all the notice King Charles took of him.

"Ha!" shouted the figure for the last time.

Then, seeing that nobody took any notice of him, the figure looked glum, and folding his arms espied the Griffin peacefully asleep, the white dinner napkin covering his fond, foolish face, waiting to be awakened, so the Griffin fondly hoped—awakened by a gentle tap as Beauty. The Griffin's slumber seemed to annoy the sombre man intensely, for without uttering a syllable he drew his sword and smote the Griffin hard upon the red flannel paws that were folded with a view to pictorial effect beside the Griffin's covered face.

There was a shriek of anguish, and the Griffin awoke.

The pain the Griffin suffered from the blow upon his tender paws was as nothing compared to the blow to the Griffin's feelings when he realised that his ineffably touching picture of the Sleeping Beauty had been spoiled for the evening. A great surge of sudden hatred swept over the Griffin at the swaggering intruder who had dared to strike him, and simultaneously the Griffin remembered something he had once heard said by a man in blue wearing a helmet close to where he always stood in Fleet Street.

The Griffin seized Carry-on-Merry's golden wand for the second time that evening and approached the sombre man of the top boots and the slouch hat menacingly. "Move on," shouted the Griffin, giving a lifelike imitation of the man in blue with a helmet. "Move on, d'ye hear?"

The sombre figure backed a little way in astonishment.

"Move on," said the Griffin, "out of this; we don't want you here. Orff you go!" The sombre figure retreated a little more. "If I catch you here again," said the Griffin pompously, "I will run you in; no loafing here!" The sombre man gave one scowl, sheathed his sword with a clank, and hurriedly took his departure without once looking back or uttering any further remark.

"Bravo!" muttered the Lion, "that is the first useful thing the Griffin has done all the evening."

"Who was that dismal looking man muffled up like a brigand?" asked Ridgwell.

The Lion smiled. "That was Oliver Cromwell. He came to try and spoil the party."

"Why?" asked Ridgwell.

"He doesn't like the extravagance," said the Lion; "he hates any display, and cannot bear to see children happy."

"Thank you, Griffin," said Christine.

"Listen, all of you," simpered the Griffin, "some one has thanked me. Oh! Fancy anybody thanking *me*. Has everybody heard me publicly thanked?" asked the Griffin anxiously.

"Yes, everybody," said the Lion; "we don't want any more of it."

The Griffin looked sulky.

"As long as everybody knows what I did," said the Griffin. "Nobody else thought of doing it. Do you think it was better than my being the Sleeping Beauty?" inquired the Griffin eagerly.

"Yes," replied the Lion, "it was more realistic."

"Fancy that, more realistic! how beautiful!" and the Griffin sidled away, sniggering with self-gratified pride at his own achievement.

"I am afraid," explained the Lion to Christine and Ridgwell, "that he intends to sing."

"But can he sing?" inquired Ridgwell.

"No," said the Lion, "it is a wretched performance; yet, like all other people who cannot really sing, he is dying to be asked to do so, and I feel sure that some one will be misguided enough to ask him. You see," explained the Lion, "the Griffin cannot sing in tune, but like most people afflicted in the same way, he is totally unconscious of his failing, and really believes his own singing to be quite beautiful."

Christine and Ridgwell both laughed. "It must be very funny," they said.

"It is so funny," answered the Lion, "and so deplorable at the same time that it is almost beyond a joke."

Almost before the Lion had finished speaking Carry-on-Merry, with a particularly wicked laugh, danced to the centre of the bright ball-room and said he thought that perhaps the Griffin might be persuaded to sing.

"I thought so," groaned the Lion.

The Griffin gurgled with pleasure, and immediately started to look coy, and playfully tap the golden carpet spread upon the ground with his forepaws, as if he had suddenly discovered some new beauty in the pattern of the luxurious floor covering.

"Really," said the Griffin, "I do not think I could. Oh! really *no*."

"Showing off," grunted the Lion; "he'll sing in the end, safe enough. Worse luck!"

"With all these beautiful singers here," smirked the Griffin, "to ask *me*. Oh!—really!"

"Oh, please sing," everybody murmured politely.

"Oh—oh!—really," simpered the Griffin, trying in vain to blush. "You see, I am not perhaps in my usual form."

"What on earth will it be like, then?" ventured the Lion.

"I am sure you will honour and delight the company," laughed Carry-on-Merry, with his wickedest laugh.

"Besides," demurred the Griffin hesitatingly, "I have two chilblains and such tender paws, I don't think I could really."

"We did not ask you to *play*," interrupted the Lion shortly.

"No, no," replied the Griffin hastily, "to sing—I understand. Yes, to sing. Oh—fancy asking *me* to sing. Well, well, perhaps a few bars."

"Now we are in for it," said the Lion, "and I don't suppose you will ever hear anything like it again."

"I do so want to hear the Griffin," said Ridgwell, "and I really cannot think what it will be like."

"Like?" echoed the Lion, "it will be like the effect of the first early gooseberries of the year without sugar or milk; it will be like slate pencils squeaking upon slates; like a trombone that somebody is learning to play for the first time. However, nothing short of an earthquake will stop him now, for, as I tell you, he is simply dying to sing the moment he thinks anybody at all will listen to him, and that he can show off. However," added the Lion, "when it gets beyond all human endurance, I make a sign to Richard I. Now the Griffin is terribly frightened of Richard I."

"Why?" asked both the children.

"Because the Griffin is afraid that Richard will advance and hit him on the paws with the big sword he carries."

"And will he?" asked the children.

"Yes," said the Lion, "if it gets too bad."

Everybody stopped talking now, for the Griffin, after much further pressing, had made up his mind what he was going to sing. He decided to make a start in a key which was indescribable, and with a voice that resembled the twanging of a banjo that had not been tuned.

And thus the Griffin sang—

"Of a merry, merry king I will relate
Who owned much silver, gold and plate,
And wishing to be up-to-date
    Within his city,
Placed a handsome Griffin outside the gate,
    A creature pretty.

"Yet one thing, the merry, merry king forgot
That it would be his Griffin's lot
To be very, very cold, or very, very hot,
    High up in Fleet Street.

So slowly the faithful creature got
Chilblains upon his feet.

"The Griffin grew prettier day by day
Directing the traffic along each way,
With always a pleasant word to say
All along Fleet Street.
One trouble alone caused him dismay,
His very tender feet.

Chorus—

"Oh! my poor tender feet!
Of what use are England's laws,
Unless they protect my claws
And keep me warm in the street?
Nothing so young and fair,
Ever sniffed Fleet Street air,
Ever sang like the Dove—
And—All that I ask is love."

At this point the Griffin was so overcome by his own performance that he burst into tears; and despite the excessive hilarity of every one present, to say nothing of Carry-on-Merry, who was rolling upon the floor in his mirth, the Griffin continued to sob, and from time to time wiped away the big tears that rolled down his cheeks with the fur upon the Lord Mayor's mantle that he wore.

"It always affects me," sobbed the Griffin.

"Yes," answered the Lion, "it has affected all of us strangely."

"Nearly been the death of me," gulped Carry-on-Merry.

"I think I will go home now," said the Griffin, as he surreptitiously wiped away the last tears and prepared to depart.

"Oh, don't think of leaving us yet," said the Lion.

"Very well," sniffed the Griffin; "perhaps I may be asked to sing again."

"Not if I know it," whispered the Lion in an undertone; "one performance of that nature is quite sufficient for one evening."

At this moment Carry-on-Merry announced that the dogs, wishing to return thanks for the general pleasantness of the party, and being unable to sing themselves, had deputed one of their number, a most intelligent bob-tail sheep-dog, to compose an ode.

This particular dog, it was thought, had some claims as a poet, since he was a lineal descendant of the canine companion who invariably accompanied Robert Burns in all his wanderings.

The three laughing little lions would now sing the ode the bob-tailed sheep-dog had composed, with the general permission of the company.

"Let us hear it," said the Lion.

"Oh! fancy singing after me," remarked the Griffin.

"Yes," agreed the Lion, "it shows great courage."

Gamble, Grin, and Grub arranged themselves in order, and Gamble commenced—

"Cross Chelsea Bridge, by Chelsea town
There is a place called Battersea.
The very name to Christian dog's
Will make them shudder fearfully."

Here Grin took up the solo.

"A place where gloomy prison doors
Do shut up homeless dogs

If ever they get lost, or stray
During the London fogs."

Grub hereupon came forward.

"When once inside that citadel
Within three days or four,
They send you to a dreadful room
Where you never bark no more."

Then came the Chorus—

"Pleasant-Faced Lion, our thanks to thee
For having avoided Battersea."

"Very well sung," admitted the Lion. "I suppose that, being always so close to Westminster Abbey, the little lions have taken some useful hints from what they have heard going on inside.

"The time has come for the party to finish," announced the Pleasant-Faced Lion, "but before it is ended——"

"Has it got to end now?" Ridgwell asked wistfully.

"Everything has to come to an end some time," replied the Lion quietly, "from ices and parties to empires and the world. However," he added encouragingly, "one can always look forward to some possible and pleasant continuation of almost everything, although, perhaps, on different, not to say advanced lines. Before you children go I shall be able to show you the most wonderfully coloured transformation scene you have ever witnessed. Watch carefully the long wall of the Pavilion which you are facing," commanded the Lion.

Carry-on-Merry romped up at this moment laughing as merrily as when the evening commenced.

"Time?" inquired Carry-on-Merry.

The Pleasant-Faced Lion nodded.

"Yes, now," he said.

Slowly the golden wall and the roof with its masses of brilliantly hanging flowers seemed to fade away.

The children knew it was Trafalgar Square they were looking at once again, yet a Trafalgar Square transformed out of all resemblance to its usual familiar aspect.

As the walls appeared to drop before their eyes a brilliant golden bungalow palace with the children dressed as Scarlet Beefeaters grouped down its shining steps glimmered through the rose-pink light in which they beheld it. Surely it could not be the National Gallery!

All the children present passed and repassed before it in their dazzling costumes, making vivid splashes of colour, as changeful and as fascinating as a kaleidoscope.

The fountains still sprayed their mists of violet, amethyst and gold.

"Mark the changing colours well," said the Lion, "and take in all the picture well, for you will not see it ever like this again."

The happy fresh voices of the children were still singing with a rare outburst of melody—

"Pleasant-Faced Lion, our thanks to thee,
For all your hospitality."

"Amen!" said the Lion. "Come, Ridgwell and Christine, jump on!" commanded the Lion, as he sank down in order to enable the two children to get on his back. "Home now!"

Both the children looked back many times, of course. They saw the golden bungalow palace for the last time in all its changing lights. Noticed that Queen Boadicea stood majestically upon the topmost step with King Richard upon one side of her and King Charles upon the other. St. George stood with his armour flashing a few steps below. The four merry dogs were gathered around him, whilst Carry-on-Merry was resting his laughing head in one of St. George's hands.

The coloured lights grew paler, a mist danced before their eyes, then twinkled and disappeared.

"It is gone," said Ridgwell, "and oh! how dark the streets look now!"

"But *what* a party," said Christine.

"And what a feast," added Ridgwell.

"Yes," replied the Lion philosophically, "it is really remarkable how times have changed. In the olden days, long, long ago, everything was reversed. For instance, it was the Lions who were then provided with the feast, and the children who were eaten."

"Horrid!" shivered Ridgwell. "You mean, Lal, those wicked Roman Emperors who let the poor Christians be eaten?"

"My child," announced the Lion gravely, "free meals have invariably been productive of much unpleasant discussion and inquiries afterwards. But see now," he added coaxingly, "the perfect state of perfection the world has arrived at. The Pleasant Lions give the banquet themselves now. Every single thing to-night was provided by Lions. I gave the party—I, the Pleasant-Faced Lion. The four laughing lions from Westminster helped. Richard Coeur-de-Lion presided, and Messrs. Lyons provided all the refreshments."

"Any rate, Lal," observed Ridgwell, "although Christine and I both love you, of course—lions must have been very cruel and savage once, otherwise they wouldn't have *thought* of eating anybody, would they?"

"Ah, my little boy," replied the Pleasant-Faced Lion softly, "if you were kept without food for days and days I wonder what you would do."

"Tuck in like mad the first chance I got," announced Ridgwell with conviction.

"Perhaps the lions did the same thing," observed Lal gently. "However, I feel I cannot offer any excuse for their past conduct; yet," continued the Pleasant-Faced Lion wisely, as he jogged contentedly on, homewards towards Balham, "I have a fair proposition to make to you, although it may seem somewhat in the nature of a riddle to you both at the present moment."

"What is it?" asked the children in a breath.

"Suppose," said the Lion—"I only say suppose—both of you ever had a chance of eating me, of—ahem! in short, devouring your old friend Lal, would you do it?" asked the Lion, with an odd tremble in his voice.

The question seemed to be so odd, not to mention out of place, that both the children laughed.

"Why, Lal," chuckled Ridgwell, "how ridiculous you are. How could Christine or myself ever possibly eat even a little bit of you?"

"No," answered the Lion, "I believe you are both little Christian children, and yet," he added with a sigh, "you might both become Pagans."

"What's a Pagan?" asked Ridgwell.

Again the Lion sighed. "My child," he said, "you have a very great deal to learn, and among the many things at present hidden from you is the fact that both you and Christine will see me once again and once only."

"Where?" asked the children.

"At your home in Balham."

"Good gracious," said Ridgwell, "will you knock at the hall door?"

"No," said the Pleasant-Faced Lion.

"Or appear sitting in the raspberry bushes in the garden?" ventured Christine. "If so, you will spoil them, you know!"

"No," said the Lion, "certainly not."

"Then how will you come?" asked Ridgwell.

"You will see me again once more," asserted the Lion, "in three days from now, and moreover inside your own home."

"Three days from now is Ridge's birthday," ventured Christine; "of course, it would be very nice to see you, but I do wonder how you will come, and I do wonder how we shall be able to explain you away."

The Pleasant-Faced Lion laughed his gruffest laugh.

"I don't think you could very well *explain* me away, little Christine."

"Suppose you sat on the hearth-rug and people seemed a little distant or awkward?" commenced Ridgwell.

"Yes," broke in Christine, "or some of those dreadful long pauses occurred when nobody speaks and every one looks at every one else and feels uncomfortable—would you *say* something?"

"Yes," said the Lion. "I have plenty of tact, but really there won't be any need," and the Pleasant-Faced Lion again chuckled softly to himself.

"There is only one thing I want you to do," said the Pleasant-Faced Lion, and he still seemed to be choked with merriment as if a sudden idea had occurred to him.

"What is it, Lal?" inquired both the children.

"Upon Ridgwell's birthday night, before you both go to bed, I want you, Ridgwell, to remember a little rhyme and say it to yourself."

"A hymn?" asked Ridgwell.

"Not exactly a hymn."

"After we have said our prayers?"

"Certainly," replied the Lion obligingly, "any time before you go to bed will do; will you promise to remember?"

"Of course, Lal."

"Well, this is the little rhyme," whispered the Lion mysteriously; and somehow it seemed to Ridgwell as if the Lion was still laughing at him as he repeated the following extraordinary rhyme—

"Christian child or Pagan child,
Which is my denomination,
Have I eaten dear old Lal
In my birthday celebration?"

Ridgwell repeated the mysterious rhyme after the Lion, then he shook his head.

"Don't understand it, do you?" grinned the Lion.

"Not a bit," answered Ridgwell.

"I give it up, too," said Christine.

"Are you laughing at us, Lal?" inquired Ridgwell anxiously.

"Ah!" said the Lion, "I wonder; however, he who laughs last, laughs last; that saying is true without a doubt; and," he concluded with a chuckle, "I bet you both anything you like that I have the last laugh. In fact, one day when you pass me you may hear me laugh, although I shall never speak to either of you again in public. And that reminds me of something I want to warn both of you about particularly. Never appear to notice me in public or speak to me whenever you chance to pass me in Trafalgar Square; you would only collect a crowd, make me very uncomfortable, and convey the unfortunate impression to everybody within earshot that you were mad. The same thing applies to Carry-on-Merry; he has a most provoking face, and the happy laugh always to be seen upon it might tempt you both to suppose that he was listening; now mind you never give way to the temptation of addressing either of us in public, and never refer to anything that has happened even in private, for you will only be misunderstood. Remember," concluded the Lion, "that the Great Order of Imagination is only given to a very few people; those who do not possess it do not understand it. See, your own has faded already!"

Both the children clasped their hands simultaneously to their necks where the glittering order had hung and shone only a few minutes before.

Then they stared blankly at the place where it had been. Alas! the luminously lighted jewels of the order were no longer there.

"Oh, Lal," said Ridgwell, "shall we never have it again?"

"Only the memory of it," replied the Lion gently; "that never fades."

"Only the memory," echoed Ridgwell thoughtfully.

"Nobody can ever take that away from you," said the Lion.

"Did any other little boy ever have the Great Order of Imagination, Lal?"

"Yes," said the Lion, "there was *one* who had the highest and greatest order of all, the Pure Soul of Imagination itself." The Lion paused and seemed to be thinking.

"Where is he now?" whispered Ridgwell, for unconsciously he seemed to have lowered his voice.

The Lion lifted his great and noble head, and looked upwards towards the silver stars above them. The Lion shook his head doubtfully, and the children noticed that there was something very like a tear in his eyes.

"I don't know which particular star," said the Lion, "but somewhere there, I think; but then, you see, I'm only a Pagan."

The Lion stopped and purred; they were outside the familiar windows of their own home.

"Oh, Lal," whispered the children, "how shall we remember all we've seen to-night; how shall we be able to think about it and go through it all again, if the Order of Imagination has been taken away from us and if we are never to speak to you again, and only to see you once more? Even then you cannot tell us *how* we are going to see you."

The Lion smiled. "I can arrange that easily. Be of good heart, little Ridgwell and Christine. I know a writer—he comes and talks to me at night sometimes, though I never answer him—and I will suggest he writes it all down for you. I can ask him things without saying a word."

"Will you?" pleaded the children. "Oh, please ask him, Lal!"

"Yes," said the Lion, "I will; good-night."

CHAPTER IV

PREPARING FOR A VISITOR

Upon the third day after bidding good-bye to their strange friend, the children felt they had every reason to be excited as to what events the day would bring forth, to say nothing of endless speculations as to the manner in which their most uncommon visitor might choose to appear to them.

Consequently after Ridgwell had opened his birthday presents the first thing in the morning, he held a sort of council of war with Christine.

"You see, Chris, fortunately the house hasn't any underneath part," explained Ridgwell, "so that we can keep watch, both of us, all on one floor so to speak. You take guard of the French windows in the drawing-room where you can see the greater part of the garden, and I will watch the windows of the dining-room, where I can see the road both ways up to the house."

"Shan't we get tired of always looking at the same spot?" objected Christine.

"I have thought of a plan for that, Chris. When either of us want a change, just shout out, 'Sister Ann, sister Ann, do you see anybody coming?'"

"I see," nodded Christine, "everybody will only think we are playing a game."

"Then," pursued Ridgwell, full of inspiration, "if Lal isn't looming in sight anywhere, the other will shout out, 'Not a sail in the offing,' then we change over rooms."

"Anyway Lal couldn't sail, could he?" queried Christine.

"You don't know how he might come," whispered Ridgwell. "He might even come in a motor car, and anyway it's only so that other people shan't understand."

"It seems to me," remarked Christine logically, "that people won't understand him anyway, and less when they see him than when they don't."

"It's an anxious time, isn't it, Chris?"

"Very," assented Christine, "and anyhow we shall have to drop Cookie a hint, because you see her window in the kitchen looks over a part of the garden that we can't see from the drawing-room."

"Of course," mused Ridgwell, "the weak spot about Cookie is that she gets shocks so quickly."

"She's sure to get one to-day," commenced Christine hopefully, "when Lal comes."

"Very well then, we'll give her a sort of hint," suggested Ridgwell.

Now Cookie, beloved of the children, to say nothing of the household generally, was a fat person, with very red cheeks, and very good-humoured rolling green eyes that somehow always looked as if they had been originally intended for gooseberries, which had boiled and bubbled during her many cooking operations and had never been permitted to simmer.

"What do you children want in the kitchen?" commenced Cookie. "Master Ridgie, you know quite well that your birthday cake ain't to be ready till tea-time."

"But, Cookie dear," commenced Ridgwell insinuatingly.

Cookie dear continued the mystic rights over which she presided as high priestess, her vermilion red hands and arms continued to splash about in a very big basin, where she contrived to throw up little waves of very white flour as if she were about to take a morning dip in it, yet hesitated before taking the plunge. These mysterious rites having been accomplished and the flour having as it were received a final blessing from Cookie's hands, Cookie commenced to beat up eggs.

"I know you've come wheedling for something," objected Cookie, "and you ain't going to 'ave it, Master Ridgie. Why, you've only just finished your breakfast."

"I don't want anything to eat," announced Ridgwell.

Cookie eyes boiled and rolled ominously, whilst a sort of faint concern appeared upon the surface of them. "If you can't eat, Master Ridgie, then you must be ill and want some medicine."

"No, no," hastily interposed Ridgwell, "I don't want any medicine, we only came in to ask you a question."

"Well, you can't ask me any of your questions now, I'm busy," asserted Cookie. "Ain't got no time."

"Oh, Cookie dear, you can listen whilst you beat up an egg," expostulated Ridgwell.

"*Egg!*" shouted Cookie indignantly, "three blessed eggs for your cake, and 2 1/2d. each, new laid too, and I only bought a dozen of 'em."

"Yes, yes, Cookie dear. I meant three eggs, the number doesn't matter, and it won't take a minute for us to tell you. It's just this. Suppose a great big beautiful Lion came and sat in the middle of the raspberry canes just outside your kitchen door, what would you do?"

"Is this a conundrum?" demanded Cookie. "If so, I don't know no answer to it, Master Ridgie."

"It isn't a riddle, Cookie, at all. If a Lion really came to see you, what would you do?"

"I should fetch a policeman at once," announced Cookie.

Ridgwell smiled. "A policeman wouldn't be any good, Cookie! Really, you know, he couldn't do anything."

"Then I should fetch two policemen," said Cookie, shortly and conclusively. Cookie, at this point in the argument, beat the three new-laids at such a furious rate, that the foam of them whirled round and round very much like the agitated thoughts of Cookie herself at being confronted with such an outrageous problem the first thing in the morning.

"'Owever," amended Cookie, "afore I went to fetch them policemen, I'd throw all the boiling green water over him, from the window first, and see if that wouldn't shift 'im."

Both Ridgwell and Christine laughed outright, the idea was too ridiculous. To think of their friendly and Pleasant-Faced Lal coming to make a society call and having boiling cabbage water thrown over his stately head, was altogether too much for their gravity.

"How indignant he would be," laughed Ridgwell. "Oh! Chris only think how hurt he would feel as he shook the stuff off his mane and whiskers!"

This imaginary picture, however, seemed to be too much for Christine, so she determined to speak seriously to Cookie.

"Cookie," said Christine in her most earnest manner, "a lion may arrive outside this door (pointing to the article in question in a most impressive fashion) at any moment to-day."

"Yes," added Ridgwell, "and we only want you to be prepared."

Cookie's eyes seemed to boil a little faster for a moment, appeared to swell in fact and be altogether overdone, as she fixed her orbs upon the door in question, then up went Cookie's apron over her head, and alas! down went the three new-laid at 2 1/2d. each, all spilled upon the floor, and the cup broken as well.

At this moment the children instinctively realised that discretion was sometimes the better part of valour, and made speedy preparations to vacate in favour of other quarters of the house, not, however, before they could hear Cookie moaning beneath her apron:

"Escaped I s'pose, oh! mighty 'Eavens! escaped from the Crystal Palace, or the Zoo, or a circus or somethink, oh, it ain't safe living in England! Blowed if I don't bolt the kitchen door, and nobody warned me or told me it was in the morning papers. Thank goodness I've taken in the milk, and them three eggs all spoiled. Only nine left now," moaned Cookie, "and cutlets and pancakes for lunch too."

"Come, Chris," whispered Ridgwell. "You see we can't expect much support from Cookie."

"No," agreed Christine, as they departed for the dining-room. "How about Mother? Let's hear what she says."

"Yes," assented Ridgwell. "You see Mother is very nice and kind always to anybody who calls, and perhaps if she spoke to Lal and welcomed him a bit when he comes, he might feel at home at once."

"I can't think where we are going to ask him to sit, can you, Ridgie? You see," explained Christine, "it's so inhospitable to leave him in the hall, and if he walks into the drawing-room and swishes his tail even contentedly, all the china would go over at once."

"No, Chris, Lal is much too well mannered to do anything like that, but I'm afraid the only place for him will be the hearth-rug in front of the fire. Stop a minute, Chris, I've got it. Of course, the sofa in the drawing-room. Nobody must sit on the sofa at all to-day, then it will be all ready for him when he comes, and we shall only have to tuck him in a bit at the sides if he's too big."

Matters were not much better understood in the drawing-room, for a lady visitor had just called and was waiting for Mother to come down. Mrs. Tallcat was a lady who always deemed it her duty to call once a week upon everybody, whether people wished to see her or whether they did not wish to see her.

Had a census of opinion been taken concerning Mrs. Tallcat's calls, Mrs. Tallcat would have found, much to her astonishment no doubt, that she possessed very few votes, and no votes at all from children.

"Would you very much mind if you didn't sit upon the sofa?" commenced Ridgwell gently.

Mrs. Tallcat, always inclined towards huffiness at a moment's notice, consequently selected a chair.

"Is the sofa likely to give way?" inquired Mrs. Tallcat suspiciously.

"No," explained Christine, "it is because it is so strong and firm on its legs that we have chosen it."

"I never allow *my* boy to play upon the sofa," sniffed Mrs. Tallcat, as if she were referring to a piano.

"It isn't to play upon," remarked Ridgwell, "but we are expecting a very, very solid visitor."

Mrs. Tallcat sniffed for the second time. "I never allow my boy to make any remarks whatever upon visitors who call," responded Mrs. Tallcat icily.

"Oh, Lal doesn't mind," said Christine cheerfully.

"Who is Lal?" inquired Mrs. Tallcat, "a gentleman friend of your father's?"

"No," said Ridgwell, "Lal is a lion, and Father doesn't know him yet."

"Tut, tut, tut," snapped Mrs. Tallcat crossly. "Directly *my* boy begins to talk nonsense I send him straight to bed."

"It's bad for the health to go to bed at the wrong time," suggested Ridgwell pensively.

"My boy always does as he's told," announced Mrs. Tallcat triumphantly; "if he doesn't, he is whipped."

At this point a new idea suddenly struck Ridgwell. "Chris," he whispered audibly, "we must somehow get the old cat out of the way."

Mrs. Tallcat instantly bridled, and her face became inflamed with anger. "How *dare* you!" commenced the indignant lady.

"I mean the *other* cat," explained Ridgwell, "our own cat."

The explanation, although convincing, was perhaps ambiguous. It was undoubtedly fortunate that Mother timed her appearance at this point to a nicety, and so prevented any further complications.

"Dreadful time her boy must have, don't you think, eh, Chris?" asked Ridgwell.

Christine nodded.

