

FICTION

Abbie Farwell Brown

Kisington Town

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION

By Abbie Farwell Brown

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Houghton Mifflin Company Boston and New York



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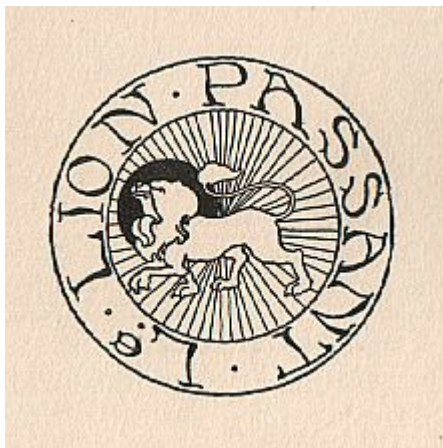
THERE WERE WIDE WINDOW-SEATS AND CUSHIONS

[Frontispiece: THERE WERE WIDE WINDOW-SEATS AND CUSHIONS]

Kisington Town by Abbie Farwell Brown

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

With Illustrations



[Illustration: *Le Lion Passant*]

To the Best of Readers
Whose Pleasant Voices taught me the Love of Books
Dear Father : Dear Mother

O for a book and a shadie nook
Eyther in-a-door or out,
With the greene leaves whisp'ring overhede,
Or the street-cryes all about,
Where I may Reade at my ease,
Both of the Newe and Olde
For a jollie goode Booke, whereon to looke,
Is better to me than Golde! -- Old Song

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XXI. RED REX AND KING VICTOR

XXII. THE BOOKS CONQUER

Note: The tales of "The Wonder-Garden" and "The King's Pie" are here reprinted by courteous permission of the publishers of *St. Nicholas*, in which magazine they originally appeared. The tales of "The Dragon of Hushby," "The Lion Passant," and "Little Bear," are reprinted by kind permission of the publishers of *The Churchman*. The Icelandic legend of "The Bear's Daughter" is sketched from notes of a talk by Vilhjalmir Stefansson, the explorer, who is lamented as lost on the late unfortunate voyage of the *Karluk* to Arctic waters.

ILLUSTRATIONS

THERE WERE WIDE WINDOW-SEATS AND CUSHIONS--Colored frontispiece.

HAROLD BEGAN TO READ FROM THE RED-AND-GOLD BOOK

SHE LOOKED BAD-TEMPERED

THE MAIDENS WOULD PAUSE TO LOOK AFTER THE GOLDEN COACH

HE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY TALKING WITH THE STRANGER

From drawings by Ruby Winckler

I: HAROLD

Once upon a time there was a peaceful Kingdom which you will hardly find upon the map. In one corner of the Kingdom by the sea was the pretty little Town of Kisington, where a great many strange things had happened in the past, the chronicles of which filled the town library.

On the High Street of Kisington lived a boy named Harold, who was chief of all the boys in town. He could run faster, jump higher, solve a problem more quickly, and throw a ball farther than any other lad of his age. He was tall and straight and broad-shouldered. His hair was brown and curly, and his eyes were sky-color,--sometimes blue, sometimes gray, sometimes almost black. All the boys liked Harold, especially Richard and Robert, his chums. And Harold liked all the boys and their doings; especially these same two, Robert and Richard.

Harold was the son of a poor widow; one of the poorest in the Kingdom. But though she was so poor, the mother of Harold was determined that her son should be a scholar, because he liked books. And she worked early and late to earn the money for his education.

When Harold was not in school or playing out of doors with the other boys, he always had a book in his hand. Often this happened in the town library, where Harold loved to go. But almost as often it happened at home. For though Harold liked to read to himself, he liked quite as well to read aloud to his mother, who ever since she was a tiny child had always been so busy taking care of other people that she had never found time to learn to read for herself. The greatest happiness of her life came in the evening when her work was done. Then she could sit in a cozy chair in their cottage and hear her boy read the exciting books which he got from the library of Kisington. And the other boys--especially Richard and Robert--liked also to hear Harold read; for his voice was agreeable and he read simply and naturally, without any gestures or tremulous tones, without pulling queer faces such as make listeners want to sink through the floor with embarrassment.