"Only fancy, Chris," pursued Ridgwell, "calling her little boy Tom. Tom Tallcat; why, he'll be chaffed no end at school. I do feel sorry for him; and then the way she dresses him, coloured velvet and a brigand's hat with a feather in it, just as if he was part of a circus. I'm glad Mother doesn't dress me like that. The other day I met him and he'd got a bow and arrow. She'd actually sent him into the street with a bow and arrow. I said 'Hullo, Robin Hood,' not meaning anything, and he began to cry; it was awkward, and I'm sure he feels it. Father said that the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children ought to interfere, but I think that was perhaps only one of Father's jokes."

"I think," suggested Mother, who had caught audible fragments of this conversation, "I think you children had better run away now and play."

The morning appeared to go quite quickly up to the cutlets and the pancake stage.

The late afternoon shadows threw their creeping patterns over both lawns, and still there was no sign whatever of their eccentric friend Lal.

Tea-time came and passed, and then the shadows grew deeper, first blue, then violet, then black, the trees and shrubs could scarcely be distinguished at all; and, as ill luck would have it, there was no moon.

At length the time arrived when the family not unreasonably suggested that the blinds of the house should be pulled down. Here was a dilemma. How was it possible to warn the household of the Pleasant-Faced Lion's approach if the blinds were pulled down? When Ridgwell found, in spite of much lingering, that the last crumb of cake had been consumed, to say nothing of the last currant which he had made last quite a long time, and that the third summons to go to bed must have some sort of notice taken of it, he resigned himself to the inevitable, and with a hopeless look at Christine, prepared to talk to Father.

Father was reading quite quietly, and apparently deeply engrossed in a book, and somehow that didn't help matters.

"Please, Father, would you mind very much if the hall door and the back door were both left wide open all night?"

Father considered this somewhat odd request for a space, then inquired with a stray gleam of amusement in his eyes, "Do you consider the house stuffy? Or have you suddenly adopted one of the Futurist ideas concerning Health?"

"No, it isn't that, but Chris and I expect somebody; no, I mean *something*, and we should be so disappointed if it, no, I mean *he* didn't come."

"Rather a late visitor," said Father, "and rather an inconsiderate one if this quite Eastern welcome of him includes us all catching our death of cold. No, Ridgie, I'm afraid he will have to knock."

"But, Father, I'm not sure he can knock."

"Then ring," suggested their parent, "nice new electric bell I've just had fixed up. He's only got to push the button."

"Perhaps he doesn't understand about electric bells," objected Ridgwell.

"Your friend seems a trifle old-fashioned," observed Father, good-naturedly.

"And then," said Ridgwell, "his paw is so big he might never find the bell-push."

"I see; a dog, eh?"

"No, bigger than a dog, much."

"Well, then, say a donkey."

"No, Father, bigger than a dog, and not so big as a donkey."

"I give it up," said Father, "but I promise whatever he is he shall be attended to and entertained if possible."

"I cannot think what you will say to him," debated Ridgwell anxiously.

"I will do my best, Ridgwell; but from your description I should imagine the conversation will be a little one-sided. However," remarked Father drily, "perhaps he can be persuaded to smoke, or drink."

"No, Father, he never smokes, and he only drinks water."

"Ah! very abstemious," murmured Father; "perhaps he is a vegetarian as well, sounds like it, and they are always the most difficult people to entertain."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a loud knocking at the front door, and immediately the new electric bell sounded throughout the house. Ridgwell and Christine nearly tumbled over one another in order to get to the hall door first.

"It's Lal after all," shouted Ridgwell.

"Sure to be," chimed in Christine.

At length in the struggle the hall door was opened, but it wasn't the form of the Pleasant-Faced Lion who greeted them, only Mr. Jollyface, a friend of Father's and a happy, jolly old bachelor, who loved both of the children.

"Anybody with you?" inquired Ridgwell anxiously, as he peered either side of Mr. Jollyface's portly form.

"No, only me," chuckled Mr. Jollyface. "Whom are you expecting? Glad to find you children up; I've got something for you in my pocket, Master Ridgie; your birthday, isn't it?"

"Yes," confessed Ridgwell, but it could be plainly seen that his former enthusiasm had died a sudden death. "But do tell me, Mr. Jollyface, did you see anything as you came along?"

"Lots of things," replied Mr. Jollyface, cheerily.

"A lion?" whispered Ridgwell mysteriously.

"No," debated Mr. Jollyface, "no, I think I may say that a lion was the only thing I didn't see."

"Oh, Mr. Jollyface, are you sure?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Jollyface gravely, "I can really be quite certain upon that point."

"If you had seen a great lion, Mr. Jollyface, what would you have done?"

"I think," debated Mr. Jollyface, as he prepared to disencumber himself of his great-coat, "I think I should have wished him good-evening and passed politely, like the—ahem—Levite, on the opposite side of the way."

"Oh, Mr. Jollyface," sighed Ridgwell, "if you only knew we have waited all day long for a lion."

"Now, that's very funny," whispered Mr. Jollyface, "for I have actually brought one for you in my pocket, I have really. Here it is," announced the imperturbable Mr. Jollyface, as he produced a parcel from his pocket and thrust it into Ridgwell's hand.

"No, no, not that sort of lion," remonstrated Ridgwell.

"Well, perhaps this one would do," suggested Mr. Jollyface. "It's the best sort of lion, you know, really, and made of the very finest chocolate, too."

Here a well-known voice was heard to remark: "If I have to speak to you children once more about going to bed there will be trouble."

"Scamper off," exclaimed the good-natured Mr. Jollyface; then he added, "you know you can eat chocolate in bed quite as well as you can anywhere else. I used to enjoy it as a boy more than I should have done upon a plate in the dining-room. Off you go; good-night, kids."

Thereupon Father claimed Mr. Jollyface, and as the children slowly mounted the stairs they could hear him saying: "So it was you the children were waiting for, and the animal friend they expected was a chocolate lion, eh?"

"Very likely," agreed Mr. Jollyface. "Ha! ha! ha! so they have been puzzling you, my old friend, eh?"

"Well, children's riddles are very difficult to guess," said Father, "and yet they are always so simple."

"Chris," observed Ridgwell dejectedly, as they reached their room and turned the handle of the door, "they none of them understand; isn't it dreadful? and they are grown up, too, and really ought to know."

"We've waited and waited, Ridgie, and there's nothing else to be done; Lal won't come now, and he's never broken his word before, has he?"

"He might come, Chris; let's roll up the blind."

"No, the garden looks the same as it always does; there isn't a thing in sight. Suppose we don't go to sleep just yet and keep awake a bit; Lal might come and throw a stone at the window."

"Let's eat the chocolate," suggested Chris, who was occasionally practical, "while we wait."

Ridgwell untied the small parcel, a wooden box, about half the size of one of Father's cigar-boxes, and appeared to be made of the same kind of brown wood.

Disclosed to view at length, the birthday present was seen to be a fairly large chocolate lion lying upon a pedestal. The entire sweet-meat model was covered in thick golden paper; this was quickly stripped off, and Ridgwell did the honours as possessor.

"I'll eat his head half, Chris, and give you the other half; I think that's a fair division."

"Right," agreed Christine; "we can't eat more than that to-night, and the pedestal part will do for the morning."

"I can't understand Lal disappointing us to-night as he has done," said Ridgwell, as he slowly munched his chocolate. "Can you, Chris?"

"No—isn't this chocolate good, Ridgie?"

"Yes, but fancy having to be contented with a chocolate lion when we know a real one! On my birthday too, and yet he promised faithfully we should see him again."

"He has forgotten us," confessed the children as they went to bed.

"Suppose he has too much to think of," said Ridgie; "he can't remember everything."

Christine never knew quite how long she had been asleep that night, before she distinctly heard muffled mutterings from her brother Ridgie's bed the other side of their little room. Surely Ridgie couldn't be saying his prayers at this time of night; then Christine was certain she heard half-smothered sobs.

"Ridgie, what's the matter; are you crying?" demanded Christine. The sobs became very audible now, and even an apparent effort to stifle them with the bed-clothes did not seem in any way to lessen them.

Christine pressed the button of the electric light, and in the sudden illumination regarded her brother across the room.

"Ridgie, why are you crying? are you in pain? have you eaten too much?"

"No," sobbed Ridgie, "no, but oh! Chrissie, I've—I've—we've eaten Lal."

Christine sat up in bed.

"Ridgie," demanded Christine, "are you dreaming?"

"No," whispered Ridgie, between his sobs; "don't you remember—

Christian child or Pagan child
Which is my denomination?
Have I eaten dear old Lal
In my birthday celebration?

Here, overcome by recollections, Ridgwell broke down completely. "I *have* eaten him," moaned Ridgwell; "at least, *we've* eaten him, for you helped. He said we should eat him, and we've done it. That's how Lal meant to come to us; now, I remember, it was exactly like him. Just as—as he is in Trafalgar Square on his pedestal. Oh, Chris, after all the Christians have eaten a lion; he said we should; we aren't Christians any longer, we're Pagans, and—and," confessed Ridgwell with a final outburst, "I feel like a cannibal; it's beastly."

Christine had become quite pale during this recital; but she thought for awhile before replying.

"Perhaps, Ridgie, Lal meant us to eat him—I mean his likeness in chocolate—all the time, and most likely he isn't angry with us at all. He might have arranged it all as a joke."

"It isn't a joke at all," sniffed Ridgwell, "it's horrible. We have eaten one of our very best friends. Oh! if only the Order of Great Imagination hadn't been taken away from us!"

"I am not so sure, Ridgie," observed Christine, with feminine intuition, "that you have lost *all* your order of imagination; I think you have still a lot left, or you would never have discovered Lal's riddle."

It was Ridgwell's turn now to sit up in bed, and he asked eagerly—

"Do you really think it was only a riddle, Chris, and Lal meant only to have a joke with us?"

Christine nodded gravely.

"I feel very comforted with that," said Ridgwell, "so turn off the light, Chris, and we'll go to sleep again; but oh, won't I just tell Lal next time I pass him in Trafalgar Square!"

Some few moments afterwards in the darkness Christine answered—

"You hadn't better make any remarks to Lal in public; you know he cautioned us about attracting a crowd."

"Crowd or no crowd, I mean to tell him what I think of him," asserted Ridgwell before he turned over and went to sleep.

* * * * *

The clock in the hall was just chiming twelve, and Mr. Jollyface was taking his departure.

Father and Mother were wishing him good-night and thanking him for bringing the chocolate lion for Ridgwell.

"It is really quite remarkable how I came to buy it," agreed Mr. Jollyface; "but I was passing through Trafalgar Square when I remembered that I hadn't bought Ridgie a present, and the sight of the corner lion, as I crossed the Square, made me remember a sweetstuff model of him I had seen in a chocolate shop in the Strand, so I went and bought it. But really the most wonderful thing about it is the almost uncanny intelligence of your children. Bless my soul! they couldn't have known I had bought it; and yet, would you believe it, they actually expected a lion, and asked me if I had brought one with me."

"Yes," agreed Father, "it's very wonderful; they were trying to describe a lion before you came in. I think at times children must have second sight, and that is why I am afraid we sometimes do not understand them. Good-night, Jollyface; come and see us again soon."

BOOK II

WHAT THE WRITER AND THE LORD MAYOR DECLARED

CHAPTER V

THE WRITER APPEARS UPON THE SCENE

There had been a certain amount of excitement when Father and Mother had started for their holidays abroad, but nothing in any way to be compared to the excitement of the day when the Writer made his first appearance.

Ridgwell and Christine distinctly heard themselves being asked for by a visitor, one day when the sitting-room door was open, and to be inquired for personally was at least something of an event. "I want to see the children," a voice had said, and there was no mistaking the significance of the words. Without any undue delay, Ridgwell and Christine immediately presented themselves.

The stranger was led in captive, one upon either side of him, and being placed upon the sofa was regarded steadfastly for some little while. During a very thorough scrutiny the prisoner smiled affably, produced a pipe which he lighted carefully and puffed at steadily, and then inquired casually if they both thought he would do.

"You look jolly," announced Ridgwell, "only I can't make out who you are; but you know Father and Mother very well, don't you?"

"Rather," said the stranger, "great friends of mine."

"But we've never seen you, have we?" added Christine.

"No," replied the stranger, "but I thought it was quite time I made your acquaintance, so I thought I would call upon you. Sorry I haven't got a card, but you can supply something in its place which will be quite as good. Where does Father keep his books?" was the sudden and somewhat unexpected question.

"It just depends," debated Ridgwell, "what particular lot you want.
Biography, Philosophy, Romance or Poetry."

"I think the Romance and Poetry department," suggested the stranger.

"This way," said Ridgwell; "I will show you."

The stranger ran his finger over the well-stocked orderly shelves, then he paused at four volumes side by side about the middle of the second shelf.

"Of course you both read?" inquired the stranger.

"Not those sort of books," explained Ridgwell. "We haven't quite got up to those sort of books yet."

"Anyway you can read the author's name upon the back of each of them."

The children nodded.

"That's me," confessed the stranger. "I have the misfortune to write books that you don't read."

"Father does," Ridgwell hastened to explain; "I've often heard him talk about you. Why, you're quite famous, aren't you?"

"I hope not," said the Writer.

"Anyway," concluded Ridgwell, "Father said you wrote jolly good stuff, only it was over the heads of the people, but Father said one of these days when you woke up, you would knock 'em, and I've heard him say that anyway it was better than some of the drivel a lot of people wrote nowadays. He hoped you'd reform, though."

The Writer laughed. "A very candid opinion, Master Ridgwell, and I really must reform and mend my ways."

"Don't you write fairy tales as well?" inquired Christine upon the way back to the dining-room.

"Sometimes," agreed the Writer.

Without more ado, Christine drew three chairs invitingly round the fire, almost by way of an invitation to recount some upon the spot.

The fire was really very cheerful in spite of the fact that it was late spring. The daffodils nodded their yellow heads quite contentedly, and filled the bowls upon mantelshelf and table with colour, and the little room with fragrance, at one and the same time. The coloured crocuses peeped in from the window boxes outside, whilst the sparrows chirped and hopped about and hoped that the Writer had something pleasant to say about them. It was all very peaceful with the sunlight stealing into the room through the lattice panes, making little patterns upon the floor, the flickering red of the fire playing at hide and seek with the diamond patterns and never quite catching each other; the yellow flowers nodding drowsily over the two childish heads that were now regarding the Writer most earnestly. The clock upon the mantelpiece chimed its mellow notes. Three o'clock it said. The afternoon had seemed almost dull up to that time, but now it all appeared to have changed in some curious way, ever since the Writer had made his appearance.

"I wonder," commenced Ridgwell, "if by any chance you could have been sent to us; you know we were faithfully promised that a Writer should come and see us and write down for us something we particularly want to remember. I wonder if you are the man," ended Ridgwell, quizzically.

"Shouldn't wonder at all," murmured the Writer; "delighted if I have had the honour to be chosen for the mission, and it really sounds to me like one of Lal's very rash promises."

"What!!!" It was a shriek from two children at once. Two pairs of arms were suddenly flung around the Writer's neck, two pairs of arms that were almost hugging him to death.

The Writer endured this onslaught throughout in the most becoming manner.

"Lal *did* send you then," shouted Ridgwell. "I knew it. How lovely!
Fancy your knowing him! Tell us all about it."

The Writer smiled. "I have known Lal almost as many years as I can remember; he is one of my oldest and very dearest friends."

"Ridgie," said Christine solemnly, at this point, "do you remember the motto of the cracker we pulled last night? It said—

"I'll whisper on this little page
A secret unto you:
The greatest wonder of the age
Shall suddenly come true."

But Ridgwell was beyond crackers, and beyond poetry; he felt, not unreasonably, amidst the development of this new wonder, that he was in possession of the real thing.

"I think," said the Writer, "I had better tell you all about it from the very beginning, but you know really it is quite a long story."

Ridgwell and Christine arranged themselves comfortably to listen; sometimes they looked at the fire, but more often at the face of the Writer, but they never missed one word of his story.

"I expect," commenced the Writer, "my story is going to be very different from anything you children may have imagined; in fact, my life has turned out so utterly different from anything it promised to be in the early beginning, that at times upon looking back it seems to be like some wonderful fairy tale—utterly unlike the ordinary fairy tales, however, one reads in books.

"The only two good fairies in my case were first and foremost our good old friend Lal, and, secondly, a gentleman who in the early stages of my life was always called the Miser, but who since has become one of the wealthiest, most generous and notable personages in the City of London. As a rule, whenever I think of my early childhood it is with a shudder, for I was running about the streets of London minus any shoes or stockings, with hardly any food save of the smallest and coarsest description, selling newspapers in the streets until late at night, and invariably soundly beaten if I did not take back some miserable coppers at the end of the day.

"I may say that these pence I had procured with so much toil were always expended in the public-house by both the man and his wife who were supposed at that time to provide me with the weird accommodation they were pleased to call home. My particular portion of this edifice was a dirty mat by way of a bed, which I shared with a rough-haired terrier dog called Sam. We two, Sam and I, were roofed in with many panes of broken glass in a species of outhouse which may at one time have formed a small conservatory. It must have been a hopeless failure, I am sure, as a conservatory, for I cannot imagine anything growing in it at all.

"One thing I am very certain of, I should never have grown either, but should most likely have withered and died in it had I remained, like my possible predecessors the plants, a few blackened and withered sticks of which could still be seen in some broken red flower-pots upon a shelf out of my reach. How these people came to have charge of me I shall never know, but I have sometimes believed, from odds and ends of conversation they let drop when they were quarrelling, which they were always doing, that my real father and mother had died when I was a tiny mite.

"The woman, who seemed at one time to have been better off, was left a sum of money to bring me up, as no relations appeared to claim me. At this time the woman was single, and had not met the man she afterwards married, the man who used to beat me so cruelly. Whether she spent all the money left for me, or whether they both spent it, appears to be of little consequence; anyway, once it was gone I was regarded with black looks as an encumbrance, and turned out into the streets to make some money, or do something for my board and lodging, as they expressed it. I have already told you what the lodging was like. Well, the board part of it corresponded to the rest of the picture in every way. Crusts of old dry bread, which they couldn't eat themselves, did for me and the dog, sometimes a little milk, varied by an occasional awful form of hard cake which the woman cooked, and which was impossible to eat unless first soaked in something. In the long hours of waiting between selling the newspapers I learned to spell, and then to read, very slowly at first, but still I learned. Then one of the men employed at the newspaper office I collected papers from, although I should imagine a very poor man himself, found a few pence every week to have me taught to write and spell, together with arithmetic, grammar, history and other things. This rather uncertain method of education went on for about two years. I was getting on fine, and absorbing everything I was taught with great rapidity, when my one friend, who had provided the night school education, departed to another world where I always hope he found the conditions easier than the one he had left. I might have been at my miserable home in the slums with the man and woman for years after this, only a curious form of providence was working upon my behalf.

"It had been a bad night for selling papers, I had a few coppers only, and my heart sank down when I approached the hovel where we all lived. The man and woman were quarrelling violently. As I slunk in white of face and with a terrible quaking feeling inside me, I saw at once the man was worse than he had ever been, and as I entered the door of the squalid room he struck the woman an awful blow, then he saw me. He grabbed me, and I think might have killed me that night, but I wrenched myself away after he had given me the first blows; he pursued me, catching at my coat, which at the best of times was only rags; he tore part of the coat away, which was left in his hand, and I ran for dear life. The man was mad and didn't know what he was doing, maybe, but the only thing he could lay his hands upon was a broken brandy bottle; he hurled this at my head. It struck me as I reached the street and cut the back of my head open. Although I was hurt I staggered on. I was dizzy and sick and the blood was dripping all over my shirt, but though I swayed about I never stopped, I would go anywhere away from the horror of that place. I never meant to go back there again.

"The next thing I remember was some sort of Square, which I had never seen until then, for I had never gone so far West in London before. There was nobody about, and I sank down beside a sort of stone thing and held my head, which hurt me horribly, and began to cry, I think.

"I was only about ten or eleven years old at that time, if as much, for no record of my age had ever been kept. Whether it was the pain, or simply fright because the few clothes I had were covered in blood from the wound in my head where the bottle had cut me, I don't know, but there is no doubt that I lost consciousness, probably for some considerable time. When I came to myself and woke up, it must have been very late at night. It was a fairly cold night, but the moon was shining, and the Square where I was sitting all looked like polished silver, and the clock of a big church at the side of the Square boomed out one.

"I looked about me, and raised myself up painfully upon one elbow and tried to think.

"Here I was outside everything—no shelter, no home, alone in London with a vengeance. True the other place had been a hateful home, yet at the very worst it had been a shelter, and, moreover, the rough-haired dog Sam and I had somehow squeezed together to keep ourselves warm, and Sam was the only thing that was in any way fond of me, and Sam was really good company.

"As the thought of him came across my mind, and how I had lost him for good now, I think I was about to start crying again, when a rather gruff but quite kindly voice just over my head called out—

"'Now then, stop that.'

"Of course I was only a very common Cockney little street boy at that time, and I couldn't either speak the Queen's English properly or spell it correctly, so when the voice said 'Stop that,' I said 'Wot?' 'Going to cry,' said the voice."

Here Ridgwell was so overcome with excitement by reason of a strange coincidence that he interrupted. "Why, that is exactly what Lal first said to me, and I can guess what the next thing was that he said to you—wasn't it 'Here, jump up'?"

The Writer smiled. "Yes," he said, "it is really very wonderful how history repeats itself. That is exactly what he said, but what I said is perhaps even more singular.

"I raised myself slowly and looked up gradually, for my head still ached and throbbed horribly, and when I saw it was a big bronze lion that was speaking to me and looking quite pleasant, all I said was—

"'Lor lummy, if it ain't a bloomin' lion a-talking to me. 'Alf a jiffey, cocky,' I said, 'an' I'll 'ave a climb up atween them paws of yours.'

"'You mustn't call me cocky,' remarked the Lion, reprovingly, when I had once landed up safe and sound; 'you must call me Lal.'

"'Right oh!' ses I. 'Can I sleep 'ere safe without a bloomin' copper a-coming and diggin' of me art 'alf-way through my nap?'

"'Yes, of course,' said Lal. 'Sleep here comfortably, and cover yourself over with the policemen's capes. You'll find three of them beside you. Hitherto they have always annoyed me by placing them there, but upon this occasion I am really grateful to them, as they will be useful for you to keep yourself warm with.'

"'I fits in 'ere fine,' ses I, 'and so 'elp me I think ye're a stunner.
But I never knowed as lions talked afore.'

"'My good little boy, there are many things that you do not know,' answered the Lion, 'one of them being that you do not know how to speak English correctly. I am afraid you are quite ignorant.'

"''Ere, 'old on, Mister,' ses I, 'I've been to school, yer know.'

"'The wrong schools, I fear,' replied the Lion; 'and would you oblige me by not calling me Mister; in future always call me Lal.'

"'Do them other three lions talk, Lal?' I asked.

"'No, I am the only one that talks.'

"'Then I should say as 'ow you're the best of the 'ole bunch,' I remarked.

"Lal sighed deeply. 'How dreadfully wrong,' he said; 'imagine a bunch of lions! No, you certainly cannot speak at all correctly, so I think perhaps you had better go to sleep instead.'

"Well, before I went to sleep I remembered at the night school I had gone to they always said people ought to say their prayers, so I thought to myself for a minute, and I'm afraid this is something in the nature of what I said—

"'Please send me as soon as you 'ave it, a goodish-sized lump o' bread and drippin', or a big baked 'tater, cos' I am as empty as ever I can 'ang together. I don't want nothink tasty, but jist somethink fillin'. I'm very grateful for lions wot talk and 'elps yer like a pal; and please don't let no blighted coppers a see me, and lock me up. Don't forget the drippin'—any sort, beef, mutton, or pork. Amen.'

"'Humph!' remarked the Lion, when I concluded, 'that is a most singular petition; to whom is it addressed?'

"'Up there, Lal,' I answered, looking into the sky; 'they say you gits everythink from there.'

"'Dear me,' replied the Lion, 'really most singular. I notice you did not describe the manner in which you expected these provisions to arrive.'

"'I'll get 'em, Lal; if not ter-night, ter-morrer.'

"The Lion looked down at me quite kindly I thought. 'What is your name?' he asked.

"'Ain't got no name that I knows of 'cept Skylark.'

"The Lion purred softly. 'You will have a name some day,' he said, 'and a great name, too. Why are you called Skylark now?'

"''Cos I sings and whistles, t'other blokes in the streets calls me that.'

"I was just starting to show him how I could whistle, and had done a bit, when we heard pitter-patter, pitter-patter, and the sound of flying padded feet over the stone Square.

"The Lion sniffed. 'It's a dog. What is he doing here to-night? I suppose he is lost.'

"I looked out between his paws, and I gave a shout of delight; I was answered by loud yelps of gladness.

"'It's Sam,' I shouted. 'Oh, Sam, 'ole cockie, 'ere I is; jump up wiv me and Lal.'

"'Is he all right?' asked Lal.

"'Yus,' I yelled, 'a friend, a fust-class friend. 'Ere, Sam, I'll 'elp yer up by yer paws,' and he scrambled up and licked my face. Then he looks at the Lion.

"'He'll do,' said Lal. 'Tell him not to attract attention by barking or making any more of that noise. You must both go to sleep; and I must say that you are a remarkably strange pair. However, here you are, and here you must stay.'

"When I woke up in the morning it was just beginning to be daylight. I spoke to Lal, but he wouldn't answer, he was cold and still, and didn't look as if he had ever spoken or moved in his life, and never would again. I folded the policemen's aprons up tight and thin like truncheons in case they missed them, clambered down, followed by Sam, and had a wash in one of the basins of the fountains, and got fairly clean and respectable, except my coat, all torn in half, which I couldn't help, and then I set out to see what I could find. It was Sam who nosed out something like a breakfast.

"Two stale buns in a bag. I should think some child had thrown them away—penny buns they were. I never tasted anything better, and Sam had some of them, and he thought they were all right.

"I made twopence that day, carrying a bag. The man who gave me the job gave me the unnecessary caution at the same time, not to run away with it, just as if such a thing was likely. Why, I could hardly lift it, and I couldn't have run two steps with it.

"He was an inquisitive man too, wanted to know if I had stolen the dog. I said no, I didn't steal. 'Well,' he asked, 'if you don't steal, how do you get a living?' I said, 'I'm getting it now.' He said it must be a hard job. I replied, 'Golly, you're right, governor, this 'ere bag is that 'eavy it drags me vitals out; wot's it got inside of it—bricks?' Then he drove me off and said I was a cheeky little devil, but he gave me twopence. Sam and I went to an eating-house and got two big lumps of pudding on the strength of it, and that fed us bang up for that day.

"I waited around at night with Sam, and directly I saw the Square was deserted, I hopped up into my old place and Sam after me.

"'Hullo!' said Lal, 'you two have turned up again, have you?'

"'Yuss,' I replied; 'it's the only 'ome we've got, yer know, Lal.'

"'I must see what I can do for you,' mused the Lion. 'There is a man I know who could give you work and help you at once, only his heart is very hard at the present time; unfortunately success hasn't softened him—he is a miser.'

"'Ain't a miser a bloke 'oo grabs all wot 'ee gits?' I suggested; 'if so 'ee wouldn't do nothink 'ansome for Sam and me; the only copper as we would git art of 'im would be the ones 'eed call up ter give us in charge. A miser don't seem no good to us, as they wants change out o' nothing.'