Every time Harold read a story aloud he liked it better than before; every time he read aloud he read better than he had done the last time, until there was nobody in Kisington, not even the Librarian himself, who was so good a reader as Harold. But the other boys were not jealous, Harold was so good-natured and always ready to read to them.

The Librarian was a very important personage indeed in Kisington. You see, this was a peaceful Kingdom, where books were more thought of than bullets, and libraries than battleships. The Librarian wore a splendid velvet gown with fur upon the hood, and a gold chain around his neck with a medal, and he was second in importance only to the Lord Mayor himself.

One summer evening the windows of the cottage where Harold and his mother lived were wide open, and Harold was reading aloud to her. For a wonder, they were quite by themselves. The Librarian, who was a lonely old fellow without chick or child of his own, happened to be passing down the High Street when he heard the sound of a voice reading. It read so well that he stopped to listen. Presently he tapped on the door and begged to be invited within the better to hear the reading. The widow was very proud and pleased, you may be sure. She bade the Librarian welcome, and Harold continued to read until curfew sounded for every one to go to bed. The Librarian patted him on the head and

asked if he might come again to hear such good reading. He came, in fact, the very next night.

After that Harold usually had an audience of at least two on the long evenings, even when the other boys were busy. The Librarian became his fast friend. He liked to come to the little cottage better than anywhere else in the world, except to his own library. But at the library he in turn was host, and Harold became his guest. And he showed Harold many wonderful things in that library of which no one but the Librarian knew the existence,—strange histories, forgotten chronicles, wonder-tales. Gradually Harold became almost as well acquainted with the books as was the Librarian himself; though, of course, he did not at first understand them all. Nothing happens all at once. The other fellows called Harold the "Book-Wizard."

The library was a beautiful building on the main square, close by the Lord Mayor's house and the belfry, where swung the great town bell. It was open freely to every one, from morning until night, and any one could always get any book he wanted, for there were many copies of each book. The caretakers always knew just where to find the book one wished. Or the reader might go in and choose for himself, which is a pleasanter thing when you have forgotten the name of your book, or do not know just which book you want most until you have looked about.

The shelves of the library were nice and low, so that, no matter how little you were, you could reach the books without standing on tiptoe or climbing a dangerous ladder. And everywhere in the library were well-lighted tables to put books on, and cozy chairs, and crickets for your feet, and cushions for your back. There were wide window-seats, too, where between chapters one could curl up and look down into a beautiful garden.

The air of the library was always sweet and clean. The books were always bright and fresh. There was no noise, nor dust, nor torn pages, nor cross looks to disturb one. The people who took care of the books were civil and obliging. It was indeed a very rare and unusual library. No wonder Harold and the Librarian and all the other citizens of Kisington loved it and were proud of it and used it very often.

II: THE SIEGE OF KISINGTON

Now, when Harold was about twelve years old, a terrible thing befell his city. Red Rex, ruler of the neighboring land across the border, decided to make war on this peaceful Kingdom, just for fun. He was a fierce and powerful King, and he had a fierce and powerful army, always ready, night and day. One morning, without any warning whatever, they marched right up to the walls of Kisington, which were never defended, and laid siege to the city. They began to batter the gates and mine the walls and fire into the city arrows and cannon-balls, or whatever were the fashionable missiles of that long-past day. The peaceful city was in danger of being utterly destroyed.

The people of Kisington were greatly distressed. Though they were brave, they did not want to fight. They had no time for fighting, there were so many more interesting things to attend to: agriculture and commerce, science and art and music, study and play and happiness, all of which come to an end when fighting begins. They did not want to fight; but neither did they want their beautiful city destroyed, with all its treasures.

There was no telephone, no telegraph in those days. Messages went by horses. It would be days before help could come from their own King Victor, who lived in the Capital City. In the mean time what could be done to save Kisington? The Lord Mayor set the great bell to tolling in the belfry, and this called together the Chief Citizens in the hall of the library to consider the emergency.

"Alas!" quoth the Lord Mayor, trying to make himself heard in the horrid din that was arising from the city gates, "our fair city is threatened, and will be taken in a few hours unless we can devise some plan of wisdom. Force we have not, as you all know. Force is the argument of barbarians. Already a missile has knocked down the statue of Progress from the portal of the library, and I fear that the whole building is doomed. For it is at our library that the enemy seem to be directing their malice."

A groan of anguish answered him. Then the Librarian spoke up. "Ah! the misguided King! He does not love books. If only he knew the treasures he is threatening to destroy! He cannot understand."

"No. He knows not what he does," said the Lord Mayor solemnly. "He is war-mad and cannot understand anything else. If he had been brought up to love peace and learning and progress better than war and blood, he would be a different man. He would be seeking to know our books in love, not to destroy them with hate. If he had but read our Chronicles, surely he would not wish to put an end to this our unique treasure."

The Librarian started at his words and jumped to his feet. "You give me an idea, my Lord Mayor!" he cried. "Can we not cause him to change his mind? Can we not interest him in our books, enthrall him in the Chronicles of Kisington, so

that he will cease to make war? Can we not at least gain time until our King Victor and his allies shall come to our aid?"

Boom! went the cannon, and *Crash!* the statue of a great poet fell from the portal of the library.

The Lord Mayor shuddered. "It is an idea," he agreed. "There is a faint hope. Something must be done, and that quickly. How shall we begin, Sir Librarian?"

The Librarian turned to the shelves behind him and took down at random a book bound in red-and-gold. "Here, let us begin with this," he said. "It may not be the best of all our Chronicles, but if the warlike King can be induced to read it through, it may serve to hold his wrath for a space."

"Who will go with the volume into the enemy's camp?" asked the Lord Mayor dubiously.

"We must send our best reader," said the Librarian. "Red Rex must hear the tale read aloud, the better to hold his unaccustomed attention."

"Surely, you are the best reader, Sir Librarian," urged the Lord Mayor generously. "How we all admire your style and diction!"

Crash! The rainbow window above their heads was shivered into a thousand pieces.

The Lord Mayor turned pale. "We must make haste!" he urged, pushing the Librarian gently by the elbow.

"Nay," said the Librarian coolly, releasing himself. "There is one who reads far better than I. It is a young boy, the son of a poor widow living on the High Street. Harold is his name, and he reads as sweetly as a nightingale sings. Let us send for him at the same time when our messenger goes to King Victor."

"Let it be done immediately!" commanded the Lord Mayor.

This happened on a Saturday, when the boys were not at school. But on account of the bombardment of the city, the Lord Mayor had already given orders that every child should remain in his own home that morning. So Harold was with his mother when the messenger from the Lord Mayor knocked on the door of the little cottage in the High Street, and Robert and Richard did not know anything about it.

"Come with me!" said the messenger to Harold. "You are needed for important service."

"Oh, where is he going?" cried the poor, trembling mother, holding back her boy by the shoulders.

"He is to come directly to the library," said the messenger. "The Librarian has a task for him."

"Ah! The Librarian!" The mother sighed with relief, and let her hands fall from the shoulders of Harold. "To that good man of peace I can trust my son, even amid this wicked bombardment."

When Harold came to the library with the messenger, they found the beautiful portal of the building quite destroyed, and the windows lying in pitiful shattered fragments. They entered under a rain of missiles, and discovered the Leading Citizens gathered in a pale group in the center of the hall, under a heavy oak table.

"My boy!" said the Librarian, with as much dignity as possible under the circumstances. "We have sent for you, believing that you only can save our beautiful library, our books, our city, our people, from immediate destruction. Will you risk your life for all these, Harold?"

Harold looked at him bravely. "I do not know what you mean, sir," he said, "but gladly would I risk my life to save the precious books alone. Tell me what I am to do, and I will do it as well as a boy can."

"Well spoken, my brave lad!" cried the Librarian. "You are to do this"; and he thrust into the hand of Harold a red-and-gold volume. "Even as the boy David of old conquered the Philistine with a child's toy, so you may perhaps conquer this Philistine with a story-book. Go to the savage King yonder, with a flag of truce; and if you can win his ear, beg to read him this, which is of an importance. If you read as well as I have heard you do ere now, I think he will pause in his work of destruction, at least until the story's end."

Harold took the book, wondering. "I will try my best, sir," he promised simply.