"'My dear little boy,' said Lal, 'your language may be pithy, but it is so incorrect; your metaphors, moreover, are so mixed. I think,' said the Lion, 'it is high time I took the Miser in hand; he is capable of better things, and if success cannot give him the milk of human kindness, I must try what sterner measures can effect. Get down now,' continued the Lion, 'and both of you slip round the other side of the pedestal and hide yourselves. I expect the Miser to pass this way shortly, and you are not to interrupt on any account, or come back until he has gone away, you understand.'

"'Yuss, Lal, anyfink to oblige. Come on, Sam, and may 'is 'eart soften,' I said.

"Well, about a quarter of an hour afterwards, sure enough, a tall, thin, elderly gentleman, with grey hair, in a top hat and frock coat, came along, and he paused when he got to Lal, and looking round first to see that he was not observed, he stopped beside Lal, and greeted him with, 'Well, my old friend, and how are you this evening? do you feel inclined to converse with me, or will you remain immovable, silent and cold as you sometimes choose to be? Indeed I hope you feel disposed to talk kindly to me, for I am far from happy, in fact it never entered into my calculations that a highly successful man could ever be quite so miserable.' After saying so much as this the elderly gentleman paused, and observing that Lal had not taken any notice of his remarks whatever, added in a lower tone, as if speaking to himself, 'Ah, not communicable to-night, only bronze and stone, eh?'

"Then the Lion spoke. 'I am not the only thing of bronze and stone. Have you ever thought how the definition might perhaps apply to yourself, for instance, Alderman Simon Gold?'

"The tall thin gentleman appeared to be slightly taken aback by the Lion's words.

"'You have a front of bronze,' continued the Lion, 'and as hard; you have a heart of stone and as useless.'

"'It seems to me, my old friend,' replied the tall thin gentleman, 'that you have some grievance against me by the hard words you are giving me. I came to you for comfort, but you don't seem to have anything of the sort to bestow. However, I suppose all of us have our ill humours.'

"'True,' assented the Lion, 'save that some of us never change that ill humour, but continue with it all through life. You yourself are one of those people.'

"'Humph! I certainly have displeased you,' vouchsafed the tall thin gentleman; 'how I really cannot imagine.'

"'I will tell you,' replied the Lion. 'Listen, therefore, carefully. Let us go back to the very beginning of our acquaintance. I am correct in stating that you were a homeless, ragged little urchin prowling the streets of London.' The tall thin man nodded. 'I gave you the only shelter you knew; others have used it since, all of them models of gratitude compared with yourself. My friendship did not stop there. You wanted work, a home, a name and riches. Who directed you to the City? who told you how to start, and where you would find all those things so long as you worked hard and were honest?'

"'I did all those things,' interrupted the tall thin man; 'I did work hard, I got a home, name, riches, and I have been honest.'

"'Until to-day,' purred the Lion, 'until to-day, Alderman Gold.'

"'To-day,' echoed the Alderman, but he started slightly.

"'Those shares you bought in the City to-day, a very great number, do you call that transaction honest?'

"The Alderman's eyes sought the ground.

"'Three people will be ruined in that transaction if you keep to it.'

"'Think of the money.'

"'Think of your name.'

"'I must have money.'

"The Lion laughed. 'You have heaps more than you require. Can you name one good thing you have done with your money or your influence since I plainly pointed the way out to you how to acquire them?'

"There was no answer.

"'Will you still decide to acquire those shares dishonestly?'

"'Anybody in the City or on 'Change would do the same thing, it is done every day.'

"'Because burglaries may be committed every night, is it any reason why you should commit one?'

"'The world is the world,' replied the Alderman. 'I have to live in it, and I have to fight it with its own weapons.'

"'You have no wife.'

"'No, Lal.'

"'No child.'

"'No.'

"'No single soul your wealth can do any good for.'

"'I need it all for myself.'

"'You are hoarding money fast.'

"'I shall need it all when I can no longer work; the value of money decreases day by day. What is a fortune now will only be a pittance a very few years hence.'

"'All for yourself?'

"'Yes.'

"'Nothing will change you?'

"'Why should it? I have only myself to consider, and I mean to make more and more, and more, and never stop; there shall be no limit to what I shall acquire, it is the only thing I care about now in life.'

"'In addition,' said the Lion, 'you are cutting down every little comfort and every luxury you might enjoy because you are becoming frightened at every small expense.'

"'Yes, growing expenses are the worries of my life.'

"'In fact, you are becoming daily, slowly and surely, a miser.'

"'It's not a nice word.'

"'It is the truth. Your clerks are the most ill-paid of any in the City of London. Only last week you cut down your office boy's tiny salary from ten shillings a week to seven shillings, although you know he has to pay two shillings a week for fares to and from your office.'

"'How can I help his living out of town?'

"'You know he has to live with his mother and brothers and sisters, five of them in addition to himself. He only takes home five shillings every week, but he *gives* it all up; he is happier than you are.'

"'Any way, I know how to arrange my own business,' snapped the Alderman. 'I have prospered so far, and I intend to go on and prosper; I am not going to change a single thing in my life or my methods of business. I have prospered up to now, I shall prosper even more.'

"'And hoard more?' inquired Lal gently.

"'Yes, you call it hoarding. I call it amassing, and I shall strain every nerve to amass more and more; it is too late in my life to alter now.'

"'We shall see,' said the Lion. 'I was going to ask you to do something for me, something for some one who is as penniless as you were once yourself; but if I did ask you a favour now I should only waste time.'

"'I have no time for charity,' said the Alderman. 'I heartily begrudge the subscriptions we have to give from time to time in the City, yet one is compelled to assist some of those for the sake of business; but as for any outside charity, pooh! it's all rot, it's been proved long ago they are all frauds. I shall always decline absolutely to give anything or do anything for any outside charity. Life is too short.'

"'We shall see,' said the Lion. 'Good-night.'

"When Lal's friend from the City had departed, I came out from the corner where I had been waiting, and Sam and I clambered up into our old place out of sight. At that time I considered the City Alderman a very horrid mean old man, and remembering Lal's words that he was a miser, I made a mental resolution that although this was the first specimen of the kind I had ever encountered, I never wished to meet another of the same sort.

"'Well?' inquired Lal, as I lay and looked up into his face before settling down for the night. 'What do you think of him?'

"''Ard-hearted, ain't 'e?' I replied.

"'Humph! yes, at present,' mused Lal.

"'Wot will yer give 'im ter take for it?' I asked.

"Lal smiled. 'Oh, a little prescription of my own.'

"'That bloke wot's just gone won't do nothink fer me. Can't yer suggest somethink else, Lal, somebody as I could go to as would give me some work?'

"'If you have patience,' answered Lal, 'and look around and get a few odd jobs, and a little grub for yourself and Sam every day for a little while, like the small London sparrow that you are—I beg your pardon, I should have said Skylark—I shall be able very shortly to bring our friend to a better frame of mind; at the present moment his sense of proportion is all wrong.'

"'Wot's sense of proportion, Lal?' I inquired.

"'If,' replied Lal, 'you persisted in thinking that you were as big as I am, for instance, your sense of proportion would be bad; if I imagined that I was as great as St. Martin's Church yonder, my sense of proportion would be worse.'

"'Lor' lummy, don't I jist wish I was as big as you.'

"'Why?' asked Lal.

"''Cos I'd 'ave a bit more weight to do fings wiv. There ain't no doubt that strength tells in the end.'

"Lal only chuckled at what I said, and I again went sound to sleep, as upon former occasions, in my strange roosting-place.

"The Alderman was in the habit of crossing Trafalgar Square every evening upon his way home, although I had never observed him until the night Lal had pointed him out to me; consequently, a few evenings afterwards, I first noticed how strangely he was beginning to walk. I can only describe it as a sort of zigzag from side to side, and occasionally a sort of stumble, as if he was not quite certain where he was going.

"Now I had often noticed the man who used to beat me, and from whom I had run away, walk something like that, and yet I knew at once it was not owing to the same reason, and I was rather puzzled to account for it, as the Alderman had never walked like that before, and had always been so upright and brisk.

"As the different evenings went on he grew worse and worse, until one night I found him slowly groping his way across the Square, with his hands stretched out in front of him, as if he was frightened of running into something at every step: that was the first evening I led him across the Square and over the road the other side; he seemed to dislike the idea of the steps, and always avoided them, I noticed.

"I did this for several evenings, and he never gave me anything, but as he was an old friend of Lal's I did it more for Lal's sake than for the Miser's, as I now called him; yet he seldom even thanked me for assisting him, although it was only too evident that he ought not to be walking by himself. A few days went by with nothing in particular to remember about them, until the evening arrived that was to be the turning-point in two people's lives, but at the time I knew nothing of this, for my small mind was overwhelmed with the first great childish grief of my life. I hadn't earned even one copper that day, and Sam and I had not had a crumb to eat. I think we must have both looked very thin and white. I know that Sam's bones could be seen plainer than ever through his dear, shaggy old brown coat; but Sam never complained, he stuck to me closer than ever; nobody ever had a better friend than he was.

"As ill luck would have it, Sam and I were crossing the wide street where the traffic is always heaviest, before turning in at our old quarters for the night. One of the many omnibuses passed, and somebody either dropped or threw a small bag of biscuits over the side of it; some rolled in the road, but a lot were left in the bag.

"Sam, who was the finest dog for spotting grub I have ever known, went for it like lightning; he had got it in his mouth, and was scurrying back to me in triumph with his old ears back, full of the importance of his find, when a two-horsed mail van struck him down in the road and went over him. I went in between all the maze of wheels and got him out; he was whimpering like a hurt child. I didn't wait for anything, I carried him along towards the old place by Lal; but he only gave me a lick, and died in my arms before I got there.

"I couldn't climb up to Lal with Sam in my arms, and I wouldn't leave him, so I don't know how long it was I crouched down in the shadow and cried over Sam—bitter tears I wept, I know. I was alone and utterly wretched, and Sam wouldn't ever speak to me again, would never do any more of his tricks. When I noticed that even in his death he hadn't released the bag of biscuits from his mouth, my tears flowed anew, and I couldn't somehow have touched one of them if I had been twice as hungry as I was. My grief at the death of Sam was so great that I didn't seem to want to tell Lal about it, so I lay huddled up by the corner of the pedestal where the shadow is darkest for what must have been some considerable time. Then I heard feet groping about and the voice of Alderman Gold talking.

"For a long time I didn't care to listen to what he was talking to Lal about. I heard the man say mockingly, 'Well, I suppose I'm beaten, and you have been right all the time, my old wise Lion. What cannot be endured, however, can sometimes be cured, so here's your health.'

"I heard a low angry growl from Lal, unlike any sound I had ever heard him make before, then Lal raised his paw and knocked something out of the Alderman's hand that fell with a tinkling sound of broken glass.

"I came slowly out of my corner to see what it was all about, and in time to hear Lal say, 'You fool, oh! you fool, when will your eyes ever be opened?'

"'I was going to close them for ever. What's the good of having them open *when I cannot see*?'

"The Miser seemed to be angry as well as Lal, for his voice was trembling with passion. 'Why,' continued the Miser, 'should I remain *blind* to please you, in order that all your prophecies may come true? Why destroy the stuff I had bought just when I had need of it?'

"The Lion regarded the Miser steadily with those fine great eyes of his, somehow he seemed to look the Miser right through; then the Lion sniffed thrice, very contemptuously.

"'Do you know *why* you are blind?' he asked the Miser.

"'No,' answered the man, 'to be going blind is terrible enough without asking the reason of it; what matter what this or that theory may be, when the thing is there to speak for itself? I know I cannot see, and that being the case my life is finished.'

"'Or perhaps beginning,' ventured the Lion contemplatively. 'You cannot see, Alderman Gold, because your eyes are filled with the colour of the thing you have made your God all through your life; it is the gold dust that has blinded you. The dazzling golden hoard you desired through life, watched, kept, gloated over. This love that tinged all your life and thoughts and feelings has poisoned you, has permeated with its fatal colour everything so that you cannot any longer see the beauty of the blue sky, the ripple of the moving waters, the tender bloom of blossoming flowers and trees. Remove the terrible gold-dust from your eyes that you have worshipped and you will see again, perhaps better than you have ever really seen before.'

"'Cease! cease!' broke in the Miser; 'you are only mocking my misery now, and even if what you say is true, it is too late now to help me.'

"'Not too late,' returned the Lion, more gently, I thought, than he had spoken hitherto; 'just in time, I think, just in time.' Then he called me. 'Skylark,' said the Lion, 'come here.'

"I came out from my hiding-place, still hugging the body of poor Sam close to me. The Miser peered at me curiously, though he couldn't see me very well, or what I was holding, judging from the expression of his face.

"'I suppose,' said the Miser, 'this is the ragged little wretch who is always hanging about here.'

"'He is very ragged now,' said the Lion patiently, 'but he will be very great one day.'

"The Miser laughed his harsh, unpleasant laugh, and peered down to see what I was carrying so carefully, then he put out his hand and touched Sam's coat.

"I pushed his hand away with my own dirty and grubby paw, but in a very determined way.

"'Don't yer touch 'im,' I cried.

"'It's a dog,' said the Miser, 'and it's dead; a dead dog isn't of much use to any one,' and he laughed again. I felt when he laughed that my blood was boiling.

"'Look 'ere, if 'ee's dead, 'ee's gone straight to 'Eaven, which is 'is proper place, an' where 'e'll 'ave fields an' the country and rabbits to chase, an' all them fings wot 'e ought ter 'ave 'ad in his life 'ere, an' 'e'll a wait fer me there sure as 'e always waited fer me 'ere, an' don't you say nothink agin Sam, 'cos in 'is life 'e was a damned sight better than wot you are, so there.'

"By this time my outraged feelings had so overcome me that I was shouting at the Miser, who stood stock still saying nothing, for the suddenness, to say nothing of the impudence, of my attack seemed to have rendered him speechless.

"'Steady, Skylark, steady,' said the Lion; 'try and behave a little more respectfully, and cease to use that distressing street language;' then Lal added by way of an afterthought, 'Come, climb up here, I want to talk to you.'

"I laid Sam down for the first time and complied with his request.

"'Now,' said Lal, 'what shall I do with Alderman Simon Gold?'

"''Im?' I asked, pointing to the Miser.

"'Precisely.'

"'Well, can't yer jist blow that there gold dust out of 'is eyes wot seems to be a-choking of 'em as you sed 'e 'ad? You can do most fings, Lal; 'ave a go, and see if 'e don't get better.'

"The Lion smiled his very wisest smile, then he asked me, 'Little Skylark, what have you got round your neck?'

"'Only rags, Lal, but I can't 'elp them, you knows that.'

"'Look again, little Skylark.'

"'Lor lummy,' I said, 'wot is it?' for I was startled by the unexpectedness of the thing I saw. Something seemed hanging round my neck that glowed and glistened and sparkled like ever so many jewels. The sort of gems that had made me wink my eyes whenever I had seen them in the shop-windows.

"'Lal, wot is it? 'ow did it get there?'

"'It is the Order of Imagination,' said Lal solemnly, 'and oh! little Skylark, there are only a few, such a few in the world who have ever worn it, even for a few minutes. You will think of this some day, you will remember my words always. Take it off your neck, Skylark, and put it over the neck of Alderman Simon Gold for an instant, for he is only just worthy to wear it. Look, there are two tears in his eyes, tears of pity, the first he has ever shed in his life, and tears of pity, little Skylark, are the keys that open the Golden Gates of Heaven.'

"I did as Lal bid me, and I shall never forget. Simon Gold's face became radiant.

"'I can see,' he gasped, 'can see! Oh, Lal, what a brute I have been! What have I been thinking about? Why am I so different? Why do I feel that I want to give something to all the world? Why, Lal, I want to give, I insist upon giving. Lal, why am I a different man, with different feelings, with a *heart*?'

"Once again Lal smiled that wise smile of his.

"'The Order of Imagination does many things,' said Lal. 'If you want to give, why not give with all your heart now and as long as you live? Everybody, however, has to make a start. Well, start by giving the Skylark a home, a good education, help him towards being the great man that I say he will one day become. You will have found a faithful, loving, lifelong friend, something as faithful and devoted as the friend whose life he himself mourns to-night.'

"'Poor old dog,' said Alderman Gold, 'I can't help him now, I wish I could, but I'll help the other, by Jove, I will; of course I'll see he has a good home, I'll see he's educated.'

"'I think he will repay you for all the money you will spend upon his education,' said the Lion, significantly.

"'And I mean to spend money,' said the Alderman. 'I've been a beastly miser, that's what I've been, but I shall never have that taunt flung at me again.'

"'Good,' nodded the Lion. 'Help him bury his pet in the big garden of your London house, and bury at the same time all the past you want to forget.'

"'I will,' said the Alderman. 'Here, come along and get fed. Here, what's your name?'

"'Skylark,' prompted the Lion.

"'Skylark? A very good name,' said the Alderman; 'it suggests Spring, and—and——'

"'Going steadily upward,' prompted the Lion.

"'By Jove, Lal, you're wonderful,' exclaimed the Alderman. 'How can I thank you for giving me my sight again, for making a different man of me? and, good gracious, now I come to think of it clearly and reasonably, every single thing you have told me has always been true.'

"'If you believe that,' said the Lion, 'listen attentively to the last thing I tell you, even more upon account of it being the last time I shall actually *speak* to either of you.'

"'Say on, Lal, we cannot do without your help; I know I can't, and I thought I could do most things.'

"'You may consider it most inconsequent of me to mention such a childishly fabled person to you as Dick Whittington, and yet strangely enough that hero of a nursery legend will have a great deal in common with both of you in your future lives.'

"'Shall I be Lord Mayor of London three times?' laughed the Alderman, who had appeared suddenly to have discovered how to laugh, and it sounded strange to hear him.

"'I won't say *three* times,' said the Lion, 'but you will be one of the greatest Lord Mayors of London in about fourteen years from now; you will be knighted, and you will become one of the most beloved and benevolent men in the whole City of London.'

"'That sounds fine,' said the Alderman; 'how about Master Skylark?'

"'Too early to prophesy,' said the Lion, 'with certainty, but I may say this; I think when he has also found another Dick Whittington, and one ever so different from yourself, he will become great almost by accident, but he has to find this Dick Whittington first. He will never part with Dick Whittington when he has found him, but as a result of sitting in front of him day by day in great perplexity, he will suddenly do the first thing that will make his name. You will only *resemble* Dick Whittington in your career, the Skylark will *find* Dick Whittington.'

"'By Jove,' said the Alderman, 'that is a pretty difficult riddle, Lal, and as I shall never solve it we can only wait and see.'

"The Lion smiled.

"'I believe you thoroughly love a riddle, Lal, you old Sphinx. Well, anything else? Tell me, how much more of the future do you see?'

"'Oh, a lot of things,' answered Lal, 'a very great many of them you would not understand now, even if I explained them to you, which I shall not think of doing. For instance, I see a very happy, cheerful and prosperous elderly gentleman—ahem!—whose acquaintance you will one day make, and whose amiable personality you in common with others will thoroughly appreciate. I see a future charming Lady Mayoress whose—ahem!—friendship you will be most glad of. I see two old friends falling out about a certain matter of business in all likelihood, and the *younger* of the two will be absolutely in the right. I see an estrangement that doesn't last more than a few years, then a joyful reconciliation, perhaps all the more joyful on account of the former separation. Then,' said the Lion, 'I see something—ahem!—a series of most painful incidents, most unbecoming to myself as well as yourself.'

"'Good gracious,' said the Alderman, 'I wonder whatever that can be?'

"'Like most other things about which there is a great fuss and commotion, it will rise from a simple cause. There will be a great meeting held in a public building, and the result of that meeting will be in your favour.'

"'In my favour,' echoed the astonished Alderman.

"'Distinctly in your favour, and it will make the whole of England laugh.'

"'At me?' inquired the Alderman, with an apprehensive note in his voice of quite pardonable nervousness.

"'No,' said the Lion, 'the laugh will be rather upon your side, I think.'

"'Indeed,' said the Alderman; 'well, that sounds a bit better.'

"'Moreover,' continued the Lion, 'for my own part I regret to say I shall be taken in a triumphant procession through the streets of London, guarded upon all sides by the police, and the whole proceedings throughout will be sufficiently ridiculous to cause me the acutest discomfort, all of which will be most undeserved and brought upon me by the extravagant adulation of my would-be admirers. However, I shall have to comfort myself in that time to come by considering that I am not the only victim who has been sacrificed from the same cause.'

"'Apart from the deep mystery attached to your strange prophecies,' observed the Alderman, 'which I do not pretend at present to understand, but which nevertheless I know will all come true, I am truly concerned about one thing. Are you really serious, Lal, in your intention of never speaking to me again? I feel the loss will be irreparable, for you have always been my wisest councillor from my boyhood upwards, and I only wish I had profited by your wisdom before and listened more attentively to your counsels in the past, whatever alterations I make in my life for the future.'

"'I shall never actually speak with either of you again,' replied Lal, 'but you will be able to live all your youthful days over again in him;' here Lal pointed to me. 'You can help him to avoid all the mistakes you have made yourself; yet do not misunderstand me, I shall give both of you a sign, and an unmistakable sign, to show how pleased I am if you fulfil all the expectations I shall have cherished about you.'

"'What sort of sign?' asked the Alderman.

"'I shall not tell you now, and you will both have to do an awful lot before I show you the sign that I am satisfied with you eventually.'

"Now let me see,' mused the Alderman, 'isn't there any little thing we could do for you to show that we hadn't forgotten you?'

"'You know what I expect of you,' retorted the Lion, 'keep your promises.'

"'Apart from that,' suggested the Alderman, 'some sort of memento, some sort of recognition.'

"'Oh, no,' hastily interposed Lal, 'no recognition, please, it is the one thing I dread most in the world owing to the curious position I occupy in public life. However, in the years to come, if you can reasonably and truthfully look back upon all you have accomplished with a certain amount of justifiable pride and satisfaction, you can come here quietly one night and place a big wreath of water-lilies; lay them as an offering between my paws; on no account hang them round my neck like the other terrible people do upon Trafalgar Day, it only makes me look ridiculous.'

"'Why water-lilies?' asked the Alderman.

"'My favourite flower,' sighed the Lion, 'and, moreover, the one I never see. You see, the fountains splash about so incessantly that there is no peaceful place where they can grow, and you wouldn't believe,' added the Lion earnestly, 'how I sometimes long for those irritating fountains to stop, and for beautiful water-lilies to grow there instead.'

"'It shall all be done as you say, and I will ponder over every single thing you have mentioned,' promised the Alderman.

"'Good-bye till then,' said the Lion in his most sepulchral voice, and then the Lion smiled at me and said, 'Good-bye, little Skylark.'

"For my own part I had stood by quite silent without saying a word, but I somehow realized that if I wasn't going to see and speak to my old friend Lal any more, there were several things I wanted to say, and a good many more things I wanted to ask.

"'Ere, 'old on 'arf a mo', cocky,' I shouted.

"'Oh, *don't* call me cocky,' entreated Lal, 'and what *do* you mean by that expression "hold on"? Is not my whole life a perpetual exhibition of "*holding on*"?'

"'You've been a first-class, tip-top pal to me, Lal, an' I wants ter know first where that there ring wot shined like blazes, and wot 'ung round my neck and then round 'is, 'as a-gone to? Ain't I to 'ave it no more?'

"'You will have the memory of it,' replied Lal; 'you have possessed it once, and I think you will have quite enough imagination left all through your life without it; in fact, in the future, at times you will have rather too much imagination for the comfort of your other fellow-creatures.'

"''Ave I got to go with 'im?' I asked; ''ave I got to say good-bye to you?'

"'Certainly,' replied Lal in his most stately way; 'you are going to have a very happy life; you are a fairly respectable kid now, but you will become more and more respectable until one will hardly recognise you at all. You are going to have a ready-made Father and Mother which I have provided you with.'

"'Ain't 'eard nothink about no Muvver yet,' I said; 'where's the Muvver come in?'

"'Ah! you wait and see,' whispered the Lion mysteriously.

"'Are you a-kiddin' me, Lal? if so, chuck it!'

"'Oh! dreadful, dreadful expressions!' lamented Lal. 'Undoubtedly the next time I see you I believe your grammar will have improved, and your vocabulary have become more select. I hope so!'

"It was at this point that something about Lal's eyes and attitude gave me the idea he was going to shut up for good, so to speak, and my feelings so overcame me, that without thinking I flung my arms round Lal's neck, that is to say, as far as they would go, and hugged him.

"Lal opened his eyes again, and somehow I am sure that he was grinning, such a pleasant-looking, happy grin, but he spoke in his severest manner to me—

"You must really restrain these exhibitions of feeling in public; if a policeman chanced to observe you I think there would be the greatest difficulty in offering any adequate explanation.

"'No, Lal,' I answered; 'all I ses to the coppers when they ses anyfink to me is "Rats"—always "Rats," and when I ses "Rats" they can fink what they jolly well likes.'

"Lal sighed, and said, 'How like Dick Whittington!' and those were the very last words I ever heard him speak, although I little dreamed how I was to meet him again."

* * * * *

At this juncture Cookie appeared carrying a most wonderful silvern tea-tray, whereon a bright gilded urn sizzled happily, and a most inviting-looking pyramid of toasted muffins nestled in apparently friendly rivalry with the choicest cakes of Cookie's own baking; even a heaped-up crystal dish of whole strawberry jam could not conceal its blushes as the firelight played upon it.

"Fairy tales," said Cookie, "I know; I've listened to them many a time myself."

"No, Cookie, you are wrong," ventured Ridgwell in tones of rebuke; "it is not a fairy tale, every word of it is true."

"That's what Cinderella always declared, Master Ridgwell," was Cookie's imperturbable reply, as she prepared to depart.

The Writer chuckled quietly.

"Of course it is true, isn't it?" asked Ridgwell and Christine in unison.

"Of course," said the Writer, "every word of it, and anyway if it isn't it ought to be, like all romances."

"But you haven't finished," objected Ridgwell, whilst he munched a muffin, and Christine poured out the tea.

"No," agreed the Writer, "I haven't finished yet, but I warned you that it would be a very long story, didn't I?"

"Oh, but we are so anxious to know what happened to the Skylark and the Miser, I mean the Alderman, for of course he wasn't a miser any more, was he?"

"Well, you see," explained the Writer, as he took his tea contentedly, which he really felt he stood in need of, apart from any consideration of deserving it, "nobody is able to read a long book all at once, and I propose to tell both of you the remainder of this extraordinary story in a few days' time."

"Anyway, that's ripping," vouchsafed Ridgwell.

"I think myself," added the Writer mysteriously, "that the great events Lal spoke of so long ago are about to happen."

"Do tell us when?" implored Ridgwell.

"I fancy very soon now; of course, you children don't read the papers, do you?"

Ridgwell and Christine shook their heads.

"Well, in to-day's paper there was one paragraph that threw out a very decided hint that the present Lord Mayor of London was going to be knighted by the King, not only on account of his public worth, but because the wonderful Home for London Children he has built is almost completed."

"Of course, the new Lord Mayor is Alderman Gold?" inquired Christine.

"He was Alderman Gold," said the Writer, "but I think myself before many days have passed it will be Sir Simon and Lady Gold."

"Who is Lady Gold? You never told us a word about Lady Gold," objected Ridgwell.

"Ah," said the Writer, "that will all come in the second part of my story. Any way, no name was ever more appropriate than hers. She is absolutely gold all through, head and heart and everything. Lady Gold is, I consider, an absolutely suitable name for her, although two people I know always call her Mum; and, do you know, I think she will prefer that title, even when she gets the other."

"Who are the two people who call her Mum?"

"That's telling in advance," observed the Writer, as he helped himself to a fourth muffin; "and of course to tell in advance always spoils a story. But I intend that both of you children shall hear and see the story to an end. In three days' time from now I am coming to fetch you both, and you will be able to see the Lord Mayor drive past in state, for I am giving a tea to celebrate that great occasion and also another great occasion at one and the same time. I will finish the story then, and you will both meet the Lord Mayor of London."

"Will he have his robes on?" inquired Christine expectantly.

"I don't know that he will wear them, but perhaps I could induce him to bring them with him to show us."

"That's fine," said Ridgwell. "Will you really come to fetch us?"

"Yes, in three days' time."

"Where do you live?" asked Ridgwell, unexpectedly.

The Writer pretended to be most mysterious all at once.

"Where do you suppose I live?" he asked Ridgwell; "I do not think you will ever guess."

"Whitechapel?" hazarded Ridgwell.

The Writer pretended to look almost hurt.

"Peckham?" suggested Christine.

"Very bad guesses," laughed the Writer. "You are both wrong. I have a set of chambers facing Trafalgar Square, where every morning of my life I can look out of the front windows and see my dear old friend Lal."

Both the children gave a shout at this astounding piece of information.

"And we shall see the Lord Mayor go past in state from the windows?"

"Yes," said the Writer; "but if what I believe is coming to pass, provided that the right time has come, and I think myself it has, we shall all see the sign that Lal promised us he would give, so long ago."

"The sign," echoed Ridgwell breathlessly; "I say, that's something like!"

"We shall see what we shall see, and as that is Chapter One of my story I am going to take my departure."

After the Writer had left, Ridgwell turned to Christine.

"It's the jolliest afternoon we've had since Father and Mother left, isn't it, Chris?"

Christine nodded; she was considering many things.

CHAPTER VI

TWO DICK WHITTINGTONS

The streets of London were alive with an unwonted gaiety, and crowds of people waited patiently, and with an air of expectancy, to see the Lord Mayor of London pass in state on his way from the Mansion House to the Home for Children which he had built—about to be opened that day by his Majesty the King.

Ridgwell and Christine sat in the broad, chintz-covered window-seat of the Writer's chambers overlooking Trafalgar Square, and viewed the great crowds of people beneath them with astonishment and interest.

"When the Lord Mayor passes my window," said the Writer, "he has promised to look out as far as his dignity will permit and nod to me. That he also intends to nod to our old friend Lal is a foregone conclusion, for without that recognition upon his part I am sure the day's ceremony would be incomplete."

"Will it be like a circus?" inquired Ridgwell.

"Yes, rather like a circus," admitted the Writer. "That is to say, a very great deal of gilt and highly coloured horses, soldiers, and inevitably one brass band playing, probably more than one."

"We can see Lal perfectly from here," said Christine.

"What is that large wreath for, placed between Lal's paws?" asked Ridgwell.

"That," declared the Writer, "was placed there early this morning by the Lord Mayor himself. He ordered it from Covent Garden, and he had great difficulty in procuring it even there. The wreath is entirely composed of water-lilies, Lal's favourite flower, and is put there in honour of the occasion. Of course this is undoubtedly one of the great days in the Lord Mayor's life, and he looks upon it as one of the crowning features in his whole career."

A sudden increased agitation among the crowd, a rumble as of cheering in the distance, and the first sound of trumpets and drums announced that the procession was drawing near.

The first sign of the vanguard were some mounted policemen who rode ahead to clear the way. There appeared to be little need for this precaution, as the crowds were standing in most orderly rows along the pavements.

"I'm sure Lal doesn't like those policemen," said Ridgwell decisively.

"No," agreed the Writer, "he sees such a lot of them where he is and, of course, he detests crowds of any sort, they jostle and bump his pedestal so much that it makes him feel uncomfortable. Here come the mounted soldiers; they look very smart, don't they? And here is the band, blowing their trumpets for all they are worth; some of them almost look as if they would burst with the effort."

"Is that first carriage the Lord Mayor's?" inquired Christine.

"No, the first carriages are all the other Aldermen."

"Six carriages full," said Christine. "And look at those men in red and gold standing up behind the last coaches."

"Yes," said Ridgwell, "strap-hangers. I wonder how they keep their balance and keep all that powder on their heads."

"I fancy," said the Writer, "they have to practise it; and as for the powder, I expect it is a secret preparation known only to themselves."

A burst of renewed cheering greeted the appearance of six cream horses, richly caparisoned with red and gold trappings, urged on by outriders.

"Here is the Lord Mayor," exclaimed the Writer excitedly, as he produced a large red silk handkerchief and waved it wildly out of the window.

There could be no doubt whatever that a fat old gentleman with red cheeks and a white moustache, whose portly form was covered with a scarlet and fur gown, around which hung a lot of glittering golden chains, and who had one side of the state coach all to himself, saw the Writer's greeting and returned it. The children saw him look up at the window and deliberately bow, then he turned his head in the direction of Lal, the Pleasant-Faced Lion, and bowed and smiled.

"Quite gorgeous," observed Ridgwell when the procession had passed, "but I always thought from what you told us that Alderman Gold was tall and thin."

"Ah," said the Writer, "that was at the beginning of the story, and he was a Miser then, and most misers are thin; but as he grew more and more cheerful, more and more happy, he grew a bit fatter and a bit fatter still, and then he got colour in his cheeks, until he became the jolly, agreeable, fat, old, good-natured gentleman you have seen just now in the distance. However, you will be able to see him at closer quarters and make his jolly acquaintance for yourselves presently, for he will call here and see me after all the ceremony is over."

"Will he be in time for tea?" inquired Christine.

"No, much too late for tea, Christine, but there will be a welcome for him, which I know he is looking forward to, and something I think he will like better than the big City banquet he has presided at, and it will be waiting for him here—a good cigar and a drink," and the Writer indicated a very handsome piece of old oak furniture at the end of the long room, which contained mysterious little cupboards which opened in odd angles and unexpected curves.

"I do hope he will turn up in his robes," ventured Ridgwell. "I rather want to see what they are like."

"We must wait and see about that, and as it must be some considerable time before tea, and a longer time still before His Worshipful the Mayor can possibly be here, I propose to finish the rest of the story I told you, right up to the present time. Of course, Lal may give the sign he promised to-night, or he may not; if he does you will both be here to see it."

Thereupon Ridgwell and Christine curled themselves up upon the broad window seat, and prepared to listen.

The Writer closed the window, and they all noticed that the crowds beneath were rapidly dispersing; occasionally some one would stop for a second and look at the big wreath of water-lilies between the Lion's paws, but the majority of people passing appeared not to have noticed it at all.

"Where did I get to in the story?" asked the Writer.

"Lal had said his last word to you," volunteered Ridgwell; "and what I particularly want to know is this: how did that second mysterious promise about Dick Whittington come true eventually, and did you ever meet Dick Whittington as Lal declared that you would, and did he really bring you fame and fortune when you met him?"

The Writer smiled. "Yes, indeed I met him, but not in any way or fashion that I should ever have expected. Of course both of you children know Lal well enough by this time to realise that he loves a little joke of his own at our expense, and many of his mysterious promises, although they come true in a way, turn out to be utterly and completely different from what he would seem to suggest to us by his words; in fact, Lal is like a great happy conjuror or wizard who dearly loves to mystify us with a trick. I am convinced he enjoys our amazement at any of his pet tricks, as much as he enjoys the laugh he has at our expense."

"That's right," said Ridgwell; "he tricked Chris and me finely once. I haven't forgiven him so very long for it, and it made me feel very uncomfortable for a good while."

"Everybody forgives Lal in the end," laughed the Writer; "one simply cannot help oneself, but really his pranks are too absurd, and yet when I found out how I had been tricked, I couldn't be cross with him, for I actually loved his funny old ways more than before, if such a thing were possible. To continue my story where I left off, Alderman Gold seemed in some miraculous way to have had much more than his sight restored to him that night. The first thing he did was to lift the body of poor Sam very gently, and as we left the Square he called a cab, and whilst we drove to his big mansion in Lancaster Gate, he asked me to tell him everything I could remember about my short life up to that time. Of course, I did so in my own peculiar fashion; the verbiage of the street and the gutter must have been freely sprinkled about during that narrative. Sometimes he looked thoughtful, and at other times he lay back in the cab and laughed out loud. When we arrived at his big house, which seemed to me at that time to be a mighty great mansion, he first made his way into a very big garden at the back where there were a lot of trees, and opening a gardening shed, he got a spade and dug a grave for Sam deep down under the trees, and it is there with his name, which was afterwards carved on a piece of wood, until this day.

"Whilst my childish tears were still flowing as the result of this sad ceremony, a lady came down the garden path in the moonlight, and as she joined us I noticed that although she appeared a little startled, she had a most beautiful face.

"'I didn't know it was you, sir, I couldn't think who could be digging in the garden at this time of night, and I grew frightened.'

"'Mrs. Durham,' said the Alderman earnestly, 'I was digging a grave for the dead pet of this small piece of humanity here, who will henceforth be one of your special charges.'

"Mrs. Durham glanced at the Alderman rather in amazement, I thought, as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses, but she looked at me as she has ever done in a most kindly way.

"'Skylark,' said the Alderman, 'this is Mrs. Durham, my housekeeper.' Perhaps the Alderman had seen the expression upon Mrs. Durham's face, and had interpreted it correctly, for he added, 'Mrs. Durham, I am somewhat ashamed to say that in the grave of a faithful and most devoted creature I have here buried metaphorically, for good and all, as many of the reprehensible habits of my old life as I can cast at once, therefore, if I seem to you to be very different in the future, you may know there is a good reason for my being so. Could you conveniently take this infant and get him something substantial to eat and drink, and see he is put to bed?'

"Mrs. Durham said, 'Very well, sir,' and taking my hand led me into the house; but she still looked amazed, as if she had seen a ghost, I thought.

"A good many other people, I fancy, must have looked amazed the next day, when in the Alderman's big City offices all the clerks found that their salaries were to be raised. I rather imagine the office boy was the most astonished of all, for upon discovering that his master had raised his weekly remuneration to a pound a week, he was heard to exclaim, 'Well, that knocks all, that is if the Governor hasn't got softening of the brain!'

"The Alderman didn't stop there by a long way, for I know that all the servants in his house commenced to have a different time of it, and his thoughtfulness, as far as I was concerned, was more than wonderful.

"I remember a few days after my arrival he called a council of war with Mrs. Durham, at which I was present, and I may say in passing, that Mrs. Durham and I were by this time fast friends.

"'There is one thing that must be done at once, Mrs. Durham,' I remember him saying during that important interview; 'the youngster must go at once to school. Now the difficulty is this: I don't want him to start at a disadvantage from the very beginning, and speaking as he does now, no ordinary school would take him.'

"'I'm afraid not, sir,' debated Mrs. Durham.

"'Very well, then,' said the Alderman, 'at present there is only one thing to do; we must have somebody here to teach him English, anyway to speak properly and to write and spell before he goes to a school. It must be done, but I think myself it is going to take time,' concluded the Alderman. Then he put on his hat and started for the City.

"I am not going to dwell upon this youthful period of my life, for everybody's school-days very much resemble every other person's, but I do know that the Alderman's belief that my education would take time proved to be only too true. I shall never forget how long and painfully I worked and toiled to speak my verbs in their proper tenses, to stop dropping my aitches, how I longed to drop the Cockney slang, how my life became possessed with a sort of terror that I should come out with some expression that would cause concern to either my benefactor or to Mrs. Durham.

"Well, I strove, and at last I succeeded so well that I was sent to a fine school where I received a first-class education, and the only effect of the great struggles I went through at this time was a sort of nervousness which I shall have all through my life, and which results, no doubt, from intense anxiety all those years not to make mistakes.

"And so I skip along until one night after the school had broken up at the end of a winter term. I remember it all so well. I had taken the best prizes in the fifth form, I was barely fifteen, and I rushed home, tore into the library, and emptied all those beautifully bound books into my benefactor's lap. He had been smoking his cigar, and was dozing in front of the fire.

"'What do you think of that, Dad?' I yelled. I always called him Dad as a sort of distinction, for although he wasn't my father really, he had been a ripping father to me.

"'Bless my heart, my boy,' he said, 'have you taken all these prizes?
Why, I'm proud of you.'

"'And I proud of you,' I said; then I laughed at him. 'You've tried to keep a secret from me, Dad,' I cried, 'and you haven't succeeded a bit. Where's Mum?'

"'Now how on earth did you know that, miles away at school, too?' laughed the Alderman.

"'Read it in the papers days ago. Where is she, Dad? I want to give her a good hug.'

"'I'm here, dear boy,' said a voice just over my shoulder, a voice I knew so well, that had helped me more in my childish hours than I could ever count, a voice that was perhaps the one that had taught me to speak correctly in those trying early days. She wasn't Mrs. Durham any longer, she was Mrs. Gold, but she hadn't altered one bit, and she was Mum then, as she has always been since.

"It wouldn't be honest to skip the next part of the story, and yet I always want to omit this part somehow, because it is entirely composed of events brought about by my own selfishness, obstinacy and pig-headedness, although as a young man I never realised the great grief and the real trouble I was causing to people who had always loved me and done everything for me.

"It started after the time I had left the University of Oxford. I had just commenced to feel my wings, so to speak. Everything there had helped to increase and nourish my love of literature, the set I mixed with had placed me on a sort of pedestal which I in no way deserved, everybody seemed to expect a lot from me, every one seemed to believe I would do great and wonderful things, and what was more disastrous still, I believed I should do wonderful things myself. Imbued with these beliefs, I went home after my last year at Oxford, determined to be a great writer, mark you, not an ordinary writer, since I was positively assured of the fact that I had only to make an appearance in print to be instantly proclaimed one of the immortals. Whilst I was in this ridiculous frame of mind, Dad unfolded to me the cherished scheme of his life. It was that I should go into his office and learn the business, and one day become the head of the firm.

"I think my blank face must have told them the utter hopelessness of the scheme, even before I had explained to them all my hopes and beliefs as to what I intended to be. One of the things I regret most in my life was the grief I saw only too plainly upon the old Dad's face. He had been brought up a business man all his life, he didn't believe in Literature as a living. He never argued, he didn't storm, hardly said anything, except begging me in an appealing sort of way to reconsider my decision. But I saw at once that I had dealt a death-blow to all his hopes, and, like the selfish young brute I was, I didn't care so long as I got my own way.

"I must have been utterly mad at the time, or intoxicated with my own belief in myself, for I even went further, and said I was going away without any further help of any sort, and that I would make a name, and not come back until I had done so. I refused all assistance; I only wanted their good-will and belief in me, and this I knew neither of them could honestly give me. The Dad implored me to let him assist me; they both begged me to live at home until I could rely upon myself, feel my own feet, or lastly, the most fatal sentence they could have uttered in my state of pride, to remain at home until I realised the *failure* I was about to make and alter my mind.

"What a hopeless and silly thing is pride. It must be a dangerous thing, too, if it can suddenly choke years of love and devotion.

"Pride was uppermost then when I left the house where we had all been so happy, and went out into the world, and I told them both I would only return when I had made myself famous, and not before. I believe they both broke down when I left, but I was a selfish young brute, and I never saw their view of things, nor how bitterly it must have hurt them. Retribution was not long in coming; I found as time went on that there were dozens of men, and women too, who could write better than I could. I found a living was not easy to get. I went even further still, and found at last that it was impossible to get any living at all. Education—there were hundreds of men, highly educated men, too, without any means of earning a living. Inspiration—and I had prated about inspiration often enough; inspiration only became inspiration when it was recognised as such. Luck, chance—I found there were no such things, save as words. Money—I never made any now, and gradually I went down and down, grew shabby, was passed hurriedly by friends of my own choosing; then followed shabby rooms and little food, only to give place in turn to an attic and no food at all. Pride must have been still at work with a vengeance, for whatever I suffered there was not a single day or night that I could not have rushed home and been welcomed like the Prodigal of old, and been rejoiced over. But the very idea of this gave me a chill feeling of horror. How could I go home with all my boasts unfulfilled? Was I to creep home a self-confessed failure, with the alternative of acknowledging it and mending my ways and becoming the head of a business firm with a heart embittered for life? I felt I would never do this. I would prefer to starve upon the Embankment, and when I made that resolution I knew only too well what I was in for. I had done the same thing in my earlier life, only it needed a far greater courage to face that life now than it required then. Things were at their very worst when one day, as I was wending my way through the poverty-stricken locality in which I lived, I was hailed by my name. The man was shabbily dressed, but about my own age as far as I could gather, yet I never remembered having met him before.

"'You don't remember me?' he asked.

"'No,' I replied.

"'Humph!' he rejoined, 'and yet at school you had quite a slap-up fight upon my behalf, which ought to have been a lesson to snobs in general, simply because I insisted upon talking to my own father when he was driving one of his own furniture vans.'

"'Murkel Minor,' I murmured. 'Jove, yes, I remember.'

"'Well, I'm a dealer now, got a place of my own, first-class antiques, you know, doing rather well, too.'

"I nodded.

"'But, I say, how about yourself? you don't look up to much. What are you doing? You know all the swell chaps at school, who always looked down on me, used to think you would do no end of things.'

"Somehow or other a sudden feeling of utter frankness came over me. 'I am not doing anything,' I said. 'I've never done anything, and I don't believe now I ever shall do anything.'

"'What are you supposed to do?' asked Murkel, and he asked it in rather a nice way.

"'Writing,' I said.

"'Books?'

"'Yes, and stories, and any blessed thing that comes along; that is to say, when it *does* come along.'

"Murkel mused for awhile as we walked along, and to this day I do not know whether he considered he was paying off an old debt, or whether he really required my services. Anyway he told me he wanted a descriptive catalogue written of some of his best antiques, their history guaranteed and authenticated, and that he would pay me a fair sum for writing it.

"I left my one-time schoolfellow Murkel Minor, with the certainty of work for which I should be paid, and with something like a ray of hope, and oddly enough I did not lament over the strange fortune which had prevented any one from accepting any of my books or poems, but had given me instead the writing of a catalogue of bric-à-brac. There was one thing I often resented in my own mind, and frequently sneered at most bitterly whenever I remembered it; that was the fact that Lal had prophesied that I should become great, and also that I should meet Dick Whittington. Both these imaginary things I regarded now as being utterly unreliable, and looked upon as two ghostly myths of the past. I might have known better. The nervousness from which I suffered, and which I have already alluded to, was becoming so marked that it greatly stood in my way, particularly whenever I had any writing to do. I would fidget, bite my fingers, nibble the pen, break the nibs, a thousand things sooner than deliberately sit down to write. Concentration seemed at times to me wholly impossible. One day, after sacrificing many nibs, and breaking my only ink-bottle, I settled down sufficiently to finish Murkel's catalogue, and received the sum of five pounds for the work. It seemed untold riches to me at the time. As I went homeward through the maze of dirty streets towards where my garret was situated, I had to pass through one where the outside pavement stalls were always heaped up upon either side of the way with every imaginable thing from greengrocery and scrap-iron to old prints and china-ware.

"Upon one of these stalls an inkstand immediately attracted my attention, partly from the fact that I had broken my own ink-bottle, and had resolved to buy another, but more particularly because this inkstand appeared to me to be one of the most uncommon receptacles for ink I had ever seen. It was made in what I judged must be some old form of china-ware I never remembered to have seen before, and beneath the dirt which was thickly coated over it I could see that both the modelling and colouring of it were very beautiful. It represented a figure lying upon the ground beside a big tree-stump, which, after the mud should be scraped out of it, was evidently intended to contain ink, and a milestone, when a similar operation had taken place, would doubtless contain one pen; a coloured three-cornered hat flung beside the figure upon the ground was obviously designed to hold a taper.

"The inkstand attracted me strangely, and I was so fascinated with it that I could not take my eyes off it. The woman to whom the stall belonged, doubtless spotting a likely customer, asked me how much I would give her for it. I deliberated for some time, as I had not the remotest idea what its value might be in her eyes, so I offered her eighteenpence as a sort of compromise between the inkstand and other articles ticketed upon her stall.

"'Give us two bob, and it's yours,' suggested the stall woman. However, I was firm, and was upon the point of going away when she called me back, and thrust it into my hand, carefully holding on to one of the square corners of it until she saw the money safely deposited.

"It took me some time to clean it properly when I got it home, but I must say it fully rewarded all the efforts I made to wash it, and somehow the more I looked at it the more beautiful I thought it was.

"There was something about that contemplative figure lying upon the grass that gave me confidence and reassurance, and I found myself regarding it as an old friend and talking to it, and when the big tree-stump was filled with ink I used to sit and write from it for hours. There always seemed to be encouragement and inquiry in the laughing face that looked from the figure on the inkstand, as if it were saying, 'Well, what are you going to write now, and when are you going to finish it?' I began to imagine that it gave me inspiration whenever I wrote; whether that was so or not, it certainly answered much better than its predecessor, the dull old ink-bottle that had been broken.

"So day by day I worked hard, and somehow became convinced that the wonderful little inkstand helped and inspired me in some curious manner which I could in no way account for, and after a few months I finished my book, eking out a scanty existence with other odd literary jobs. It was about this time that Murkel called on me.

"He stumbled up the winding stairs to my garret one day, smoking a quite objectionable pipe, and declared that I was the only old schoolfellow he had ever cared to call upon, as all the rest were snobs, and wound up by stating that we probably got along so well together as he came from the people, and he was certain that I came from the people also, and only those people who came from the people themselves ever got there eventually.

"After I had listened patiently to this harangue he came to the point by declaring he was a great friend of a publisher who sometimes bought the Murkel curios, furniture, china, pictures, etc., and if I liked he would get him to read my new book.

"I was only too thankful to accept this offer, and was saying so when a curious thing happened. Murkel, whose eyes had been roaming around my one attic room with the curious instinct of the dealer, and finding nothing that in any way interested him, suddenly crossed over to my rickety writing-table, and pouncing upon my inkstand emitted a low and prolonged whistle which might have been emblematical of either astonishment or delight.

"'Don't drop that inkstand,' I said. 'I'm very fond of that.'

"'Drop it!' almost shouted Murkel, 'drop it! Great Scott, do you know *what* it is?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'of course, it's an ink-stand.'

"Murkel looked at me almost pityingly. 'Oh, my great aunt,' he said, 'the ways of writers are beyond understanding. Here's one who lives in a garret, probably hasn't enough to eat, and upon a rickety three-legged writing-table, which would be a disgrace to a fifth-rate coffee-house, he has a jewel worth a hundred guineas and more.'

"'Bosh! you're joking,' I retorted.

"Murkel gave a queer smile. 'Am I?' he said. 'Well, I am prepared to go back to my place and write you a cheque for a hundred guineas for this, now on the spot.'

"I suppose I still continued to stare at him stupidly, and most likely the signs of my utter disbelief were plainly to be seen in my countenance, for Murkel continued hurriedly—

"'It's my business, I never make a mistake. This inkstand is Old Bow china, date—early Queen Anne. My friend, there are not five of these left in the world to-day, there are not four, and this is probably the most perfect one in existence; and what makes it so valuable, apart from its glaze, is that it was done by a fine artist, and it is a famous legendary figure perfectly executed. In fact, it is none other than the famous Dick Whittington.'

"'What!' It was my turn to shout this time. 'Dick Whittington!' I cried.

"'Of course,' said Murkel; 'Dick Whittington, only done in the costume of Queen Anne's day instead of his own.'

"'Then it is all true,' I shouted. 'By Jove, what a fool I've been; I see it all now, every bit of it. Oh, Lal! Lal! how impossible you are to understand.' Of course, this was all so much Greek to Murkel, who hadn't the remotest idea what I was so excited about; but he was thoroughly convinced that I meant to jump at his offer, and he thought I was merely madder than usual when I told him that I wouldn't sell Dick Whittington for five thousand pounds if he offered it to me.

"Murkel replaced Dick Whittington regretfully upon the rickety table and sighed deeply.

"'I suppose,' he said, 'that some forms of mental derangement are inseparable from some writers. The annoying part of it is that I wanted this piece for my own cabinet. If I had bought it I should never have sold it again. Well, if you want money, you know where to get it, old chap.'

"'I do,' I replied, 'and I have as good as found it in an unexpected quarter.' I took up the MSS. of the new book, lying upon the rickety table actually in front of Dick Whittington.

"'I will prophesy to you,' I said, 'and although it is a second-hand sort of prophecy it is going to come true nevertheless. You see this manuscript; this is going to make the first lot of money.'

"Murkel looked at me curiously. Do what he would the poor chap could not rid his mind of the thought that I was mad, but I will say he was very patient with me.

"'Give me the introduction to your publisher friend, and I will bet you a dinner, or two dinners, he accepts this as a start, and most probably everything else I write afterwards.'

"'Of course,' debated Murkel, 'you are a very amazing person. I meet you one day and you swear that nobody ever wants anything you do, and is never likely to want any of your work again; and then a few days after, without rhyme or reason, you swear they will take everything, even the things you haven't written. I don't pretend to consider you at all sane, but I am prepared to tackle the publishers for you; and, by Jove, you are really eccentric enough to have done something really good, so you may be right. But I cannot and will not understand why you cannot take a hundred guineas down for that little Dick Whittington.'

"'Do you believe in mascots, Murkel?' I asked.

"'Yes,' he said. 'I've got a black cat in the shop that always sits on a big Chinese idol whenever I have any luck. I don't know what it is, but the combination of my black cat Timps and that Chinese idol is extraordinary, and the greatest mascot I know.'

"Well, I told him that my mascots were a lion and the china Dick Whittington.

"'Where's the lion?' asked Murkel, always on the look-out for curios.

"'Oh, that is at present in a collection,' I told him, at the same time fervently hoping that Lal would forgive me for ever referring to him as being in a collection, for I knew the feeling of majestic toleration with which he regarded the other three lions.

"Very little more remains to be told, except that the person who was most astonished when my first book was instantly accepted was Murkel, and his astonishment appeared to greatly increase as each of my succeeding books made their appearance in print, whilst to-day is one of the red-letter days of my life, for the most important of all my books was published this morning, and so it is all doubtless intended to form part of to-day's story; and, by the way, so is to-day's tea."

* * * * *

"Ridgwell, would you ring the bell for the housekeeper? I have ordered all the sort of cakes you and Christine like best."

"I think it is a more wonderful story than Dick Whittington's," commented Ridgwell, as he rang the bell; "but before we have tea, we do so want to see the little china Dick Whittington which made all your story come true, and which is worth such a lot of money."

"You shall both see him presently, but at the present moment Dick Whittington is safely packed up; he is going to be given away this evening with a copy of my new book."

"Given away?" echoed the children blankly.