III. RED REX

A committee of the First Citizens led Harold to the city gate. He wished to say good-bye to his mother, and to Richard and Robert; but there was no time. Presently a watchman raised a white flag above the wall. Thereafter the noise of the besiegers ceased.

"A truce, ho!"

"What message from the besieged?"

"One comes to parley with your King."

"Let him come forth, under the flag of truce. He will be safe."

Bearing the white flag in one hand and the gorgeous book in the other, Harold stepped outside the gate. The foreign soldiers stared to see so young a messenger, and some of them would have laughed. But Harold held up his head proudly and showed them that he was not afraid, nor was he to be laughed at.

"I am the messenger. Pray bring me to the King," he said with dignity.

A guard of fierce-looking soldiers took him in charge and marched him across the trampled sward, between the ranks of the army, until they came to a little hillock. And there Harold found himself standing in front of a huge man with bristling red hair and beard, having a mighty arm bound with iron. His eyes were wild and bloodshot. He sat upon the hillock as if it were a throne, and held a wicked-looking sword across his great knees, frowning terribly.

"Well, who are you, and what do you want with me?" growled the Red King. "A queer envoy this! A mere boy!"

"The City Fathers have sent me to read you something, please Your Majesty," said Harold, trying to look brave, though his knees were quaking at the awful appearance of the War-Lord.

"Is it a war message?" asked Red Rex, eyeing the red-and-gold book suspiciously.

"You must hear and judge," answered Harold.

"Very well," grumbled the Red King. "But waste no time. Begin and have done as quickly as may be."

Harold began to read from the red-and-gold book; but he had not gone far when Red Rex interrupted him.

"Why, it is a tale!" he roared. "Thunder and lightning! Do they think this is a child's party? Go home with your story-book to your nursery and leave me to deal with your city in warrior fashion."

"I come from no nursery!" protested Harold, squaring his shoulders. "I am no molly-coddle. No boy can beat me at any game. I am instructed to read you this, and I must do so, unless you break the truce and do me harm."

"Who ever heard the like of this!" thundered Red Rex. "Here am I making real war, and this boy interrupts me to read a tale! What a waste of time! I read nothing, boy. War dispatches are all I have taste for. Does this concern war?"

"It has everything to do with this war," said Harold truthfully. "It is very important, and they say I read rather well."

"When did you learn to read rather well?" questioned the Red King sulkily. "I never learned to read well, myself, and I am thrice your age. I never have had time. At your years I was already a soldier. Fighting was the only sport I cared for. Reading is girls' business."

"A lot of good things are girls' business, and boys' business, too," said Harold loyally. "But please hear me read about the fight, Your Majesty."

"About a fight;--it is a long time since I heard a story about a fight, written in ink," said the Red King musingly. "But I have myself seen many fights, written in red blood."

"This is a story different from any you ever read," said Harold. "It is a story no one ever heard read before, outside Kisington. Will Your Majesty permit that I begin?"

Red Rex hummed and hawed, hesitated and frowned. But he was a curious King, as well as a savage one, and his

curiosity triumphed. "What ho!" he shouted to his guard at last. "Let there be a truce until I give word to resume the fighting. I have that which claims my attention. Boy, I will hear the story. Plant the flag of truce upon this hillock and sit down here at my feet. Now!" He unfastened his belt and sword, took off his heavy helmet and made himself comfortable, while his men lolled about in the grass near by. Harold seated himself at the feet of the Red King, as he was bidden; and opening the red-and-gold book began to read in his best manner the story of *The Dragon of Hushby*.

IV. THE DRAGON OF HUSHBY, PART I

Long, long ago, in the days when even stranger things befell than we see nowadays, travelers brought news to the little town of Kisington-by-the-Sea. They said that the terrible Dragon of Hushby had wakened again from his fifty years' nap; had crept out of his cave in the mountain, and was terrifying the country as he had done in the grandfathers' times. Already he had destroyed ten horses; had eaten one hundred head of cattle, six fair maidens, and twelve plump little children. Besides which he had killed three brave men who had dared to fight with him. But now no one ventured near the cave where the dreadful creature lived, and the land was filled with horror for which there seemed to be no hope of relief.