The Writer nodded.

"I can't make out how you can bear to part with it," suggested Ridgwell; "I know I would never give it away. Who is it for?"

"You will both see presently; and really, you know, if you come to consider it, it is not of any use giving anybody something one does not care for, for that is not a gift at all."

"It seems jolly hard to part with the one thing you like best," observed Ridgwell.

The Writer laughed. "Ah! Ridgwell, that is the only kind of gift worth giving in the world."

CHAPTER VII

THE LION MAKES HIS SIGN

Tea was finished, the remains of it were cleared away, and the heavy curtains drawn over the big windows overlooking Trafalgar Square. Having turned on all the electric lights he could find, the Writer led Ridgwell and Christine by either hand towards the door.

"The Lord Mayor has arrived," he whispered, "I can hear him coming up the stairs. Now as he comes into the door let us all bow down with a low curtsey, and say, 'Welcome, Sir Simon Gold, Lord Mayor of London.'"

"Bless him, he is still puffing up the stairs," whispered the Writer, "so we shall have time to rehearse it once before he gets here. Now then, all together," urged the Writer. "That's fine; why, you children make obeisance better than I do, but of course I was forgetting you had both been to the Pleasant-Faced Lion's party. That must, of course, have been an education in itself. Now then, get ready."

Outside somebody who was puffing and panting somewhat heavily could be heard exclaiming between these exertions in a cheery voice: "Good gracious me, why ever does the boy live in such a place? These stairs will be the death of me; positively fifty of them if there is one. Really at my time of life it is most unreasonable; he ought to have a lift put in, I will make it my business to see he doesn't live up here in the clouds any longer, whether he always wants to see Lal or whether he doesn't."

The Writer grinned at the children, and Ridgwell and Christine gave a faint chuckle by way of an answer. At last the door was flung open and the pleasantest-faced old gentleman it would be possible to find anywhere, with round pink cheeks, merry eyes, a snowy white upturned moustache and white hair to match, peering through big gold-rimmed spectacles like a cheerful night-owl, stood in the doorway.

Thereupon the three people inside the room bobbed down in a most profound curtesy, and there was a perfectly timed and simultaneous chorus from three voices, "Welcome, Sir Simon Gold, Lord Mayor of London."

"Bless my soul," said the Lord Mayor, "very impressive, upon my word; but as His Majesty the King has only knighted me twenty minutes ago, how on earth did you come to hear of it?"

"Magic," said the Writer. "Besides, Lal prophesied the event."

"Who are the children?" asked the Lord Mayor.

"Friends of Lal's and myself," replied the Writer, "and very anxious to see you in your robes."

"They are all in this bag," vouchsafed the Mayor, "and it may be vanity upon my part, but I brought them up on purpose to stand in front of the window so that Lal could have a good look at them and see the effect of his own handiwork. And now, you rascal," demanded the Lord Mayor of the Writer as he helped himself to a comfortable chair, "what excuses have you got to give me for not coming near either Mum or myself for ages, and for taking up your abode in this absurdly high flat which is as bad as mounting the Monument?"

"I have my excuses all labelled and wrapped up, Dad, and you and Mum must accept them when you have looked at them."

Thereupon the Writer fished out of the mysterious odd-fashioned cupboard two packets very neatly done up, and placed them in the hands of genial old Sir Simon.

The old gentleman opened the first packet with evident pleasure; it was a well-bound book fresh from the printer's press.

"Open it, Dad, and see whom it is dedicated to," suggested the Writer; "you will find it upon the first page."

"Beautiful," murmured the old gentleman, whilst his hands trembled slightly as he held the book and read out, "Dedicated to my dear Dad, to whom I owe everything—created Lord Mayor of the City of London in the year——"

The old gentleman coughed and wiped his spectacles carefully, and even suspiciously, for they appeared to be quite misty. "Oh, you bad boy," he burst out unexpectedly. "How dare you write books and become famous, when you ought to have been sitting upon a stool behind a glass partition as a junior partner in my counting-house? However, I believe Lal was right, he usually is; he said we should disagree, and that the youngest one would be in the right, and upon my word, my dear boy, I never believed how very right he was until to-day. Bless me, I'm proud of you."

"And I'm proud of you, Dad," was the Writer's answer.

"Goodness alive," declared the old man, as he turned and beamed upon Ridgwell and Christine by turns, "do you children know, those were the very words this rascal here used sixteen years ago, when he deposited a lot of ridiculous prizes that nobody ever wanted to read in my lap when I was asleep in front of the fire in my library. Bless me, history does repeat itself."

"And prophecies come true," added the Writer.

"Tut, tut," said Sir Simon, "there was one prophecy our friend Lal made that never came true. How about that absurd statement of his that you would find Dick Whittington? That was all a lot of riddle-me-ree, as you may say, thrown in like the cheap-jack's patter to mystify all of us."

"You haven't opened the second parcel," quietly remarked the Writer; "but when I read in some of the papers three years ago that you had started collecting valuable old china, I always determined you should have this piece."

"It all sounds very mysterious," replied the old gentleman, as he gingerly prepared to take off the outside wrappings.

It was at this point that Ridgwell could contain himself no longer, for he felt as if he were present upon a Christmas Day before the gifts were opened.

"It's worth more than a hundred guineas," shouted Ridgwell.

"Then it is simply disgraceful extravagance," replied Sir Simon, "and I shall certainly not accept it."

"I am sure you will," ventured Christine, "it is the thing that he values most of anything he has got."

The last wrapping was undone, and the beautifully coloured and modelled Dick Whittington was disclosed to view. There was not even a spot or trace of ink anywhere upon his enamelled coat, the tree-stump, the milestone or the three-cornered hat, he had been washed and cleaned for the cabinet with a vengeance, and looked as beautiful and as spick and span as the day the artist had turned him out to an admiring world.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Sir Simon, as he viewed the treasure with the keen admiration of a connoisseur. "Why, it is perfect; I don't believe there is another one in existence like it. Where did you get it, and who is it meant to be?"

"Why, Dick Whittington, of course, Dad; so you see Lal was right after all."

Sir Simon placed the little figure carefully upon the table, and folding his hands regarded the Writer severely. "Do you happen to know that it was this particular piece of Lal's nonsense that has worried me more than anything else all these years?"

"It worried me for a long time until I found out his trick," confessed the Writer.

"Yes, but mine is a most disheartening story," declared Sir Simon, "and nearly succeeded in alienating me from all my friends; and as for Mum, I dare not so much as mention Lal's name to her for fear of having my nose snapped off; she never did and never will believe in him, declares that the whole thing is a preposterous lot of nonsense, and declines even to discuss the subject with me at all. You know, my dear boy, that Mum is very sensible upon other points, but about Lal she is openly scornful and secretly adamantine; in fact, the mere mention of Lal is like poison to her, and he was entirely responsible for the only difference we have ever had in our married lives."

"Light a cigar, Dad, before you start; and what will you have by way of a drink?"

The Writer had opened other compartments in the mysterious old oak cabinet that seemed to possess more doors than a Chinese temple.

"These Coronas I remembered you used to smoke, so I got some."

"Excellent," declared Sir Simon, "and, let me see, why, bless me what a lot of bottles you have there. I hope you don't drink them all. Some of that green stuff, my dear boy, if you please, Crème-de-Menthe; yes, I think a couple of liqueurs of that would be most beneficial to me after the most indigestible banquet we all partook of at the Mansion House to-day. The stuff is largely made up of peppermint, I'm sure; and, of course, peppermint, when it is tastily got up like this liqueur, is very good for indigestion, isn't it?"

The Writer lighted the old gentleman's cigar, and placing the Crème-de-Menthe upon the table, filled a tiny liqueur glass to the brim.

"Of course," commenced Sir Simon, "from the very first nothing would induce Mum to believe that the Pleasant-Faced Lion, our old friend Lal, ever had anything to do with my life, or ever influenced me in any way. You know, my boy, it is one of women's weaknesses to invariably believe that they do more than they really do. She declared that everything in my life was owing to your influence and to hers."

"Mine?" asked the Writer in astonishment.

"So Mum always insisted, and so she always undoubtedly believed, and when the time came that you ran away,—yes, you dog, for you did run away, don't deny it,—well, what with sorrow for the loss of you, and trouble with your mother, for she declared I had driven you from home by not encouraging you to write, and women are most illogical and unreasonable when they once get a fixed idea into their heads,—well, between one and the other of you I had a very bad time. The fact remained that you were gone, never gave us any address, and I got all the blame for it. But the thing that annoyed Mum more than anything else was my everlasting habit of going to the Pantomimes."

The Writer laughed. "Well, I never knew before, Dad, that Pantomimes were a special weakness of yours."

"Neither were they, my boy, but as sure as ever Christmas came, and the inevitable Pantomimes also, so did I go to every one; not only in London, but every city of the United Kingdom." Here Sir Simon, as if overcome with emotion, groaned aloud. "My boy, pity me; I believe I am the only person still alive who has ever sat out every single Pantomime that has been written for ten years, and oh! what twaddle they were."

"But what on earth did you go to them for?" asked the Writer, aghast.

"To find you."

"Me? Good heavens, at a Pantomime? Dad, were you dreaming?"

"Yes," answered old Sir Simon, shaking his white head at the recollection. "I was dreaming of what Lal had prophesied—that you would make your name and fortune when you met Dick Whittington, and then you would come back to us. And the more I thought of it, the more I was convinced that there was only one possible way of meeting Dick Whittington in the world to-day, and that would be when some lady—and they were always ladies, plain, fair, ugly, tall, lean, fat, pretty—who appeared as that character—met you whilst impersonating Dick. You rascal, I believed that you would meet one of these female Dick Whittingtons, would ever after write the rubbishy Pantomimes in which she appeared every Christmas season, train up your children to be Pantaloons and Harlequins, and have the audacity to appeal to me to keep the family after having christened the eldest child after me. There is not one single lady," continued the Lord Mayor, as he mopped the perspiration from his face, "from here to Aberdeen, and back to Liverpool and Manchester, who has ever played Dick Whittington that I have not treated to either port wine or champagne (for those were the refreshments they all seemed to favour most) in the hope of finding you; I have spent more than ten times the reputed worth of that Dick Whittington inkstand, in railway fares and buying stalls and programmes. Yet the worst of all to relate is, that when Mum saw the programmes underlined upon my return, she accused me of being enamoured of these extraordinary ladies who stalked the stage in the most indescribable costumes, accompanied by cats. My boy, I know every ridiculous speech, every stupid gag spoken by every Lord Mayor in all those Pantomimes by heart, and the one dread of my life is that I shall one day come out with some of it in one of my speeches at either the Guildhall or the Mansion House."

The Writer lay back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"Poor old Dad, I had no idea you were undergoing such an awful penance!"

"You think it funny, do you?" asked the Lord Mayor indignantly.

"I think it is the funniest thing I have ever heard, but I am sure that all the blame rests with Lal for playing us such a trick."

"Humph! Well, Mum didn't think so, and every time Christmas came there was a coldness between us. Perhaps she will be convinced when I take her this inkstand and explain what it is," wound up Sir Simon triumphantly; "she will believe in Lal then, and believe in me at the same time."

Some two hours later Ridgwell and Christine, having viewed the Lord Mayor in his state robes, were safely despatched home in a carriage with the Writer's housekeeper in charge, but not before old Sir Simon had promised to send one of his state coaches, attended by servants in livery, to fetch them to the Mansion House Children's Ball.

Upon taking his departure, Ridgwell had inquired most particularly if the state coach would drive up to their door for them. The Lord Mayor assured him that this would be the case.

"I believe," declared Ridgwell, as he said good-bye and made his departure, "that all the neighbours will believe we have something to do with fairies."

"I shouldn't wonder," chuckled Sir Simon, "and I will get the Lady Mayoress to send you both two costumes that will help the illusion enormously."

"I do wonder what they will be like," mused Christine; "I do so love dressing up."

"So does the Lady Mayoress, my dear," laughed Sir Simon, "so I am sure both of you will get on capitally together, and really she is the life and soul of a children's gathering. I don't know how I should get on without her."

"It certainly seems very strange," remarked Sir Simon, when at length he and the Writer were left alone, "that Lal has not given any sort of sign; this is undoubtedly the night of all nights that he ought to show he is pleased."

Sir Simon helped himself to a third cigar, and a second Crème-de-Menthe, and after drawing back the curtains, looked anxiously down into Trafalgar Square for at least the twentieth time that evening.

The lights of London twinkled gaily, lighting the Square up in fairy-like brilliancy of colours. Signs were to be seen in plenty; they burst from the tall roofs of houses, in coloured electric lights, which worked out advertisements for Foods, Patent Medicines, brands of Cigarettes, brands of Whisky; nearly everything, in fact, that one could not be reasonably in need of at that time of night; but still the Pleasant-Faced Lion remained obdurate and made no sign at all of ever having been alive.

"There is one thing that both Mum and I insist upon," commenced Sir Simon.

"What's that, Dad?"

"Directly we leave the Mansion House, and I may say at once that although it is undoubtedly very stately, and all that sort of thing, we neither of us feel at home there, and for my part, I would as soon live in the British Museum—directly we leave, I insist that you come back to your old home and live with us, and complete the old happy party we three used to make."

"All right, Dad, I'll do that, I promise you."

"And now that you have made a name and fortune for yourself in spite of my doing everything I could to prevent you——"

"No, no, Dad, that isn't fair, and really, you know, I don't believe we could help ourselves, everything has come about exactly as Lal arranged it."

"I am very angry with Lal and his tricks, and if I thought he would listen to me for one minute, I would go down now and—Good gracious alive!" broke off Sir Simon, as he stared somewhat wildly out of the window; "what's that?"

"What's what?" inquired the Writer inconsequently, from his easy-chair at the other end of the room.

Sir Simon rubbed his eyes, then he looked out of the window again, then he rubbed his spectacles in case by any chance they were deceiving him.

"My dear boy," faltered Sir Simon, "is that—is' that—ahem!—Crème-de-Menthe you gave me exceptionally strong by any chance?"

"No, same as it always is, Dad; why?"

"Then I'm not mistaken, Lal's eyes have gone a *bright* green, the same colour as the liqueur in that bottle. Green," shouted Sir Simon, "and they are blazing like fireworks. Look! look at them."

The Writer rushed across the room to the window.

There could be no doubt about it that the calm eyes of the Pleasant-Faced Lion, which were wont to gaze haughtily upon the more commonplace things around him in Trafalgar Square, had suddenly changed to the colour of living emeralds, and were terrible to behold.

"Great Scott!" muttered the astonished Writer, "I have never seen him look like that. He's angry about something."

"He's more than angry—he's furious," suggested the Lord Mayor nervously. "What on earth can be the reason of it? Why, yes, I see. Why, how dare she!" spluttered Sir Simon. "There's a woman dancing, positively waltzing round the Square with his wreath of water-lilies I put there for him! I'll stop her, she must bring it back at once."

Without another word, Sir Simon rushed for the door and downstairs with the most surprising speed, followed closely by the Writer, who considered his old friend ought not to be deserted upon such a mission.

"Ho! hi! stop thief," puffed the Lord Mayor, as he toiled three parts round Trafalgar Square after the corybantic lady, who was dancing on ahead with the huge wreath held with both arms, swaying over her, as she danced a sort of bacchanal in front of the enraged Sir Simon.

"Hi!" panted the Lord Mayor, as after frantic efforts he came alongside. "Woman, bring that wreath back at once; how dare you take it away!"

"Oh, go on, ole dear," retorted the lady good-humouredly; "ain't it making me much 'appier than an old lion? Why, bless you, it put me in mind of the days when I used to play Alice in Pantomimes. Lead, I used to play, once, yes, s'welp me if I wasn't. What 'arm am I a-doing? Oh, look 'ere, if you're going to get snuffy, 'ere, take your ole wreath. I'm blowed if you don't look as if you come out of a Pantomime yourself, in them red robes! 'Ave yer been playing in a Pantomime?"

"Certainly not," replied Sir Simon, somewhat stiffly.

"Why, now I sees the light on your face, I knows you quite well; 'ow do yer do, ole sport? I'm Alice; don't you remember little Alice in the Pantomime of Dick Whittington ten years ago at Slocum Theatre Royal? Why, you gave me a bouquet, and stood me two glasses of port."

The Lord Mayor groaned.

"Little Alice," he queried vaguely; "let me see, little Alice?"

"Yes," averred the lady, who must have weighed fully eighteen stone, "shake hands, old pal."

The Lord Mayor felt thoroughly uncomfortable, more particularly as the Writer joined him at that moment.

"Ahem! an old Pantomime friend," explained Sir Simon.

"Yes, my dears," continued the lady, "and I don't get no Pantomimes now, been 'ard up, I 'ave, for a long time, can't even get chorus now; but bless your 'earts! coming along to-night, when I gets to Trafalgar Square, I somehow could 'ave declared I saw that there Lion a-laughing at me, and then when I sees the wreath, blessed if I didn't want to dance once again all of a sudden. Look 'ere, old sport, you used to have plenty of the shinies in the old days, you used to chuck the 'oof about a bit; I remember you was a-looking for some bloke who wrote—that you had an idea in your 'ead all us girls wanted to marry."

The distressed Lord Mayor fumbled in his pockets and produced two sovereigns.

"Thank you, ole dear," observed the lady, as she pocketed the gold with alacrity, "you was always one of the best; and Cissie Laurie, that's me, you know—Cissie—who used to play Alice, will always swear you are a tip-top clipper. Lor! when I sees you in them robes, and you ain't told me yet why you've got 'em on——

"An inadvertency," stuttered the Lord Mayor; "most unfortunate."

"Well, when I sees you in them robes it puts me in mind of the dear old Pantomime, when little Alice flings herself at the Lord Mayor's feet," and here, overcome with past recollections of the drama, the fat lady sunk upon her knees, and dramatically clasping the robes of Sir Simon, to that worthy old gentleman's utter confusion and consternation, at the same time gave forth aloud the doggerel lines that had once accompanied the incident in the play—

"Oh! Dad, I'm your Alice, in whom you're disappointed,
And here is Dick Whittington, whose nose was out-of-jointed,
Though your heart be as cold as an icicle king's,
Forgive us and say we are nice 'ikkle things."

"Oh, hush! hush! dreadful," implored the Lord Mayor, endeavouring in vain to extricate himself from the dramatic lady's clutches.

At this moment a gruff judicial voice, which sent an immediate thrill down the worthy Lord Mayor's back, broke in upon the scene.

"Now, then, what's all this? Move on, there!"

A dark blue policeman stood in the pale blue moonlight.

The Lord Mayor only shivered.

The dramatic lady was equal to the occasion.

"Aren't we a picture?" she asked coquettishly.

"Get up, then," commanded the policeman dryly, "and be a movin' one."

"All right, don't get huffy, dear, we're professionals."

"So I should think," observed the policeman shortly.

The Writer thought this a most propitious moment to seize the Lord Mayor by the arm, and hurry him in the direction of his own rooms, across the almost deserted centre of the Square, without waiting for any further conversation of any description.

The policeman stared after them suspiciously as they moved away.

"What's he doing in them things?" inquired the policeman of the lady.

"Lor', 'ow should I know? I guess he's a good sort, though, he gave me some money."

"Oh, did he?" remarked the policeman in a sepulchral voice. "Well, I hope he came by it honestly, that's all."

"Oh, that old chap's all right, old tin-feet," retorted the once time Lady of the Drama. "I only think 'e's a bit balmy in his 'ead, that's all. So-long, I'm off 'ome!"

"Balmy in his head, eh?" grumbled the policeman gruffly. "Ah, I thought there was a funny look about him; yes. Well, I had better follow him up, and see that he doesn't get up to no mischief of any sort."

"I say, Dad," suggested the Writer, "you had better let me carry the wreath, whilst you lake off those robes; you know they attract a lot of attention, even at this time of night."

"I am afraid they do," confessed the Mayor. "What a dreadful and degrading scene! That upsetting fragment of a pantomime enacted in the open air, too, which is only a specimen of the stuff I was compelled to listen to for so many years!"

"She evidently regarded you as an old friend, and a patron of the theatre," laughed the Writer, "without in any way guessing your identity."

"It was a terrible situation," groaned the Lord Mayor; "however shall I be able to tell Mum about such an incident when I arrive home?"

The worthy Lord Mayor got no further either in his remarks or in removing his bright robes, for as they approached the position occupied by the Pleasant-Faced Lion, Sir Simon became aware of another figure standing menacingly in front of it.

A short, thick-set man in a sailor's dress was holding his hands to his head, and regarding the Lion with his mouth and eyes wide open, whilst an expression of horrified wonder and astonishment appeared to have petrified his face into a sort of ghastly mask of perpetual astonishment.

Whilst the sailor continued to stare and mutter, the Lion's eyes could be seen to shoot out the most brilliant green fires; they looked like the flashing of two wonderful green emeralds.

The Lord Mayor quickened his pace almost to a run. "Look, look! what's the thing that man is flourishing about in his hand?"

"It's a big sailor's knife," replied the Writer uneasily.

"Quick, quick!" shouted the Lord Mayor, "he is going to do Lal some harm with it! Good heavens! he's swarmed up the pedestal and he is positively contemplating cutting Lal's eyes out. Stop, you villain," shouted the Lord Mayor, whilst he ran towards the spot. "Come down at once; how dare you touch that beautiful Lion's eyes!"

Without so much as turning his head, and apparently heedless of any remarks addressed to him, the sailor continued to flourish his ugly-looking knife, shouting meanwhile in the Lion's face as he did so—

"Emeralds, bloomin' emeralds here in London under my very nose. I'll 'ave 'em out," yelled the sailor. "I'll have 'em out in no time. I've come from Hindia, where they've got jools like these 'ere in the hidols' eyes. I couldn't get at them there, but I can get these 'ere," whereupon the sailor made a frantic jab with his knife at the Pleasant-Faced Lion's right eye.

He had no time, or indeed any opportunity of continuing his unpleasant execution, for the enraged Lord Mayor had seized the wide ends of the sailor's trousers and had dragged him down with such abruptness and goodwill that the over-venturesome son of Neptune, dropping his knife, lay upon the ground volunteering expressions which at least had the merit of showing that his travels must have been indeed varied and extensive to have left him in possession of such a widely stocked vocabulary.

"I'll have you up for attempting to mutilate the beautiful statues of London," shouted the enraged Lord Mayor.

The Writer restrained the sailor's more or less ineffectual efforts to get at the Lord Mayor, but the Writer found it singularly impossible to control the shouted execrations of that abusive mariner, among a few of whose remarks could be mentioned, by way of sample, that he wanted to know why an old bloke dressed like an etcetera Mephistopheles meant by coming along from a blighted Covent Garden

Ball and interfering with him; that if he, the mariner, could once get at the—ahem!—Mephistopheles in question, he would never go to a fancy ball again as long as he lived, as he would not have a head to go with, and his legs wouldn't ever be any use to him again as long as he lived.

The Writer being sufficiently athletically active to control, or at any rate postpone, these amiable intentions of the mariner, the Lord Mayor was afforded a few brief seconds to climb up and examine his favourite. Flinging the wreath of water-lilies around the Lion's mane to get it out of the way, the Lord Mayor clasped his old favourite Lal round the neck, uttering words of consolation and affection.

The Lion's eyes had changed from their bright emerald colour to a dull topaz yellow, which in turn subsided to their wonted colouring during the Lord Mayor's affectionate address.

The countenance of the Lion gradually resumed its ordinary pleasant-faced expression, and two large tears fell upon the Lord Mayor's outstretched hands.

The worthy Lord Mayor was quite overcome with emotion at this obvious sign from the Pleasant-Faced Lion!

"Dear old Lal," murmured the Lord Mayor, "dear, faithful, loving soul, these are the first tears I have ever known you shed. Are they tears of gratitude because we have rescued you from this ruffian with a knife, who would have destroyed your noble sight? Or are they tears of pity? Speak to me, Lal; if they are tears of pity, they will open the gates of——"

"A police station," interrupted a cold, judicial voice, and the good Lord Mayor turned to find what the Writer, although fully occupied with the mariner, had seen approaching with consternation and alarm, the same policeman who had spoken to them before, followed by a small crowd of late night loafers, who were already starting to exchange remarks and jeer at the somewhat unusual scene.

"Just you come down," said the constable, in his severest and most judicial tones.

The Lord Mayor prepared to climb down, looking somewhat crestfallen, whilst the unsympathetic crowd uttered a faint, ironical cheer.

"This is the second time to-night I have spoken to you," said the constable. "Now, as you have been behaving most strangely and attracting a crowd, I'll just trouble you for your name and address," and the constable unfolded an uncomfortable-looking pocket-book, bound in an ominous-looking black case, produced the stump of a pencil and prepared to take notes. "Now then, out with it, what's your name?"

"Gold," faltered the Lord Mayor, fumbling vainly for a visiting card, which he was unable to find.

The stolid constable misunderstood the action. "No, you don't bribe me," said the constable loftily.

"I was not attempting to," objected the Lord Mayor.

"Well, what's your name, then?"

"Gold," repeated the Lord Mayor.

"Oh, I see," muttered the constable; "what else?"

"Simon Gold."

"What else?" pursued the remorseless officer of the law.

"Sir Simon Gold," groaned the helpless Lord Mayor.

"What address?"

"The Mansion House."

"Here, I don't want none of your jokes," vouchsafed the constable sternly; "this is no joking matter, as you will find out when you're charged afore the magistrate."

The worthy Sir Simon's plump cheeks flushed red with anger at the bare mention of such an indignity. "How dare you suggest such a thing to me?" spluttered Sir Simon. "Do you know who I am? I am the Lord Mayor of London."

This remark was greeted with a loud cheer from the rapidly gathering crowd.

The constable smiled a maddening smile.

"A likely tale," observed the constable. "Why, I was present keeping the crowd off when his Worship, the Lord Mayor of London, opened his Home to-day; he returned hours ago; and I think myself it's some sort of Home as you have got to return to, and I don't leave you until I find out which Home it is."

Whether the mention of the word Home suggested sudden possibilities to the Writer, or whether, like Ulysses of old, he longed so ardently for a return to that blissful abode that he even stooped to emulate the sort of stratagem Ulysses might have adopted in similar circumstances will never be known. Yet the fact remains that the Writer turned the fortunes of war for the time being.

He drew the constable quickly upon one side and spoke rapidly and earnestly to him for some moments. At the end of these whispered explanations the constable closed his pocket-book with a snap, and pointed across the way in the direction of the Writer's chambers.

The Writer nodded.

The constable touched his forehead significantly at the side of his helmet.

Once again the Writer nodded.

"Very well," said the constable, "if you are the one who looks after him, you can go; better get him home as quickly as you can."

Amidst a parting ironical cheer the Writer hastily seized the worthy Lord Mayor by the arm and broke through the assembled crowd with all possible speed.

As they passed upon their way one small incident, however, caused the Writer grave misgiving.

A tall man who had undoubtedly watched the whole proceeding nodded to him and remarked sarcastically, as he passed—

"Good-night; a really most interesting and illuminating episode."

Having safely gained his own abode, the Writer gazed apprehensively out of the window.