HAROLD BEGAN TO READ FROM THE RED-AND-GOLD BOOK

[Illustration: HAROLD BEGAN TO READ FROM THE RED-AND-GOLD BOOK]

Moreover, so the travelers said, the King proclaimed that whoever should put an end to the terror of Hushby might ask of his sovereign whatever reward he chose, even the hand of the King's daughter. Now when this news came to Kisington there was great excitement. For Hushby Town was not far distant from the market-place of Kisington. People gathered in groups talking in whispers of the Dragon, and looking fearfully out of the corners of their eyes as they

spoke. Who could tell when the creature might wander in their direction, as the Chronicles recorded that he had done once, long ago, when he had destroyed the daughter of him who was Lord Mayor at that time? Kisington had special reasons, you see, for longing to hear that a hero had conquered the Dragon.

Of all the people in Kisington who heard the news, the one most excited thereby was a lad named Arthur. He did not look like a hero, for he was short, and small, and ugly. For this reason no one had ever thought him especially brave. Most people expect heroes to be great, big men. Arthur was held to be of little account in Kisington. But though he was a little fellow, he had a great heart. All his life he had loved tales of bravery and adventure, and he longed to be a hero. Besides, he thought it would be a fine thing to marry the King's daughter, who, like all princesses, must be very beautiful.

Arthur lived by himself in a castle which had once belonged to his uncle. Now that uncle had been an Amateur Magician; that is, he was always doing things with flaring fires and queer bottles, messes of strange liquids and horrid smells,—hoping to learn how to turn old iron into gold, or to discover some other useful secret. No one ever heard, however, of his accomplishing anything; until one day, with a *Bang!* he blew himself up. And every one heard of that. His will gave all his Amateur-Magical stuff to Arthur—all his forges and bellows and bulbs and bottles, the syrups and nasty smells. But Arthur cared nothing at all about Amateur Magic, and scarcely ever went into the desolate tower in one wing of the castle, where his uncle's laboratory was gathering dust.

But after news came about the Dragon of Hushby, things were different. An idea had come into Arthur's head. "Oh, dear!" he said to himself. "If only I could find something which would make me big! Only a giant could kill the Dragon of Hushby, he is so huge and terrible. Perhaps my uncle may have discovered a secret which would turn me into a giant!"

Eagerly he hurried to the deserted room. Everything was draped in dusty cobwebs, and when he opened the door the rats went scuttling in all directions. All among the bottles and boxes and books and bundles he sought and sought for some discovery which should help him. But though he found many other curious things, he found not what he sought. Though he poked in every dark corner and read carefully the labels on every phial, and the recipes in every book, he found no Secret for Growing Big. He could have learned, had he wished, "How to Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear"; "How to Make a Horse Drink"; "How to Make an Empty Sack Stand Upright," and other very difficult things. But all these secrets were of no use to Arthur, and he thought that his uncle had wasted much valuable time in making these discoveries. Which, indeed, was true.

Arthur grew more and more discontented every day. But one morning, quite by accident, he hit his elbow against a hidden spring in a certain knot-hole of the wall in the dusty laboratory. Immediately a secret panel opened, and there behind it was a secret cupboard. In the cupboard was the secretest-looking package, wrapped in a velvet cloth. Arthur unrolled it eagerly and found a little leather case. When the case was opened, he saw inside a bit of glass set in gold, with a handle. It looked quite like a modern reading-glass—only reading-glasses were not invented until many, many years later. "What can this be?" said Arthur to himself. And taking up the glass he looked through it. Wonderful! Everything suddenly seemed to become small—just as it does nowadays when we look through the wrong end of an opera-glass. But Arthur had never seen an opera-glass, you know; this was so many hundreds of years ago.

Arthur looked around the room, and everything had suddenly become so tiny that it made him laugh. In the window a huge spider—as big as his hand—had been spinning her web. Now she was no larger than a dot. A rat scampered across the floor, and as Arthur looked it shrank to the size of a fly! A bird flew past the window, singing, and it grew smaller as it flew, while its voice became tinier and tinier till it sounded like the buzzing of an insect. Amazed, Arthur took down the glass from his eye. Instantly everything appeared again of its natural size—all except the spider and the rat and the bird. They remained tiny as they had seemed through the glass. Arthur had magicked them!

"Ho!" cried Arthur. "This is some of my uncle's Amateur Magic. He had, indeed, discovered how to make living things grow small. Alas! That helps me little. I am small enough now. But if only it worked the other way I might become a giant. What a pity! what a pity! Stay—perhaps if I reverse the glass something better may be done!"

He was about to turn the glass over and raise it to his eye again, when he spied a bit of parchment in the box. On it were scribbled some words, in faded ink.

"A Wondrous Device to Make the Living Small. Thrice More May It be Used Before Its Virtue Fades."

"Ah!" said Arthur, laying down the glass. "Then, as I feared, the glass can only make things smaller. But I have an idea! What if I should look with this glass upon the Dragon of Hushby? Would he not shrink as the spider and the rat and the bird have done? Yes; and then I should no longer have need to be a giant, for I could tame him, even I myself in

my proper form! It is a good thought. I may yet be the hero of Kisington. But I must be careful of the precious glass and not waste its powers. 'Thrice more may it be used,' so says the scroll. Once, then, for the Dragon, and two times more for accidents that may happen."

Without more ado Arthur made ready for his great adventure. For arms he took but two things--the magic glass in his wallet, and a butterfly-net over his shoulder. In truth, the little fellow looked more like a schoolboy bound for a holiday in the woods, than a hero in quest of honor.

Now, first, without saying aught of his intent to any in Kisington, he journeyed to the Capital City, to gain the King's permission for the trial.

With the handle of his butterfly-net he thumped upon the door of the King's palace and said: "Open! I wish to speak with the King!"

The warders looked at him and laughed; he was such a strange little figure. "What do you want of the King?" they asked.

"Tell him that I come to seek his favor before I go forth to conquer the Dragon of Hushby."

"Ho, ho!" roared the warders. But they went and told the King what Arthur said. "He is mad, Your Majesty," they added. "He is a little fellow, armed with a butterfly-net. Ho, ho!"

The King laughed, too. But he was curious to see this champion. So he had Arthur admitted. With his net over his shoulder, Arthur marched into the long hall, between the rows of tittering courtiers, and knelt before the King. "So you intend to slay the Dragon of Hushby?" said the King. "It needs a giant for that deed. What will you do, forsooth, you little fellow, with your butterfly-net?"

"Your Majesty," said Arthur, "do you not remember how David was a little fellow, when with a stone he slew the giant Goliath? Well, I am another little fellow; but I have a stone in my pocket with which I mean to tame a foe more terrible than David's was. And as for this net--wait, and you shall see!"

"Very well," said the King, laughing, "I will wait and see. But what reward shall you ask if you are successful?"

"Your Majesty," said Arthur politely, "may I ask to see your daughter? I have heard that the Dragon-Slayer may hope to win her hand."

At these words of Arthur's the King burst into a roar of laughter, and clapped his knee, as though it were a mighty joke. And all the courtiers held their sides and shook with mirth. But Arthur was angry, for he did not see that he had said anything funny.

"Ho! ho!" roared the King. "Heralds, bid my daughter Agnes to come hither. He! he! For there is one who wishes to see her. Ha! ha!"

While the room was still echoing with laughter, the heralds entered with the King's daughter, and Arthur saw why every one had laughed. The Princess was a giantess,--a head taller than any man present,--and though she was very beautiful, her face was hard and cold, and she looked bad-tempered. When she walked, the floor trembled, and when she spoke, the glasses shivered.

"Who wishes to see me?" she said in a deep voice, crossly.

"Heavens!" said Arthur to himself, "this is a Princess, indeed! It will be more of a task to tame her than any dragon. But she is very handsome, and I have my magic glass. When we are married I will turn her into a nice little girl, just the size for me. So all will be well."

The King pointed to Arthur with his scepter. "Behold our champion," he said, chuckling. "My daughter, it is for you to hope that this brave fellow may slay the Dragon of Hushby. For in that case I vow to make you his wife."

"Huh!" said the Princess, looking down at Arthur and frowning. But Arthur advanced and made a low bow to her. "For such a great prize, Your Highness," he said, "a man would venture much."

At these words the Princess looked crosser than ever, and tossed her head. "Take care that the Dragon does not swallow you at a mouthful, Dwarf!" she said, very impolitely, and every one laughed.