The sailor could still be seen supporting himself against the pedestal of the Lion's statue, the policeman appeared to be engaged upon a new crusade of note-taking. The small crowd was melting away, but the sinister face of the sarcastic man could be seen wreathed in a cynical smile of triumph.

The Writer whistled, and drawing the curtains close, turned up the electric light and anticipated the worst.

The Lord Mayor sank into the most comfortable chair he could select, and helped himself to a drink; he felt he needed one badly at that moment.

"What a dreadful and degrading scene," lamented Sir Simon. "Good gracious, if anybody had seen me who recognised me, I should never have heard the last of it."

The Writer lit a cigar thoughtfully, and passed the box to Sir Simon.

"I am afraid, Dad, we never shall hear the last of it," prophesied the Writer gloomily.

"What do you mean?" inquired Sir Simon.

"Did you notice that man who spoke to me at the edge of the crowd, who had presumably seen the whole thing?"

"Of course not," replied Sir Simon; "how on earth could I notice anybody under such distressing circumstances? Who was he? what about him?"

"That was the famous Mr. Learnéd Bore."

"What, the man who is always advertising himself?"

"Yes," agreed the Writer, "and unfortunately he has the power to do so through the medium of the newspapers; his letters to London are one of the features of the Press," added the Writer significantly.

"Don't tell me," entreated the Lord Mayor, with an imploring look in his eyes, "that he will make me, the Lord Mayor of London, a subject for his heartless gibes."

"He's certain to write two columns about it in one of to-morrow or the next day's papers," declared the Writer hopelessly. "Do you suppose such a man would waste such material and copy as that for one of his satirical eruptions?"

The Lord Mayor groaned aloud at the very thought of this new terror, which threatened to descend like the sword of Damocles and crush all the joy of his new civic dignity. With trembling hands he folded his bright robe and glittering chain of office; the Lord Mayor felt that he could no longer bear the sight of them.

"What on earth I can say to Mum for being out as late as this I don't know," lamented the Mayor dolefully; "she will, of course, believe I have been to another Pantomime; she always taxes me with having gone to a Pantomime whenever I stay out late. However," sighed the Mayor, "I shall show her the Dick Whittington which has really been the cause of all the trouble."

It may have been that Sir Simon was still unusually agitated from the scene he had recently passed through, to say nothing of the vague foreboding caused by the knowledge that Mr. Learnéd Bore might conceivably do anything within the next few days. There is a possibility that his hand trembled; whatever may have been the cause, as Sir Simon lifted the little Dick Whittington from the table, he let it fall. As it crashed upon the hard polished floor it broke into a dozen pieces, and the merry little figure of Dick Whittington was hopelessly shattered. Sir Simon looked blankly at the Writer.

The Writer looked blankly back at Sir Simon.

As poor Sir Simon ruefully picked up the pieces, he looked disconsolate enough to be upon the verge of tears. The Writer, although keenly affected by the loss, tried, although unsuccessfully, to comfort him.

"Never mind, Dad, it can't be helped, and I suppose Dick Whittington has served his day."

"To think I have broken the most perfect specimen in the world," moaned Sir Simon; "that you must have denied yourself greatly to give me, and to think I shall never be able to convince Mum now, or even mention it, for she wouldn't believe one word of the story. Besides," wound up Sir Simon, "it is so dreadfully unlucky to break china. Call me a cab, my dear boy," implored the old gentleman, "a four-wheeler, if possible; I really dare not go home in a taxi, I feel some other dreadful accident would happen to me if I did."

Upon his way home Sir Simon ruminated upon the events of the evening. He found himself unable to make up his mind which portion of the adventure had been the most discomforting to him. Finally, upon approaching the Mansion House, he caught himself indulging in speculation and uttering his thoughts aloud.

"I wonder what possible story he could have told the policeman, to get me out of that dreadful situation so quickly; and I wonder," mused Sir Simon, "why the policeman tapped his head in that curious manner; he must have told him something that appealed to him at once. I dare say even policemen have their feelings, and looking back upon matters calmly, I suppose my conduct must perhaps have appeared a little out of the ordinary. However, if I ever come across that constable again, I must try and make him a little present."

Sir Simon little realised that he was to meet the constable again very soon, and certainly never realised where, otherwise it is safe to assume that the good Sir Simon would never have slept the tranquil sleep he did that night, full of peaceful dreams, over which the Pleasant-Faced Lion presided like the protecting guardian watch-dog that the good Lord Mayor always believed him to be.

CHAPTER VIII

AN UPSETTING ARTICLE IN THE MORNING PAPER

Some few mornings after the events just recorded the Lady Mayoress sat down to breakfast in one of the most cosy of the morning-rooms in their private suite in the Mansion House. A very smart manservant of quite aristocratic appearance solemnly poured out some most fragrant coffee, and removed many covers from a most delicately appetising breakfast-table, as a preliminary to removing his aristocratic presence from the room altogether. There could be no doubt that the Lady Mayoress was a singularly pretty and attractive lady, and despite her well-dressed head of iron-grey hair, looked fully fifteen years younger than her age, which is invariably a pleasing reflection for a woman who has passed the age of forty-five.

The Lady Mayoress sipped her morning coffee, and in the absence of her husband the Lord Mayor, who was late for breakfast on this occasion, unfolded the morning newspapers and started leisurely to peruse their contents.

The Lady Mayoress, being exceedingly popular, and having taken a prominent part in a number of social functions, like most women, was never averse to reading any paragraphs which might chance to mention her sayings, doings, and, more particularly, her dress. The Lady Mayoress read on; there appeared to be very little in the particular paper she was perusing that interested her, so refolding it carefully the Lady Mayoress selected another morning paper, and opening it, smiled as she read in big print, "Audacious attack by Mr. Learnéd Bore."

"Ah!" commented the Lady Mayoress, "he certainly is a particularly audacious, as well as being a very naughty man, who makes fun of everything and everybody, but at least his articles and letters are always amusing." Thereupon the smiling lady gently stirred her coffee, folded the newspaper to the required place, and proceeded to enjoy Mr. Learnéd Bore's contribution to the morning journalism.

Suddenly the little silver coffee spoon dropped from the Lady Mayoress's hand, and she sat bolt upright in her chair as if she had received a galvanic shock. At this inauspicious moment the Lord Mayor made his appearance, very jovial and full of happy morning greetings, mingled with pleasant apologies for being late.

Something in the expression of his wife's face, however, gave the worthy Lord Mayor an uncomfortable, apprehensive sort of feeling, the cheerful flow of his morning remarks died away in little sentences, as if the promise of their young life had been cut short.

The Lord Mayor chipped an egg nervously, and made a brave show of gulping his coffee.

"Well, Mum, you seem very interested in the morning paper," observed Sir Simon, with an assumption of hearty cheerfulness he was far from feeling.

Something in the expression of Mum's face seemed to baffle all analysis, as she continued to read without vouchsafing any answer. After a terrible pause the Lady Mayoress refolded the paper, and laying it upon the table, regarded her husband steadfastly with flushed face and sparkling eyes.

Sir Simon's heart seemed to sink into his boots.

"I thought you distinctly told me, Simon, when you returned, at what I can only describe as a most eccentric hour in the early morning, that you had been visiting an old friend."

"Quite right, my dear, I assure you I had. I'm right upon that point at any rate."

"You told me you had not been to a Pantomime," continued his wife, heedless of the interruption.

"No, my dear,—no Pantomime, I assure you; I never entered a theatre or a building of any such description."

"Apparently not," came the icy reply; "the Pantomime in this case appears to have taken place in the open air. Read that paper," commanded the Lady Mayoress, "and offer any suggestion you can find as to how I can keep up my position, or your position, whilst such a statement as this" (tapping the opened paper) "remains uncontradicted." Then the Lady Mayoress swept from the room.

Sir Simon groaned and closed his eyes before venturing to look at the offending article. He instinctively felt he was about to receive a shock without the necessary strength to bear it. Sir Simon gingerly unclosed one eye and read, "Audacious attack by Mr. Learnéd Bore." Sir Simon shivered and hastily closed the one eye he had opened. Then he valiantly tried both eyes and read by way of a second and happy headline, "The Lord Mayor revives Paganism in London." Sir Simon never knew how he finished that article. It was a most scurrilous attack.

All the biting satire and vitriolic irony that Mr. Learnéd Bore had so well at his command was here employed to compliment the Lord Mayor upon being acclaimed a great Christian in the afternoon after opening his New House for Children; whilst he was found at night like any Pagan of old worshipping one of the lions in Trafalgar Square, around whose mane he had hung a votive wreath of water-lilies, across whose unresponsive neck the Lord Mayor had wound his arms in supplication, imploring it that it might speak, and give a sign like the Oracle in Delphi.

Was the Lord Mayor of London the last of the great Pagans? asked the writer, or had he merely gone back a few thousand years in imagination, owing to the insidious suggestions of another Heathen Deity who had doubtless presided over the Wine-press with an unstinted hand earlier in the day during the banquet at the Guildhall? The writer dared to express a hope that it was merely a form of Civic debauchery emanating from the oft-replenished toasts of the Devil's cup, rather than a classical intoxication which if persisted in might plunge the whole of London once more into the perverted darkness of Pagan ages.

The Lord Mayor seized his hat and called for his carriage, and arrived at the Writer's chambers overlooking Trafalgar Square, purple in the face.

"Yes, I've read it, Dad," remarked the Writer as he observed Sir Simon's signs of almost apoplectic agitation. "It's very bad form, and what is worse it's very badly written."

"The pen is mightier than the sword," shouted Sir Simon, "and unfortunately the sword is out of date nowadays, or I would challenge him upon the spot; but, my boy, you have the pen, and you can use it, and a jolly sight better than the silly ass who wrote that article. Will you answer him for me?"

The Writer smiled and shook his head.

"No, Dad, that is exactly what he wants; he would get all the advertisement out of such a controversy that his soul craves for, and which is absolutely necessary for him now to keep up his reputation. I have something to suggest much better than that."

"What is it?" asked the Lord Mayor helplessly.

"Did you ever consider some of the characteristics of Ulysses, Dad?"

"Oh, they talked about him in my school-days, but I didn't have much schooling, you know; and what on earth has Ulysses to do with this?"

The Writer grinned. "Because, Dad, he possessed a remarkably wily gift of always finding his enemies' one vulnerable spot."

"Well?"

"I know at least two of Learnéd Bore's most vulnerable spots."

"Eh? Unbounded conceit and unlimited calumny?" questioned Sir Simon.

"No," rejoined the Writer, "I should say he was *invulnerable* upon those two points. However, two things he dreads more than anything else. He has a horror of ridicule when it is turned upon himself, and an unutterable and most unnatural hatred of all children."

"Well, I don't see how that helps me," rejoined the Lord Mayor.

The Writer looked at Sir Simon significantly, and spoke slowly and deliberately so that his words might have their full effect.

"Lose no time in bringing an action against him for libel; as a defendant he will be off his pedestal,—and at a disadvantage."

The Lord Mayor opened his eyes and whistled softly. "I never thought of that," he confessed; "and where does his horror of children come in?"

"The chief witness for your side will be little Ridgwell," suggested the Writer quietly; "it will be something that Learnéd Bore doesn't understand, has never encountered, and will not know how to deal with, and of the two I know whose story will be believed, however fantastic it sounds. The child will be the one who will score, they always do in Court, and I think that Learnéd Bore will live to gnash such teeth as he hasn't had pulled, and employ the venom of his remaining fangs upon some one else."

Sir Simon lay back in his chair and laughed heartily, and all his old good-humour seemed to be restored to him.

"'Pon my word," he declared, "it is a capital idea of yours. How shall I commence the action?"

"I'll find the man for you and get Vellum and Crackles, the solicitors, to instruct him at once on the case. His name is Mr. Gentle Gammon, K.C., a famous barrister. He was at school with me, and afterwards at Oxford. Why, Dad, you must remember him, he returned home once with me and spent the Christmas holidays with us at Lancaster Gate. Mum thought an awful lot of him."

"I remember!" exclaimed Sir Simon excitedly; "meek manner, gentle voice, but the young devil always got his own way, I noticed, before any one even knew what he was after."

"He gets his own way rather more now than he did then, if possible, and by the same means. He always wins his cases too."

"Engage him," commanded Sir Simon, "engage him at once, my boy; and are you going to undertake to coach little Ridgwell?"

"Little Ridgwell won't want any coaching," chuckled the Writer. "I only want little Ridgwell to appear in Court and talk to them about the Pleasant-Faced Lion as he talks to me, and I think it will be a refreshing and unusual experience for them all; and I firmly believe for the first time in his life Mr. Learnéd Bore will not be able to find anything to say."

"It's very odd," remarked Sir Simon as he rose to take his departure, "really very odd that you should have mentioned that chap just now—what's his name—Ulysses; as far as I remember he was a very cunning person, uncannily cunning, and I'm afraid really quite underhand, so to speak, and sometimes deceitful in his methods; and do you know, my boy, you rather remind me of him, now I come to think of the matter."

The Writer grinned affably.

"And whilst we are upon this subject," pursued Sir Simon, "I should really like to know what explanation you gave to the policeman that night, that he considered so convincing and satisfactory."

"Even Ulysses didn't reveal all his wisdom, Dad. Good-bye."

CHAPTER IX

THE WRITER PLANS WICKED PLANS

Now it so happened that the Writer chanced to be quite as fond of jokes as the Pleasant-Faced Lion, and the Writer contended, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that an action for libel with the Pleasant-Faced Lion involved in it would be an excellent great big joke, to say nothing of a graceful retaliation upon the Pleasant-Faced Lion himself for a few of the jokes which that Pleasant Animal had played upon the Writer. Not to mention the fact that such a case promised to supply the Writer with a little light recreation almost in the nature of a holiday, after the labours of producing his last book.

Consequently, as soon as Sir Simon had left, the Writer selected his favourite pipe, filled it with his choicest tobacco, and having lit it, stretched himself at ease upon the most comfortable divan in his rooms, and thought out subtle schemes.

There he lay laughing and chuckling for all the world like a wicked Puck, bent upon mischief, joyfully and solely devised for a confusion of his enemies, particularly Mr. Learnéd Bore.

Cheered and emboldened by such happy reflections, the Writer hit upon a scheme haphazard which for sheer unscrupulous impudence would baffle all description; gradually embroidering his machinations with that whimsicality that had always served him so well as an author, until his plans appeared to be complete.

"Very fortunate," murmured the Writer as he knocked out his pipe, "that those kids told me all about the Pleasant-Faced Lion's party. Great heavens, what a chance! and it will be worth a fifty-pound note to have Lal brought into Court and to hear the Griffin's song sang in Court, and sung it shall be, only I must alter the words to fit the occasion." Here the Writer sat upon the edge of the table and rocked with delighted laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha!" gurgled the Writer, "only one man in London who can set it, and, by Jove, I'll ring him up on the 'phone at once; a few judicious rehearsals—before Vellum and Crackles, the solicitors, are communicated with—to say nothing of Gentle Gammon, and—ha! ha! ha!—what a glorious joke. What's Billy Cracker's number in the book?"

A quarter of an hour afterwards, in answer to a most urgent summons by telephone, Mr. William Cracker made his appearance in the Writer's rooms.

Mr. William Cracker, called Billy by his friends, was rapidly rising to fame as a writer of musical comedy—a tall, sleek personage, with straw-coloured hair brilliantined very flat over his head, and carefully parted in the centre, wearing a monocle in one eye, which appeared to grow there, and was always lavishly adorned as an exact and living replica of the latest fashion plate.

Billy greeted the Writer and stared at him through his eyeglass quizzically.

"Whenever I hear you give that Mephistophelean chuckle at the end of the 'phone," commented Billy, "I always know you have got some particularly impish scheme on. Well, what is it?"

"Oh, Billy, Billy," chuckled the Writer, "I have indeed got a scheme, and it is funnier, Billy, than any of your musical comedies."

"In that case," announced Billy, as he leisurely helped himself to a smoke which the Writer offered, "I shall steal the plot."

"Listen, Billy. Could you write a tune, a refrain, an air, whatever you call it, so catchy that people would hum it and sing it on the spot? I want a perfectly irresistible tune, Billy."

"All my tunes are irresistible," confessed Billy modestly.

"Yes, but I want an absolute dead cert. The sort of thing you used to write at Oxford before you took up music as a profession; you know, one of those catchy things we all used to stand round and sing the instant you played it."

"Of course," returned Billy equably, "it's my profession. I turn out any amount of such things."

"Oh, yes; but, Billy, this has got to be a Comic Classic."

Billy considered for a space.

"Is it to be sung in a Comic Opera?" he asked.

"No, it's going to be sung in Court."

Billy stared through his eyeglass.

"You're joking!" he said.

"Of course I'm joking," retorted the Writer, "you only have to read the words to gather that fact."

"Have you got the words?"

"Yes, here they are; but wait a minute, old chap, that isn't all, you have got to coach a youngster I know to sing them."

"Oh, that's a very different matter," demurred Billy; "I don't teach, and anyway it would be awful waste of time."

"I will pay you your own fee," grinned the Writer, as he fingered a cheque-book, artlessly placed upon the top of a desk. "Nice fat cheque, Billy, always useful."

Mr. Billy Cracker appeared instantly to succumb to this suggestion and to take very kindly to it.

"Here are the words," said the Writer modestly, handing two half-sheets of notepaper to his friend, "there is the grand piano, Billy, opened already, a medium of expression only waiting for your musical genius."

"Let's see the words," said Billy.

Mr. Cracker perused the lines offered for his inspection with amazement.

"I say," he observed, "they seem awful rot."

The Writer laughed.

"Ah, Billy, that's only because you don't know the situation yet."

"True," assented Billy; "I've had worse given me to set in musical comedies. Now let me see," murmured Mr. Cracker as he seated himself at the pianoforte, "scansion is the great thing—scansion and rhythm."

Thereupon followed a curious procession of tum tiddle, tum tiddle, tum tiddle, tiddle tums, varied by little tinkling outbursts upon the pianoforte, which there could be no doubt that Mr. Billy Cracker played astonishingly well.

"Easy or difficult to set?" inquired the Writer.

"Oh, child's play!"

"That's just what I want it for," remarked the Writer encouragingly, "child's play, and the sort of tune a child would sing whilst he played."

"Half a mo," murmured Billy, "I'm getting it fine—lum, lum, lum, lum, lum, lum, lum, lum, lum. Ha! What do you think of this?"

Out rippled a delicious melody, harmonised with rich full chords this time.

"That's it!" shouted the Writer excitedly. "Oh! lovely!! Billy, you're a treasure. Oh! play it again!"

Mr. Billy Cracker obligingly consented.

The Writer was dancing round the room and singing at one and the same time.

"Ripping! Billy, Ripping! Write it down at once!"

"Suppose you haven't got any music-paper in the place? No, I thought not; never mind, I can soon manufacture some from this manuscript-paper."

"No, not that," exclaimed the Writer hastily, "that's my new poem."

"Humph! Hope it's better than the one you have given me to set."

"Billy," exclaimed the Writer enthusiastically, "I am going to stand you a tip-top lunch, and then I'm going to take you to Balham."

"Balham, good gracious! what on earth for?"

"You've got to give a music lesson in Balham after lunch, Billy, one lesson will be enough with that tune. Why, it's in my head now, I can't forget the thing."

"Isn't that exactly what you required?" asked Billy languidly, as he wrote down notes.

* * * * *

Messrs. Vellum and Crackles, most concise and conservative of solicitors, found themselves suffering for the first time in the history of the firm from a fit of astonishment, not to mention dismay, regarding the strange nature and unusual features of a case concerning which their firm had recently received instructions.

The case was considered so unusual that a sort of hastily contrived board meeting was deemed expedient, and was accordingly held in Mr. Vellum's private room.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Vellum gave instructions for the writing of a letter to the Board of Works, for special permission to have one of the Lions, which would be, hereinafter, especially pointed out and specified, removed from Trafalgar Square to the Law Courts, as its presence in Court was deemed indispensable in a case of a peculiar and special nature.

"It is a very singular application," remarked Mr. Crackles thoughtfully.

"I hope the request will not bring ridicule upon the firm," rejoined Mr. Vellum.

BOOK III

CHAPTER X

THE LION GOES TO COURT

There was a curious hush of expectancy one early autumn afternoon in Court X., about to be presided over by Mr. Justice Chatty.

Outside in the streets London was suffering from partial darkness, which is not infrequently the case, so a number of the lights in Court had been lit, and although they burned a somewhat dull amber, the lighting was sufficient to outline a truly remarkable scene.

Mr. Justice Chatty, the Judge, had not yet entered and taken his seat, so that the expectant hush which had momentarily crept over the Court was all the more remarkable by way of contrast to the series of rushes which had gone before this state of calm.

Something approaching a small riot had taken place before the doors of the Court had been opened. Crowds of curiosity-loving people, having stationed themselves outside for hours, and who had even thoughtfully provided themselves with sandwiches, now fought and kicked and struggled in solid wedges to find a place, and even roundly abused the police who controlled the doors when they were thrust away. The public have an unfortunate habit of becoming abusive whenever "House Full" is announced, after bravely enduring the probationary martyrdom of waiting hours for one of their favoured entertainments to start.

The belief that the Judge was about to take his seat was found to be a false alarm, so the hum and hubbub inside the Court recommenced with renewed activity. The solicitors chattered at their table like magpies. The leading barristers turned over their briefs and snapped out replies to the other barristers with them, and fidgeted with their gowns. Everybody glared at everybody else in the amber-lighted Court, but however eagerly they talked, and wherever they looked, the eyes of every one in Court always returned to stare in amazement and wondering curiosity upon one object. In the body of the Court, looming out of the dimness, the head fully illuminated, was the enormous statue of a bronze lion upon its stone pedestal.

"Most extraordinary case in my recollection," drawled a junior barrister to one of his fellows who was flattened beside him; "no wonder there is no room in Court with that ridiculous thing stuck there!"

"Who's for the defendant?"

"Dreadful, K.C., instructed by Brockett and Bracket."

"Umph! then I suppose there will be explosions and fireworks in Court: it's usually so when Dreadful starts."

"Gentle Gammon, I see, for the plaintiff. Biggest spoofer on the Law List, clever though."

Even after the Court appeared to be packed with that overlapping economy which is a characteristic repose of preserved sardines, small bodies of juniors, some with wigs, some without wigs, some in whole gowns, some with their gowns in shreds, forced their way in from other doors and other Courts. Some conspicuously held briefs borrowed for the occasion, some did not even pretend to have any such thing.

The stalwart policeman who guarded this second door suddenly became firm, and closed it with a mighty effort; that is to say, he all but closed it, only was prevented by the foot and head of the last junior hurrying in, who howled his agony aloud at having fallen into such a trap.

"No, no, Mr. Towers," expostulated the tall constable, "can't you see the Court is full and won't hold another one?"

"Lucas, let me in at once."

"I can't, sir, more than my position is worth."

"Then let me out," howled the suffering junior, "you're crushing my foot and my neck."

The stalwart policeman lessened a fraction of his weight against the door, and the imprisoned junior was allowed to scrape himself out as gradually as his peculiar position would admit.

The one person who considered the presence of the Lion in Court to be the most natural thing in the world was Ridgwell, who, standing beside the Writer, peeped through the little glass panel let into the door leading from a passage to one of the witnesses waiting-rooms.

"Is the Round Game going to commence?" Ridgwell asked the Writer innocently.

The Writer admitted gravely that the Round Game was going to commence with a vengeance.

"The ones who lose have to pay the forfeits, haven't they?" persisted
Ridgwell.

"Yes," agreed the Writer. "Exactly—ahem!—heavy forfeits."

"I hope Sir Simon wins then," observed Ridgwell.

"You see that man across there, Ridgwell," remarked the Writer, "big fierce-looking man making ineffectual efforts to adjust his wig becomingly over a pair of very big red ears, with two very big red hands?"

"Yes," agreed Ridgwell.

"With the sort of expression upon his face that the first of the Three Bears must have worn when he entered Silverlocks' kitchen and found the bread-and-milk to be missing?"

"Yes," laughed Ridgwell, "I remember, 'Who stole my bread-and-milk?'"

"Well, that is the man who is going to try to make you and I and Sir
Simon pay the forfeits."

"How?" inquired Ridgwell.

"Well," suggested the Writer, "you know he will roar and shout and bang the table with those red hands of his, and try to frighten everybody, but the one thing to do is not to take the slightest notice of him. If he annoys you, just smile; if he continues to annoy you, just glance towards the Judge."

At this moment the voices of the ushers were heard shouting for silence and order, and a profound stillness reigned inside the Court, for his Lordship the Judge had entered through the doors leading to his room and had taken his seat.

His scarlet robe only seemed to accentuate the colour of his puffy pink cheeks, whilst the blackness of his little beady eyes and pointed nose rather gave him the appearance of some overfed bird gorged to repletion after a particularly satisfying meal, slightly apoplectic, with its beak out of focus. The Judge, moreover, appeared to be afflicted with a little wheezy asthmatical cough which attacked him at intervals as he prepared to arrange his papers. The Clerk carefully placed a glass of water upon the desk by his Lordship's side, but whether this was done by way of a simple remedy for the Judge's wheezy little cough, or merely as a gentle reminder that the case was likely to be a dry one, cannot be guessed with any certainty. The preliminaries having been arranged, the case having been called, the Ushers of the Court having again shouted unnecessarily for silence, Sir Simon Gold having stared at the Judge, and Mr. Learnéd Bore having stared at everybody, the Judge having appeared to have closed his beady eyes in slumber, like a broody hen upon a perch, Mr. Gentle Gammon rose and opened his case for the plaintiff.

As Ridgwell observed in a whisper, "the Round Game had started." Mr. Gentle Gammon opened his case in his proverbially gentle tones. It was a silky voice, purring in its gentleness, but with a curious power of penetrating every corner of the over-crowded Court; it insisted even whilst it soothed, and its effect upon his Lordship the Judge seemed to be most pleasing, as he immediately appeared to nod to it as if in greeting. Mr. Gentle Gammon related to the Court how his client, holding the highest Civic position in London, had been made the subject of a virulent and unscrupulous newspaper attack by a man who, in addition to writing plays which nobody professed to understand, undoubtedly wrote articles that all fair-minded people unquestionably deplored. This unprincipled person, Mr. Learnéd Bore by name, had seen fit to attack no less a person than the Worshipful the Lord Mayor of London, and that, moreover, during his Lordship's tenure of office, believing that he, an unscrupulous journalist, could drag the Lord Mayor down from his exalted position by means of a few clap-trap phrases written for money, although he, the learned Counsel, marvelled how any one could find it in their hearts to remunerate such a person engaged in such a calling using such questionable language in such a preposterous case.

He, the Most Worshipful the Lord Mayor, the observed of all observers in the City as elsewhere, or in any assemblage he adorned with his presence and ornamented with his personality, had been accused in an offensive phrase of "imbibing too freely of the Devil's cup," the Devil's cup in this instance signifying wine, the insidious inference being that the Most Worshipful the Mayor was inebriated, and, moreover, in public, and in Trafalgar Square of all places in London. The Counsel paused dramatically, then a thrill of unutterable horror crept into the hitherto purring voice of Mr. Gentle Gammon.

"That, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, is a foul calumny, an insidious lie, uttered to drag down the exalted of the earth, and bespatter the resplendent robes of Civic dignity with the spiteful mud besprinkled from the nethermost garbaged recesses of the journalistic gutter.

"During the still and beautiful night hours, when this travesty of an accusation is brought, my client, the Most Worshipful, had wandered into the holy star-lit night, clad in the flowing robes symbolical of his exalted earthly estate, to place a wreath, a beautiful wreath, upon one of the monuments of London he deemed the most dignified and fitting to receive it. That monument, if they but lifted their eyes, they would see in Court. A stately noble Lion, whose presence there had necessitated the removal of four separate sets of folding doors leading to the Court in order that it might be present. Could this noble beast but speak," urged Mr. Gentle Gammon, K.C., "could it even roar, it would speak its severest censures, would roar its loudest denunciations at the libellous statement that the noble Civic head of London who honoured it, could possibly have done so, could conceivably have climbed to such a height upon its back, unless he had been eminently sober, unfalteringly steady at the time when, clad in his robes in the calm violet depth of night, he had placed his offering in happy felicitation as a symbol and a greeting to his beloved City of London. This should have excited only admiration; but seen through the prying eyes of a prurient pressman, this touching tribute had been changed by the vile alchemy of suspicion to an unseemly and ridiculous action of midnight debauchery which could only have turned the noble Lion to stone, had it not already been made of bronze.

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, this Lion stands for liberty, as do all British Lions. I claim the liberty and full right of my client, if he deems fit, to be able to decorate any statue of London whenever he pleases, at any or every possible hour of the night that he chooses, without the stupid and interfering intervention of a constable, or the slanderous pen of a Mr. Learnéd Bore, having the power to make a lovable and harmless action wear the appearance of a midnight frolic of bibulous recklessness, which, had it taken place, would have been only food and gossip for the senseless and shameful, and reflective regret for the wise.

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, my client does not wish for big damages, but he does demand strict justice. That is what he is here for, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, that is what we are all here for. If I were given to emotion, which I am glad to confess I am not, my deepest and innermost emotions would be called forth by the picture of his Lordship there before us, who holds the scales of Justice in his hands, who can pierce the outer coverings of dissembling and falsehood with the eagle eye of truth, who can right this hideous wrong, who can smooth out the crooked paths of falsehood, making all plain. Let the false traducer beware, I say, he is veritably between the Lion and the Eagle. His Lordship in this case is the Eagle (metaphorically, of course)," hastily added Counsel, upon noticing the extraordinary likeness of his Lordship to a bird roosting, "and the Lion and the Eagle shall each of them turn and between them rend the truth and nothing but the truth from the lying carcase of calumny.

"Having now shown with impartiality, at the same time characterised with reserve, that the condition ascribed to the Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor was ridiculous, I will proceed to deal with the other statement in this misjudged journalistic attack, that the Right Worshipful was reviving Paganism in London, and in consequence attracting a crowd. Far from the Right Worshipful either attracting attention or causing a scene or obstruction in Trafalgar Square, I shall prove indisputably that it was the Lion, and the Lion alone, that caused the scene; the Lion also, who by a strange metamorphosis occasioned a crowd to collect. We know from classical history that in Babylon and Assyria bulls talked, we have heard of the oracle of Delphi, and in Biblical history of animals who talked. I shall prove by witnesses that this Lion has not only walked but talked as well."

Sensation in Court.

Here his Lordship the Judge appeared to show the first sign of interest he had evinced in the case.

"My learned friend must be careful," cautioned the Judge. "If what he states is true, the Lion may have to go into the witness-box."

Titters in Court. The Learned Judge smiles, rather pleased with his own remark.

Mr. Dreadful, K.C., at this point arose hastily; in fact, the learned K.C. almost jumped.

"My Lord, I protest against such a line of argument, such a travesty being introduced to mar the seriousness of this case."

His Lordship waved the learned and excited gentleman aside.

"I am the Judge here," observed his Lordship, "and in that sense I even resemble Daniel with regard to his duties in a similar capacity, but I fear I do not possess his special knowledge with regard to Lions."

Titters again in Court, in which the Learned Judge joins.

"However, I am always anxious to learn."

Renewed titters.

Mr. Dreadful, K.C., seats himself hurriedly and grinds his teeth in vexation, but finds time to whisper rapidly to a junior, who leaves the Court hastily and mysteriously.

"Pray continue, Mr. Gammon."

"My Lord, I have little more to say."

"I am sorry for that," interposed the Judge; "you were beginning to interest me more than I should have believed possible."

Mr. Gentle Gammon bowed ever so slightly, as if the Learned Judge had crowned him with a compliment that he found too heavy for his head to support, and proceeded—

"But, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, if I say little else with regard to this case before you, which is permeated throughout by the mythical mystery of a classical age, it is only that the witnesses I shall produce to prove this strange thing may speak instead of myself. Three witnesses in all, and one in particular. The one in particular, since only truth can issue from the lips of infancy, I shall call first. My Lord, I shall put a child, a little boy, into the witness box that you may hear his simple story."

Judge. "Dear me, I hope he won't be frightened of the Lion." (Titters in Court.)

Mr. Gammon, K.C. "On the contrary, my Lord, you will find he regards it as an old friend; and, my Lord, when you have listened to what he has to say, I think we may all realise 'that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in—er—philosophy.'"

His Lordship (pleasantly). "I think I have heard that before."

Mr. Gammon (courteously). "Your Lordship is much too well read to have missed it." (Thereupon Mr. Gammon, K.C., sat down.)

Judge (with a little snigger). "The only thing I am likely to miss is how our *celestial* knowledge is going to be especially advanced this afternoon. However, the curious nature of the case as presented possesses unlimited possibilities."

Ridgwell, having been called, walked with the utmost composure into Court and took his place in the witness-box. He looked very tiny, but very self-possessed, and smiled pleasantly at the Judge.

The Judge smiled pleasantly back at Ridgwell.

Mr. Gammon rose to the occasion and to his feet at one and the same time. He permitted the pleasing impression that Ridgwell had unconsciously created to have its full effect upon the Court, and upon everybody present with the exception of Mr. Learnéd Bore, whose countenance alone wore the disgusted and horrified expression that might have been expected had a great green toad been introduced into the witness-box. Mr. Learnéd Bore's countenance afforded a strange study of nausea struggling against outraged dignity.

"Now, Ridgwell, do you see any one in Court that you know?"

"Yes. Lal."

"And will you tell us who Lal is?" purred Mr. Gammon.

"Yes, Lal is the Pleasant-Faced Lion. There he is," said Ridgwell.

"How do you know his name is Lal?" inquired Counsel winningly.

"He told me so himself, it is short for Lionel. Lionel is his proper name."

"And when did this Lion Lal first speak to you?"

"Some weeks ago. The night I got lost in the fog."

This was altogether too much for Mr. Dreadful, K.C.

"My Lord," shouted that gentleman, as he bounded to his feet, "my Lord, I take this opportunity of protesting that the witness is not the only one who complains of being lost in the fog. I myself, my Lud, am completely lost owing to the same cause."

"In that case," said the Judge, testily, "always keep quite still, and you will in time find out where you are."

Titters in Court.

"My Lord," roared Counsel for the defendant, "I protest!"

The Judge interposing. "My learned friend, there is only one thing present in this Court that has a right to roar, and it is noticeable what a good example he sets you by refraining from doing so." (Amusement in Court.) "Kindly sit down. The little boy is giving his evidence very well indeed."

"Am I to take this witness's evidence down, my Lord?" inquired the Judge's Clerk in a whisper.

"Certainly, certainly," replied the Judge. "If a Hans Christian Andersen comes into Court, or sends a deputy, the evidence must be taken down, the same as anybody else's."

"And now, Ridgwell," said Mr. Gentle Gammon, in his gentlest tones, "will you please tell us in your own way all that befell you when you became acquainted with the Pleasant-Faced Lion."

For a considerable time the Learned Judge folded his claw-like thumbs and listened, and the Court sat amazed and stupefied whilst Ridgwell told of all the adventures that had befallen him after his acquaintance with Lal.

First came the tournament, then his first ride home to Balham on the Lion's back.

"Rather a long way, little man, eh?" suggested the Judge, affably. "He could never have been away so far from Trafalgar Square before. How did he find his way?"

"Oh, he followed the tram-lines," said Ridgwell.

Titters in Court.

"Good indeed, a most admirable witness this," observed his Lordship.

Then followed a simple but glowing description of the Pleasant-Faced Lion's wonderful evening party.

"Dear me," again observed his Lordship, "you had Royalty present, too!"

"Yes," said Ridgwell. "King Richard, King Charles, Queen Boadicea; and Oliver Cromwell came in and shouted 'Ho!' at King Richard and 'Ha, ha!' at King Charles. Then the Griffin ordered Oliver Cromwell out, and Christine thanked him."

"Very extraordinary and interesting," observed his Lordship; "and who is Christine?"

"She is my little sister."

"I have her deposition here, my Lord," broke in Counsel for plaintiff, "bearing out her brother's statements."

When Ridgwell came to a description of the Griffin, his sayings, doings, his woes and his character generally, the entire Court rocked with amusement which nobody made any effort to subdue.

"And now," said Counsel, who had watched everything up to this point with the cunning eye of a fox, "and now, little man, will you kindly sing as well as you can the song you say the Griffin sang at the party before the Lion?"

At this point Mr. Learnéd Bore, with his hands covering his ears, sank his head upon the solicitor's table at which he sat. If there was one thing Mr. Learnéd Bore hated more than children, it was music, in any shape or form, and when they both came together Mr. Learnéd Bore shared all the unpleasant feelings from which Mephistopheles was supposed to have suffered whenever he heard church bells. In a beautifully clear childish voice Ridgwell sang the merry song in the merriest way imaginable.

"Of a merry, merry King I will relate,
Who owned much silver, gold and plate,"

commenced Ridgwell triumphantly, in a quite wonderful rendering of the Griffin's favourite ballad. The tune was haunting, the swing of the air irresistible. The entire Court became slowly infected with the seductive gaiety of the song. The Juniors began to move their feet, the solicitors began to wave their quill pens to it. The Usher of the Court nodded his head, and his Lordship the Judge was so carried away by the melody that he unconsciously beat time gently by wagging one finger, whilst he smiled around upon the Court; and so in a burst of pleasing song Ridgwell continued—

"Yet one thing the merry, merry King forgot,
That it would be his Griffin's lot
To be very, very cold or very, very hot—"

"High up in Fleet Street," sang the entire Court.

"So slowly the faithful creature got
Chilblains in Fleet Street."

"Chilblains in Fleet Street," yelled all the Juniors in chorus. On went Ridgwell without a breath—

"The Griffin grew prettier day by day,
Directing the traffic along each way,
With always a pleasant word to say,"

"High up in Fleet Street," burst from the Court, who knew the phrase quite as well as the refrain by this time, and could not have sung it better if they had practised it.

"One trouble alone caused him dismay,"

"Chilblains in Fleet Street," came the chorus, which drowned Ridgwell's last notes entirely.

Frantic applause in Court, which the Judge instantly suppressed.

"If," said his Lordship, forgetful of the fact that he himself had helped in the scene by beating time, "if I have any more of this disgraceful disturbance in Court I shall give orders for it to be instantly cleared."

"Thank you, that will do. You can step down now, Ridgwell," said Mr. Gentle Gammon.

"And very well sung," observed his Lordship, as Ridgwell departed.

The next witnesses were called, Cissie Laurie and John Bowling.

"Are you sure you have those names correctly?" asked the Judge.

"Yes, my Lord; why?"

The Judge (facetiously). "It has been an afternoon of ballads; we have just heard one very well sung, and it seems to me that the collection would not be complete without *Annie* Laurie and *Tom* Bowling." (Much laughter in Court, in which the Learned Judge joins in a high-pitched alto.)

John Bowling admitted that he behaved most oddly, but he did so because the Lion seemed to be behaving strangely. Said he thought the Lion's eyes had gone green; believing that they were real emeralds, he had tried to cut them out with his knife.

Judge. "What! tried to gouge out the Pleasant-Faced Lion's eyes?" (Laughter in Court.)

The Sailor admitted it with contrition.

The Judge. "Such a gentle creature, too! Lal, the Children's friend." (Much laughter in Court.)

His Lordship. "Had *you* been to the party?" (Renewed laughter.)

Sailor. "No, my Lord, not his, another." (More laughter.)

Counsel here asked witness to relate what exactly happened upon the evening in question.

Sailor. "Well, yer see, governor, I can't say, 'cos I can't remember much about it; yer see, I was tuppence on the can, so to speak."

Judge (interrupting). "I don't understand that expression; is it a term used in the Navy? What does he mean by 'Tuppence on the can'?"

Sailor. "Well, in other words, I was blind, your Worship, I mean your Lordship." (Titters in Court.)

Counsel hastened to explain that Mr. Bowling wished to convey the unfortunate fact that he was intoxicated.

Sailor. "You've caught it, governor!"

Counsel was here heard to murmur words to the effect that he was thankful to say he had not caught it.

Witness (continuing unabashed). "Yer see, the reason as I was like I was, I 'ad snatched five dog's-noses right off."

Judge (plaintively to Counsel). "What does he mean by saying he snatched five dog's-noses? Why, was he possessed with a mania for mutilating animals?"

Counsel (explaining). "No, my Lord, the dog's-noses the witness refers to is a form of alcoholic stimulant—ahem!—gin, I believe, with some other ingredient, such as ale, mixed with it."

His Lordship. "Oh, very well."

Counsel. "Did the witness consider the Lord Mayor of London was sober?"

Sailor. "Do you mean that there old cove in the red gown?"

Judge (excitedly, and in needless alarm). "Of whom is he speaking?"

Counsel (hastening to explain). "The Lord Mayor, my Lord. I asked the witness did he consider the Lord Mayor sober upon the night they met."

Witness. "Yes, he was sober enough, but I think he was balmy, and I shall always think he was balmy."

Counsel. "Thank you, that is sufficient; you can stand down."

Cissie Laurie, upon being called, went skittishly into the witness box, curtseyed to the Court, and blew a kiss to the Judge.

His Lordship glared at the lady in shocked amazement.

Upon being questioned, Mrs. Laurie confided that most of her early life had been passed playing in Pantomimes, therefore she had always been fond of dancing. At the present time she kept a lodging-house for theatricals, and the only chance she had of indulging in her old and favourite pastime seemed to be to dance attendance upon these lodgers.

"Never mind what you do indoors," suggested Counsel. "I want to know what you do out of doors, what you did out of doors on the particular night in question when you met the Lord Mayor of London."

"Well, I felt young and girlish," confessed Cissie. "The first floor back and the second floor front had both gone out, and the house seemed dull with no lights and nobody in it."

"Never mind about the house or the lighting of it," interrupted Counsel. "You went out for a walk in the streets of London."

"When I got to Trafalgar Square," continued Cissie, "I felt skittish, thoughtless and jolly, and I could 'ave declared he laughed at me and then winked."

Judge (interrupting). "The witness tells her story very badly. Who laughed and winked at her? The

Lord Mayor?"

Counsel (hastily). "No, no, my Lord, not the Lord Mayor; the Lion."

Judge. "Oh, well, why doesn't she say so?"

Then proceeded Cissie, heedless of all interruptions—

"I sees the wreath round his neck, and I at once thought of the Russian dancers——"

Judge. "Tut, tut, tut! what has the fact of the Lord Mayor of London having a wreath round his neck to do with the Russian ballet?"

Counsel (in despair). "Not the Lord Mayor, my Lord; the Lion."

Judge (testily). "Then will the witness please say the word Lion whenever she wishes to refer to the Lion?"

Cissy (imperturbably). "I don't want to refer to it no more, 'cos I collared the wreath, and 'olding it over my 'ead I danced round the Square, just like the posters of them Russian dancers."

His Lordship (irritably). "Which particular poster was she desirous of realising?"

Counsel. "My Lord, I think it must be the one of a slim and classic youth dancing the Bacchanal with a wreath uplifted over his head."

His Lordship (looking at Cissie's ample form completely filling the witness-box, murmurs), "No, I cannot see the picture at all."

Counsel. "Nor I, my Lord, believe me."

Then volunteered Cissie, "He gave me two sovereigns."

Judge. "What, the Lion? does he give money as well as parties?"

Counsel (desperately). "Not the Lion this time, my Lord, but the Lord Mayor. Did you consider that the Lord Mayor was sober when he gave you this money?"

Cissie. "Lor bless yer, yes, as sober as his Honour there the blessed Judge himself."

Judge (with complexion rapidly changing from pink to crimson). "Do not refer to me again in such a way. It is most improper."

Cissie (obligingly). "Very well, my dear."

Judge (very annoyed). "Do not address me as my dear, do not address me at all, direct your remarks to Counsel, please."

Cissie (tossing her head). "Wot o'! now we shan't be long."

Counsel (soothingly). "No, Mrs. Laurie, as you observe, we shall not be long now. Will you kindly tell me where you met the Lord Mayor, previous to your meeting with him in Trafalgar Square?"

Cissie. "Yes, I first met him in a Pantomime."

Counsel. "In a Pantomime; very good."

Cissie. "Yus, I was playing Principal Boy, dressed in a green velvet jacket, green ostrich plumes in my 'air, and a pink pair of silk tights. Oh, you should just 'ave seen the pink silk tights, bran new ones."

Counsel (hastily). "Thank you, that is sufficient; a detailed description of the costume you wore is immaterial to the case."

Cissie. "Oh, is it? then I don't see the object of my being dragged 'ere if I ain't to describe my costume."

Counsel. "That will do, thank you, Mrs. Laurie; stand down."

Cissie. "Dragging me all the way 'ere, when the lodgers ain't got their dinners yet; fish to fry for the first floor, and the second back wanting macaroni with their stew, because they're I'talians."

Counsel. "That's enough, Mrs. Laurie."

Cissie (still talking as she prepares to depart). "Oh, is it enough, Mister Grey-Wig? Well, I call it a darned sight too much." (Cissie here being persuaded out by an usher of the Court). "So the next time you wants me to leave my work in the middle of the day you can fish for me, same as the lodgers will 'ave to fish for their darned dinner this blessed——" (door of the Court closes upon Cissie, rendering further remarks inaudible).

Judge. "A most garrulous woman."

Here Mr. Dreadful, K.C., rose with an evil smile of triumph, that is to say, it was a cross between a legal smile and a snarl.

Mr. Dreadful, K.C.'s utterances rather suggested the muffled discharging of pom-poms. Whenever he opened his mouth it was succeeded by an explosion of words, then a whistle by way of taking breath, another explosion succeeded by more whistles. Mr. Dreadful announced that before placing his client in the witness-box, he would state that all his client, the defendant's, written words were true in substance and in fact.

"The Lord Mayor of London had wandered out into the night, so had his client, Mr. Learnéd Bore. This gentleman, a playwright, journalist and writer, had wandered forth in order, no doubt, to get inspiration. The source of any such inspiration as he might have derived from the calm night had been utterly destroyed by the ridiculous antics of the Lord Mayor of London; inspiration had vanished, giving place instantly to a righteous feeling of strong condemnation that so beautiful a thing should have been so ruthlessly crushed. Fancies had fled, driven from their abiding-place by stern facts. Those facts had been embodied in a glowing article, destined to be distributed through the medium of the daily paper which his client adorned by contributions from his pen."

"If the Lord Mayor of London objected to the ridicule which his client's able article had heaped upon him—it was entirely the fault of the Lord Mayor. Any sober person, such as his client, must have instinctively supposed the Lord Mayor to be inebriated, when he was actually discovered arrayed in his state robes, coaxing the statue of a Lion to speak to him. Any Christian person, after observing this high Civic official place a wreath about this effigy, would unquestionably have believed him to be a Pagan, and a very ignorant one at that. Finding it hopeless to either excuse or explain such conduct, the plaintiff in this action, which ought never to have been brought, that is if the plaintiff had been wise, had actually, with an impudent audacity unparalleled in any Court of Law, urged that this lifeless Lion not only talked, but made signs. I shall not cross-examine one single witness who has appeared up to the present in this case, they have sufficiently condemned themselves already."

"The last lady, with a wealth of unnecessary words and adjectives, had informed the Court that she was once in a Pantomime, and it is my firm impression that is exactly where all the other witnesses in this case ought to be, especially the child who had unblushingly told them a long fairy story, and had attempted to sing them a song. A Pantomime was the proper place for them all, a fitting setting, and especially suitable for the Lord Mayor himself, robes and all. There, amidst the medley of such an entertainment, the Lord Mayor could coax Lions to do tricks, the sailor could indulge in his hornpipes and quaff dog's-noses. The child could act fairy stories, and sing all by himself, whilst the vociferating lady, who owned to a weakness for dancing indecorous solos, would be able to delight her heart by performing the Russian Carnival——"

Judge (prompting). "Bacchanal."

"They would all be most suitable in a Pantomime, but not in a Court of Law."

"The one amazing thing which had horrified him inexpressibly during the case was the fact that his learned brother Counsel, Mr. Gentle Gammon, had so far forgotten his professional dignity as to declare that this Lion actually moved and spoke at times. He feared, and also he lamented, that his learned brother must be approaching his dotage. Yet in order to satisfy each and every one in Court, he, Mr. Dreadful, had sent an urgent and special messenger for a first-class veterinary surgeon, having the letters M.R.C.V.S. after his name, and also for one of the keepers belonging to the lions' house in the Zoological Gardens. Their evidence would now be taken."

Upon the appearance of the M.R.C.V.S. in the witness-box the Learned Judge saw fit to interfere.

Judge. "Have you ever attended a lion professionally?"

M.R.C.V.S. "Never, your Lordship."

Judge (sagaciously). "Then what do you know about them?"

M.R.C.V.S. "I have attended other animals, your Lordship."

Judge. "Very likely, very likely, but a live ass is a different thing to a dead lion." (Laughter in Court.)

Counsel (for the Defendant). "*Better* than a dead lion, your Lordship." (More laughter.)

Judge. "Not in this case." (Loud laughter.) "The learned Counsel for the Defence need not waste the time of the Court in hearing the opinion of either Veterinary Surgeons or experts from the Zoo. What the Learned Counsel ought to do is to produce Pygmalion." (Titters in Court.)

Mr. Dreadful, K.C., rising to protest. "My Lud, Pygmalion is a mythical personage, and your Ludship knows he is of a necessity shrouded in silence."

His Lordship. "So is the Lion." (Laughter in Court.)

Mr. Dreadful (still exploding and still protesting). "My Lud, I do venture to suggest that this Lion should somehow be thoroughly examined."

His Lordship. "Well, it is in Court, better try for yourself. I only hope your efforts will be as successful as Little Ridgwell's and his sister Christine, to say nothing of the Lord Mayor of London."

Mr. Dreadful. "My Lud, I cannot treat with these people, it is like dealing with the worshippers of Baal."

His Lordship. "Well, I really cannot sanction digging a trench and lighting fires all round it here in my court, to make it speak." (Loud laughter.)

After the laughter had somewhat subsided a slight stir was occasioned in Court by the appearance in the witness-box of Mr. Learnéd Bore.

In reply to many questions from Mr. Dreadful, K.C., Mr. Learnéd Bore stated all the incidents in Trafalgar Square which he had witnessed, and which had given rise to the present action.

Cross-examined by Mr. Gentle Gammon—

"You are a famous playwright, Mr. Learnéd Bore," commenced Counsel.

"I am a playwright."

"Do you write to instruct or to amuse?"

"It is possible to combine both."

"Can you give me an example?"

"Yes, this afternoon's experience in Court."

"Wonderful as that may have been, Mr. Bore, I suggest you have not written it."

His Lordship (facetiously). "Give him a chance, he may." (Laughter in Court.)

"Of course," suggested Counsel, "you always enjoy reading your own articles in the papers."

"Oh dear no. I am only concerned with writing them."

"But I suggest you read them before you send them in."

"Never; the Editor saves me the trouble."

"Your articles have a ready acceptance, I take it."

"Always."

"The Editor is so desirous of obtaining your work, I suppose he is willing to pay a big price for it even before it is written."

"Yes, and before it is read."

"Indeed, so there must be a time when nobody knows what your articles are about, including yourself, as you never read them." Counsel continuing. "I presume you never contribute any articles during the time of the year known as the Silly Season?"

"On the contrary, my first effort in that direction has resulted in the bringing of the present action."

"You considered the Silly Season had started then, upon the night you met the Lord Mayor?"

"The Silly Season started then, has continued since, and appears to be at its height here this afternoon."

(Sweetly.) "Then you can congratulate yourself upon being thoroughly in the fashion. Now tell me, Mr. Bore, in your opinion, should we take the statues of London seriously?"

"No, in my opinion we should take them all down."

"All? Oh, surely not. Now, as an instance, let us go down the Strand."

His Lordship (interrupting). "No, no, no, I believe the correct quotation is, 'Let's all go down the Strand.'" (Loud laughter.)

Counsel. "I have never heard the quotation, my lord."

His Lordship (pleasantly). "What! I should have thought that everybody had heard that, the difficulty is not to hear it. I have even heard it set to music." (Loud laughter.)

"Now, Mr. Bore," continued Counsel, when order had once more been restored. "Has it never struck you that some of the statues of London might, for example, sometimes come to life?"

"Never. I cannot imagine anything less like life, than any of the statues of London."

"Surely the one in Court to-day is a good specimen?"

"If it is a specimen it ought to be in its proper place—in a case."

Counsel (gently). "It is in a case."

"And I object to it being in this case."

"Sculpture is evidently not your strong point."

"Neither are ridiculous fairy tales!"

"You wish us to believe that you, a writer, are only capable of dealing with facts."

"I have not encountered any facts in this case at all yet, and I utterly fail to understand what anybody here can mean by facts after this afternoon's exhibition."

Judge (annoyed). "Tut, tut! Facts are facts: this is a Court of Justice: I am the Judge; would you, for instance, regard me, *me* as a fact?"

Mr. Learnéd Bore. "No, as a figure-head."

His Lordship shrieks in his highest falsetto—

"Remove this witness at once, he is flippant. Order him to stand down, or I shall commit him for contempt."

Sensation in Court. Mr. Learnéd Bore leaves the witness-box, hurriedly, and looking slightly scared.

Mr. Dreadful, K.C., wishing to cover up the *faux pas* as quickly as possible, rises and announces in explosive tones—

"Call the Writer."

The Writer entered the witness-box; inclined his head slightly to the Judge, smiled in the direction of the Lord Mayor, and was immediately bombarded explosively by Mr. Dreadful, K.C., whose pom-pom-like shells whistling overhead seemed totally unable to disturb the Writer's serene calm.

"Now, sir, are you not the author of the song, the ballad, the bosh, whatever you like to call it, that we have all been compelled to listen to in Court this afternoon?"

"Yes and No."

"Don't prevaricate, sir; which is it, yes or no?"

"Both."

"I warn you, sir, I warn you; what do you mean by both?"

"What I say."

"Then kindly say what you mean, sir; you must mean one or the other if you mean anything; you cannot mean both."

"I rearranged the song you refer to only from hearsay."

"Oh, indeed, sir, pray who is the original author?"

"The Griffin."

"Kindly stop talking nonsense, sir; it is bad enough to have to suffer it from an over-imaginative child, from a grown-up person it is intolerable. Do you suppose we are going to have the Griffin brought into Court in addition to the Lion?"

"I hope so."

"Indeed, indeed, sir, why do you hope so?"

"Well, judging from the Griffin's characteristics we have heard so well described this afternoon, he must be feeling green with envy that he has not received a summons here."

"You are pleased to joke, sir, and you are attempting to be elusive, but you will not slip through the fine meshes of evidence woven by the law in that way. Kindly examine that paper!"

Small piece of dirty paper passed to witness—

Witness smiles.

"Is that your handwriting, sir?"

"Certainly."

"And the composition of the words are yours?"

"No, only touched up from the Griffin's original."

Mr. Dreadful, bellowing, stamping, and banging his hand upon table all at one and the same time—

"The wretched Griffin is left entirely out of this case, sir."

"It is a thousand pities; he would have enjoyed it so."

"My Lord, I will venture to read this fragment mercifully dropped in Court by the child confederate of this slippery witness: it is headed *Chorus*, my lord; it doubtless forms a last part to the ridiculous song we all listened to in pained surprise. I contend, my Lord, that this fragment which has come into my possession is seditious; seditious, my Lord."

"Well, well, let us hear it," his Lordship adding hastily: "No, no, don't sing it, read it."

"My Lord, your injunction to me is unnecessary; indeed, my Lord, I lack all training enabling me to sing, I am thankful to say, but what is more to the point, my Lord, I almost lack the necessary self-control to read these seditious words unmoved by indignation. However, my Lord, I will make an effort." Counsel reads: "'Oh, my poor tender feet.'" (Titters in Court.)

His Lordship. "Well, well, that is harmless enough, the Griffin complained of that, you remember."

Counsel. "My Lord, I know nothing of the Griffin, and care less whether he complained or what he complained of, but, my Lord, it is I who complain, and rightly so, when the majesty of the law of England is mocked at. Listen, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, to the following lines, and their harmful wickedness—

"Of what use are England's laws
Unless they protect my claws,
And keep me warm in the street?
What snuffy old Judge in Court,
Ever gives my poor feet a thought;
Ever thinks of the snows and frosts,
Or adds up my bill of costs?"

(Titters in Court from the juniors.)

"There, my Lord," thundered Counsel, "can any one hear this iniquitous document unmoved, these wantonly wicked lines mocking alike at Law and Order, even at your Lordship's own almost sacred calling."

His Lordship. "A highly offensive and seditious document; impound it, Mr. Dreadful, and continue your examination of witnesses, please; time goes on."

"Now, sir," exploded Mr. Dreadful, "the Court, having with shame listened to your ribald effusion, I will ask you what you had to drink upon the night you and the Lord Mayor were found wandering under extraordinary circumstances in Trafalgar Square?"

"To drink—I personally? Nothing."

"What did you have in the house, sir, at the time?"

"Oh, the usual things."

"Don't equivocate, sir; how does the Court know what you may consider usual in your ill-regulated household. What did the Lord Mayor partake of during the period he was in your company, in your rooms, before going out to chase a lady who was under the impression she was a Russian dancer—round Trafalgar Square, and before proceeding to play bo-peep with one of the lions, placed in that Square to ornament it,—what, I ask, sir, did the Lord Mayor partake of by way of refreshment?"

"Oh, two tiny glasses of Crème-de-Menthe."

Counsel (triumphantly). "I knew it; at last, my Lord, we have the mystery explained. The mystery of the Lion's green eyes, the strangeness of the Lord Mayor's attitude, the strangeness of his speech, his dress, all due, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, to Crème-de-Menthe! My Lord, that one phrase explains this whole mystery, and with it I finish my statement of this case, my Lord, finish it with those three, deadly, green, significant words—Crème-de-Menthe."

Whereupon, to everybody's relief, the pompom explosions of Mr. Dreadful ceased. The last shell had been fired, followed by the usual whistles, and he sat down.

The silky tones of Mr. Gentle Gammon came as a positive relief as he re-examined and asked gently—

"Have you got the particular bottle of Crème-de-Menthe in Court?"

The Writer said he had brought it.

The bottle was fetched promptly.

"My Lord," observed Mr. Gentle Gammon, "I do not think the amount taken could possibly have had any effect upon anybody. Your Lordship observes that the bottle is nearly full, and the bottle produced is the identical vessel used upon the evening in question. Was any other sort of refreshment partaken of that evening in your chambers?"

"None whatever."

"One more question before you go. Of course this ballad, rearranged, as you say, from the original by you, was written without any thought of giving offence?"

"It was never intended to be published at all."

"Never intended to be read in Court, of course?"

"*Never*, in the way it was read."

"Thank you, that is enough," whereupon the Writer vanished gracefully from the witness-box.

After this period in the proceedings, if the Learned Judge slumbered only fitfully during Mr. Dreadful's final peroration, it might have been owing to the spasmodic explosions of that Counsel's voice; but there could be no doubt that the Learned Judge slept peacefully during the earlier portions of Mr. Gentle Gammon's final effort upon behalf of his client.

The Learned Judge had, however, a curious habit of hearing particular things in his sleep, which, like the highly intelligent house-dog, might have been either the result of long training or a naturally keen possession of the intuitive faculty. His Lordship found frequent occasion, therefore, to arouse himself in order to interpolate remarks during the latter half of Mr. Gentle Gammon's closing speech.

"Who are these sceptics?" demanded Mr. Gammon, "these disbelievers?" After all they had heard that afternoon, might they not verily be approaching that blissful period when the Lion should lie down with the Lamb?...

His Lordship (opening one eye). "But it seems, according to evidence, that the Lion didn't always lie down; it stood up and gave a party."

Counsel proceeds: he had not quite finished the beautiful and well-known simile; here Counsel paused before continuing in a voice mellowed by winning tenderness—

"And the little child shall lead them."

Judge (again interrupting). "No, no, the Lion, according to evidence, distinctly led the children, even took them to Balham, we gather, in the direction of the tram-lines."

Counsel. "Your Lordship is pleased to interrupt my remarks."

Judge. "No, no, not pleased at all; quite the contrary."

Counsel. "I am sorry to have encountered your Lordship's displeasure."

His Lordship (irritably). "You have not encountered anything yet, save an inability to deal with the evidence, as evidence."

Counsel. "But, my Lord———"

His Lordship. "Hush, do not contradict me. Please continue; I shall not interrupt again."

Counsel. "I thank your Lordship for that assurance."

His Lordship. "Please do not thank me, and do not provoke me."

Counsel (proceeds, slightly ruffled). He would take another case of Biblical history; it was without question an ass who had upon a certain occasion been the one to see when a Lion had stood in his path. Here the case was unhappily reversed; it was only the asses who couldn't see the Lion, as he ought to be seen in this case.

His Lordship. "No, I cannot see that."

Counsel. "Your Lordship only makes my remarks more pointed than I actually intended."

His Lordship. "Please do not set cheap traps or you may one day get caught in them yourself."

Counsel (gallantly). "In that case, I can only hope that your Lordship may be there to extricate me by the nimbleness of your wit."

His Lordship (beaming round upon the Court, and especially upon Counsel). "Very pleasant, very clever; your speech interests me very much; pray continue!"

Learned Counsel (continuing). "Shakespeare, our best guide, philosopher, poet, thinker, and prophet, had fitly and most appropriately even foretold this very matter with regard to the Lion; maybe had prophesied it, when he told us there were sermons in stone and good in everything."

Judge (awakening, after dozing). "Good gracious! I always understood it was bronze."

Counsel. "Ahem! Yes, my Lord, that is to say stone pedestal, bronze beast."

His Lordship. "Very well, but when you quote for a purpose always quote with exact correctness."

Counsel (proceeds). "Did not the creature his Lordship had referred to as the great Pyg—Pyg—Pyg ——-"

His Lordship (prompting). "No, no, not a pig, a Lion."

Counsel (bows, and with a supreme effort of memory recollects the word Pygmalion). "Had not the great Pygmalion so created Galatea that she verily became endowed with life, and may we not suppose that the genius of Sir Edwin Landseer, or whoever carved this wondrous lifelike Lion, might not also have endowed it with some such strange new form of existence? Was it reasonable to suppose that what had happened to Beauty might not also happen to the Beast? Take the simple exquisite statement of this child, this little boy Ridgwell, confirmed by his sister."

Judge (prompting). "No, no, you can only be actually confirmed by a Bishop."

Counsel. "I spoke of another confirmation, my Lord."

His Lordship. "Well, the issue, the issue, what does it show?"

Counsel. "My Lord, I will explain at some length carefully."

His Lordship immediately relapses into another short but placid slumber.

Counsel. "This child Ridgwell, with the imagination worthy of Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, states simply, and you have heard for yourselves how beautifully, that the Lion walked and talked with him; and as I have used the touching illustration of the Pilgrim's Progress, with which you are all familiar, I say this child is not alone in his belief that the Lion came to life. There are others to testify, others to write of it, among them a well-known Writer and Poet. This Lion has not been left without a Bunyan."

His Lordship (waking almost with a start). "No, no! ridiculous; you are mixing matters. All the Lion had was a swelling in the foot caused by a thorn—I know the fable well."

Counsel. "My Lord, believe me, I spoke of a different matter."

His Lordship. "Well, you must not really wander from the point, it makes it almost impossible for me to follow you, and if I cannot follow you I don't know where you will be."

Counsel (glibly). "I trust it is I who will always follow your Lordship, and be led, as it were, by your Lordship."

His Lordship (obviously highly pleased). "Very true, and very aptly expressed. Pray do not let me interrupt you."

Counsel (bowing). "Your Lordship's remarks are in themselves a Commentary, and worthy of all preservation."

His Lordship (almost playfully). "Exceedingly apt. But I must refuse to be prejudiced by your clever advocacy."

Counsel. "And now we come to the touching and beautiful story of the Lord Mayor of London, the Right Worshipful" (with a rising inflexion of admiration in his voice), "who, after many years, had been knighted like Dick Whittington."

His Lordship. "What has Dick Whittington and his Cat to do with the present Lord Mayor of London and the Lion?"

Counsel. "Nothing, my Lord, save that——"

His Lordship. "Then please omit it; we have had enough of the fairy tale element in this trial without the introduction of any fresh fairy stories or nursery rhymes whatever."

Counsel (continues blandly, as if unconscious of interruption). "The Right Worshipful knew, and had always known, that one Lion was different to the others. One only, the one present in Court, was intelligent, a companion; the other three were *deaf*."

The Learned Counsel hoped the Gentlemen of the Jury "would not resemble those other three Lions by being deaf, deaf to the cause of justice, deaf to the interests of his client the Right Worshipful, deaf to those promptings of illuminating intelligence which had been especially vouchsafed to them as Jurymen, deaf to their duties as citizens in a strange world where there were to be found things even stranger than themselves." Thereupon the Learned Counsel sat down.

The Jury were asked if they wished to put any questions before His Lordship summed up.

One juryman, rising, wished to know where Trafalgar Square was, as he had never seen it.

Consternation in Court.

His Lordship. "Good gracious, where do you live?"

Juryman was understood to say he had lived all his life upon the borders of Clapham Common. Questioned further with regard to this extraordinary admission, confessed he had never seen any of the Lions until he met the one in Court. Knew the Griffin well, as he had waited beside it during the four different days he had been obliged to come to town for the first time in his life. Had waited from an early hour each morning for several days until his name was called, when the different Jury lists were made up. Obliged to wait so many days on account of the names being taken alphabetically on the List, his beginning with Y, his name being Yobb.

After this brief interlude his Lordship appeared to rouse himself up and proceeded to sum up at one and the same time. His Lordship commenced by observing that the case before them that day was without exception the most extraordinary case that had ever come before him since he had presided as a judge. The Learned Judge considered that the child Ridgwell was exempt from—er—er—any deliberate desire to pervert facts. This boy claimed that he had become the recipient of some High Order of Imagination. He, the Learned Judge, had not the remotest idea what this order meant, and he firmly believed nobody else in Court had the faintest conception either concerning such a possession. However, children would be children, which was unfortunate, as he himself considered that children should be always, ahem! grown up, yes, or nearly always. That is to say, as often as was possible.

But the defendant, Mr. Learnéd Bore, had not even got the plea of childishness to excuse some of the very reprehensible, if not flippant, statements he had dared to make in the witness-box.

As a writer, the Learned Judge had always been led to believe that Mr. Learnéd Bore was quite intelligent; as a witness, the Learned Judge considered him deplorable. That a Lord Mayor of London, of London, perhaps the most beautiful and dignified city in the world, with a few architectural exceptions which the Learned Judge deplored, but—ahem!—allowed; that the Lord Mayor of this City with the glittering chains of that High Office still weighing down his neck, yet wearing his crimson robes, which the Learned Judge hoped blushed for him, as indeed his, the Learned Judge's own robes did, which he was at that moment wearing. That this Lord Mayor should utter the still more crimson falsehoods and fabrication of fairy folk, was well-nigh inconceivable.

The Learned Judge could only suppose such a state of Civic imbecility was due to the decadence of the times in which they had the misfortune to live. It was the first indication that the downfall of London, like that of Rome, and—er—other cities he could not at the moment recall—was at hand.

It showed, in the Learned Judge's opinion, that the Navy should at once be strengthened, the Board Schools increased, and the Asylums for all those who were mentally afflicted, and therefore so unlike themselves, should immediately be enlarged throughout the country, in order to cope with the extra call upon them that such a state of things as they had listened to that day might necessitate.

Furthermore, the Learned Judge remembered with gratitude the many petitions to the Royal Family, who, he was thankful to note, were never afflicted or influenced by any imagination whatsoever; therefore he begged that those petitions might be increased fourfold for—for—reasons which at that moment he found it impossible to explain.

He furthermore would remember with gratitude, and would increase if possible, the numbers of institutions for the blind, not to mention the deaf. During this action they had listened in very truth, and not unmoved, to people who had been blind. (Here a faint titter being heard in Court, the Learned Judge added reprovingly—)

He did not intend his last remark as a joke, having regard to the evidence one man had given. No, it was no matter upon which to joke. The blind were there before them, and he had used the expression the deaf, inasmuch that some of those before him had heard too much.

To hear too much was worse than not hearing enough. One of the Jury at this critical point, as if speaking upon impulse: "Hear! hear!"

His Lordship paused in passionate surprise; indignantly wondering whether or not the Gentleman of the Jury, whose face appeared to be covered with purposeless pimples, had really intended his last remark to be ambiguous.

Upon feeling himself reassured upon this point, the Learned Judge remarked: "Any more unseemly interruptions of this nature, and I shall clear the Court, not—ahem!—personally, but—er—vicariously, so to speak. Where was I?" (consulting notes). "Yes, at the House of Commons. The House of Commons, whose common sense as a body have helped to make the—ahem!—Irish and the English as one."

Where was the House of Commons now? He was thankful to say, where it had always been.

Would any one of the Members of that House believe that Oliver Cromwell, who had stood so long outside, had condescended to alight from his pedestal to shout vulgar abuse and brawling words at King Richard and King Charles, such as "Ha! ha!" and "Ho!"? He trusted not, he believed not; but if, indeed, such a thing could be possible, he trusted that Oliver Cromwell, if he could by special

Providence be now actually alive, would verily with laughter say, "Ha! ha!" and even "Ho! ho!" to the ridiculous statements they had heard that day. In face of the many indignities offered to them he was thankful to note, since it was admitted in evidence, that King Richard, and especially King Charles, had kept their heads. He, the Learned Judge, again expressed a hope that no one would interpret his last remark as being facetious. Nothing was at that moment further from his thoughts. To joke in a Court of Law, or even attempt to joke beneath the emblazoned sign of the Lion and Unicorn somewhere above his head, would be to mock that noble animal (he referred to the Lion, of course), whose other effigy in Court formed such a striking contrast to the undignified attitude of those who had preferred such fanciful charges against this nobly statured beast, whose presence there among them, as Counsel had observed, was only rendered possible by the separate removal of *five* pairs of folding doors.

"Little imagination was required to realise that the stony stare of this noble animal must, Medusa-like, have become even more stony from horror and abhorrence at the eccentric things it could not hear, uttered concerning himself, I mean itself, that day.

"Now, Gentlemen of the Jury, you know what I have been talking about?"

The face of each and every Juryman a complete blank save one, who murmurs as if in his sleep, "No! no!"

"I therefore charge you, consider only that which is right, punish those, if any, who should be punished, spare the simple, if any, who should be spared. Commend any, if there are any such, for their intelligence in reporting a matter which they, like myself, are utterly unable to understand. If none in this affair should be reproved, then I charge you hereafter keep silent.

"Learn a lesson from the statue of the Lion in Court, who has remained silent throughout, and whose wisdom in this respect I cannot too much commend, whilst heartily wishing its example could have been followed by every one in Court with the exception of myself.

"By the many witnesses in general, but by one in particular; I refer to Mr. Learnéd Bore. Gentlemen, you need no other words of mine to make you do your duty.

"Words will never make people do their duty. Therefore, in having spared you much, I can only feel that I have helped you little. Gentlemen of the Jury, the matter having got thoroughly into your heads, is now in your hands. I therefore leave it there."

Here the Learned Judge ceased speaking. The Learned Judge having refreshed himself after this amazing forensic effort with a draught from the glass of water beside him, which, during the proceedings, had become lukewarm, gathered his robes about him and hopped through the folding doors at the back of him, into his private room.

The Jury, looking like men suddenly out of work, repaired in a body to their room, and once again the overcrowded and overheated Court gave itself over to the buzz and hum of conversation, freely interspersed with endless speculations as to what sort of verdict could possibly be returned in such an amazing case.

The Right Worshipful warmly thanked his Counsel, Mr. Gentle Gammon, for the brilliant efforts that gentleman had made upon his behalf, whilst Mr. Dreadful, K.C., glared unspeakable things in the direction of the Plaintiff and Plaintiff's Counsel alternately, for the entire case had filled Mr. Dreadful, K.C., with feelings of revolt.

Juniors not engaged on the case made whispered and sporting bets among themselves as to who would get the verdict. The amber light illuminating the Court continued to gleam upon the Pleasant-Faced Lion, unquestionably the most reposeful thing inside the building, although the primary cause of all the disturbance.

"Of course," observed Ridgwell to the Writer, "we shall know now who has won the game."

The Writer agreed.

"Will the old gentleman in the red robe call out the forfeits then?"

"Rather," replied the Writer, "and I fancy, myself, the heaviest forfeit will be the one which includes bringing Lal into Court; it must have really cost a very considerable sum. Hullo, they are all coming back," broke off the Writer, "all the Jury, looking as if they have lost their way, which I believe, myself, they have, during the entire case. There, they are summoning his Lordship. Now for it."

Upon his Lordship resuming his seat, the foreman of the Jury delivered himself thus, upon behalf of himself and his other eleven brethren.

"The Jury had all tasted and partaken of the Crème-de-Menthe" (bottle produced and the contents seen to be very considerably diminished), "and they found that the Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of London could not have been suffering from any form of intoxication in the ordinary acceptance of the word, but that the Lord Mayor might have been temporarily intoxicated with a sense of his own greatness. That the noble Statue of the British Lion was regarded by the Lord Mayor merely as a symbol of the whole British Empire, and was emblematical of his own power under that Empire. Consequently no blame whatever could be attached to him.

"They further found that Mr. Learnéd Bore had forthwith unquestionably uttered a libel against the Lord Mayor which might have been a gross libel, had it not been merely a stupid assertion published in a newspaper, and not therefore to be taken seriously.

"They found that Mr. Learnéd Bore's evidence was flippant, and left much to be desired; they wished accordingly to severely censure that gentleman.

"Damages, therefore, in the case, although slight, would be given to his Worship the Lord Mayor, together with all costs of the action.

"With regard to the Writer and Poet, they, the Jury, wished to severely condemn all the works he had written, or *partly* written, since he had produced, or partly composed, one wholly seditious ballad, attempting to make fun of the Laws of England, whereupon they expressed an earnest hope that all his works might in future be banned."

His Lordship, after partaking of a final sip of the lukewarm water still beside him, then delivered his verdict.

"His Lordship entirely agreed that the Lord Mayor of London had been quite blameless throughout this case, the Lord Mayor's devotion to the British Lion as a symbol, was the most touching feature in the case; he would therefore have damages against Mr. Learnéd Bore, and Mr. Learnéd Bore would have to bear the entire costs of the Action.

"The damages in this Case would not be the unsatisfactory damages sometimes assessed at one farthing, nor would they be one shilling, or even half-a-crown. The damages he, the Learned Judge, awarded would be a sum sufficient to purchase a bottle of Crème-de-Menthe, and that of the very best (sensation in Court), to be given to his Worshipful the Lord Mayor in order to show that the fluid which had figured so conspicuously in this Case, although it might do some people harm, could only do good in the case of his Worshipful the Lord Mayor, since, to use Counsel's borrowed, but apt phrase, this liquid had only made it possible for the Lord Mayor to see sermons in bronze and stone, and good in everything; good even in the effigy of the Pleasant-Faced Lion, who had been brought into Court for the first time in its life, and who, could it have the power of hearing, must surely approve of the verdict now given."

The Learned Judge, having thus delivered himself, then rose, and once more hopped out of Court.

The sensation throughout the entire Court was profound.

* * * * *

Some considerable time after the Writer had hurried Ridgwell from the scene, and had provided a quite sumptuous tea, which both of them stood in need of, in a tea-shop in Fleet Street, they repaired upon the way home, and passed the statue of the Griffin.

"Look," whispered Ridgwell, as he pulled the sleeve of the Writer's coat to attract the Writer's attention. "Oh, look, the Griffin has been weeping bitterly."

It was, indeed, only too true. The Griffin's cup of sorrow and mortification was full. Four great indignant tears trembled upon his cheeks ready to fall. He had been compelled that day to stand and listen to people humming his, the Griffin's, own, pet song as they left the Court, and the Griffin had not been able to join in it.

The Pleasant-Faced Lion had gone into the Court and had left it in triumph, cheered by enthusiastic and interested crowds, whilst *he*, the Griffin, had remained unnoticed. The Griffin's feet were very, very cold, and his vain, foolish, excitement-loving heart had turned to stone.

Having contemplated this sad spectacle, the Writer and Ridgwell clambered upon the outside of a bus going westward. Half-way up the Strand the road was partly blocked by a concourse of cheering people. As their bus came alongside, Ridgwell and the Writer both stood up to look over the bus rail to see what was causing all the commotion. It was the Pleasant-Faced Lion being escorted back to

Trafalgar Square in state upon a lorry. The crowd cheered enthusiastically upon viewing the unusual sight.

As the Writer and Ridgwell gazed at their old friend, the Pleasant-Faced Lion slowly, solemnly, and deliberately winked his right eye, which was nearest to them.

* * * * *

The Father and Mother of Ridgwell and Christine, upon returning from a most enjoyable holiday upon the Continent, could not avoid seeing the large headlines of the evening papers pasted everywhere upon the station boards at Charing Cross.

The headlines were varied; some of them read, "Comic Opera Scene in Court." "Amusing Case before Mr. Justice Chatty." "Ridgwell Makes all London Laugh."

"Very uncommon name," observed the Father of Ridgwell, as he bought some papers. Later on, in the railway carriage upon the way home, the Father of Ridgwell first read his paper, and then promptly wiped his eyeglasses, to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed that worthy but astonished gentleman, "why, it's *our* Ridgwell!"

"What is our Ridgwell?" inquired the Mother of that hopeful.

"Our Ridgwell has been into Court, before a Judge," faltered his perplexed Father; "has sung a song, which seems to have been a great success. Positively gave evidence that one of the lions in Trafalgar Square was alive, and a great friend of his, and that the animal has occasionally given him a free ride home on his back to Balham; did you ever hear of such a thing?"

The Mother of Ridgwell hastily perused the papers recording these strange statements, whilst the Father of Ridgwell leaned back in the railway carriage, endeavouring to recover his breath, and collect his startled faculties both together.

The Mother of Ridgwell read the part describing her offspring's performance to the end, and then observed—

"Did you see, Father, that Ridgwell declares he possessed a high Order of Imagination, and then lost it?"

The Father of Ridgwell groaned.

"Lost it? Good gracious me, what nonsense, my dear; I should think myself he has just found it. I'll talk to that Writer, when I see him; he really oughtn't to be allowed about at large, any more than the Pleasant-Faced Lion. I consider the whole history of this animal most incredible."

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF THE MATTER

The family had just sat down to breakfast when the Writer arrived at Balham in a taxi-cab, bearing two large cardboard dress-boxes with him.

Having deposited these articles, he was greeted by the family.

"Oh! you bad man," commenced the Mother of Ridgwell and Christine; "sit down and have breakfast at once before you start any more of those plausible tales of yours."

"How did you get here so early?" inquired Father.

"Took a taxi, but it wasn't half such fun as riding down here on a Lion's back!"

Ridgwell leaned one side of his head down upon the table and laughed, and Christine glanced round shyly.

"A fine sort of commotion you and Ridgwell have caused," protested Father; "listen to this paragraph out of this morning's paper."

The Writer actually appeared to enjoy eating his breakfast unabashed, whilst Father proceeded to read.

"'The amusing action which took place yesterday in Court X—— has been the cause of unprecedented scenes in London. Thousands of children, both boys and girls, throng Trafalgar Square in order to see if the Pleasant-Faced Lion intends to speak, or give another children's party.

"'Hundreds of children congregate every minute round the Griffin's statue, waiting for it to sing, and have to be moved on good-naturedly but firmly by the police.'"

"A nice state of things," commented Father, during a pause in the reading.

"'There can be no doubt whatever that the extraordinary story of Lal has interested all London, and everybody is laughing at the idea.

"'Sir Simon Gold, the Lord Mayor of London, with the usual thoughtfulness that always distinguishes him, has resolved that the London children shall not be disappointed with regard to a party. Sir Simon has therefore taken the four biggest public halls, in the four quarters of London, north, south, east, and west, and all the children of London in each district will be entertained upon behalf of the Pleasant-Faced Lion by the Lord Mayor to a delightful evening party the same evening that the Lord Mayor gives his usual children's party at the Mansion House.'"

"I can add something to that piece of news," observed the Writer, as he continued eating his breakfast happily, and totally unconscious, seemingly, of his many misdoings. "In those two big cardboard boxes are two costumes; they are presents from Mum, one for Ridgwell, and the other for Christine. Oh, no!—not to be opened until after breakfast. Now, upon the night of the parties an event is going to take place that will please everybody. The Lord Mayor wants both Ridgwell and Christine to tell the story of Lal at each party after the dancing. It will be the event of the evening, and will be illustrated on the cinematograph."

"Oh!" echoed Ridgwell and Christine, "what fun!"

"All very fine for all of you," protested Father, "but I have to go to town to-day on business, and if I cannot get past Fleet Street or the Griffin on account of all the children round it, what am I to do, and how am I to get along with my work?"

Christine and Ridgwell sidled up, one upon either side of Father's chair.

"Don't you know you ought to be very pleased?" they said.

"Why?" inquired Father.

"Because the Griffin is happy at last, he is being noticed."

The Writer laughed: the Writer was really a most unscrupulous person as to the source from which he derived amusement.

"It is a very incredible tale," remarked Father, severely.

"*Most* incredible," confessed Mother, with a smile.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TALE OF LAL ***

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