Arthur turned red with anger. "I will take care," he said. "And I shall win what I will and conquer where I choose. Farewell, my lady. We shall have more words hereafter, when I come to claim you for my wife."

"You shall have her if you win her," said the King.

But, of course, no one thought there was any hope for the little fellow. They believed him to be mad, and when he had gone they nearly died, laughing at the huge joke. The Princess laughed loudest of all.

Proudly Arthur set forth upon the King's errand, with the magic glass in his pocket, and the butterfly-net over his shoulder. A number of merry fellows followed him from the court to see the issue of his mad adventure. For they thought there would be a thing to laugh at ere the end of the matter. They jested with Arthur and gibed pleasantly at him. But he answered them gayly and kept his temper, for he knew that they meant no harm.



SHE LOOKED BAD-TEMPERED

[Illustration: SHE LOOKED BAD-TEMPERED]

But with them journeyed one of a different sort. And this was Oscar, a burly ruffian, whose joy was in evil, and who followed Arthur hoping for a chance to rob him, since he seemed a fool who had some precious treasure in his wallet, which he was forever handling. Him Arthur did not like, and he watched Oscar, but had no words with him.

V. THE DRAGON OF HUSHBY, PART II

After a time, Arthur and his band came to the town of Hushby, and were received with wonder; for the people thought them all mad, especially Arthur, with his butterfly-net and his boast to slay the Dragon. But they treated him gratefully, as one who sought to be their deliverer, albeit shaking their heads over his small stature and slender strength.

Arthur slept that night at the inn, intending to seek the Dragon on the morrow. And about the inn, on benches, on the curbs of Hushby streets, and under the trees, slept the merry jesters who had followed Arthur from the King. And Oscar thought to rob Arthur while he slept; but he was prevented.

In the night came the Dragon down from his cave in the mountain, and rushing up the village street nearly caught Oscar as he was climbing in at the window of the inn. Oscar fled barely in time. But the Dragon caught and ate in one mouthful two of the merry band of jesters, so that they jested no longer. Then there was a great outcry and panic. But Arthur slept soundly through it all, dreaming of the Princess, and how fair she would be when he had made her his wife and had magicked her with the glass.

In the morning bright and early Arthur came down to table. He found the landlord and all the people white and trembling.

"Oh, sir!" cried Mine Host in a whisper. "Behold, the Dragon has descended from the mountain in the darkness and has eaten two of the King's men this night. His appetite is whetted, and we hear him roaring afar off. It is a sign that he will soon again make another descent upon us. In the name of St. George, haste to save us!"

Arthur listened and heard the far-off thunder of the loathly worm. But he did not tremble. He only drew himself up to his last inch and frowned, fingering the magic glass in his wallet.

"First will I breakfast," he said. "And then will I go forth to rid you of this pest. Bring on the morning meal."

When he had eaten heartily, even to the last crumb, Arthur arose and took his butterfly-net in hand.

"Farewell, noble youth!" cried Mine Host, with tears in his eyes. For Arthur had paid his score generously, and the landlord did not expect to see the little fellow again. The landlord's fair daughter, Margot, stood weeping, with the corner of her apron to her eyes. For she admired the brave lad mightily. She was a very little maid, no taller than Arthur's shoulder, and he looked at her kindly when he saw her weep.

"What a fair, sweet maid!" he said to himself. "If it were not for the King's daughter, I would choose her for my Lady, and ask her to give me the blue ribbon from her hair to wear in my cap. But that may not be. I must win glory for the King's big daughter."

He patted Margot on the head and said debonairly: "Farewell! And have a goodly dinner ready against my return. For I shall bring with me a Dragon's appetite."

So he spoke, jesting upon the terrible subject. Margot wept harder than ever, and his other hearers shuddered. Some of the people followed him afar off. But when, nearer and nearer, they heard the Dragon's roars shaking the hills, they turned about and fled back to the village, leaving Arthur to go his way alone.

Arthur was not afraid. He strode on manfully until he came to the valley which led up the mountain where the Dragon lived. And as he strode he whistled. Presently there was a roar and a rumble and a rattle, and Arthur stopped whistling. Nearer and nearer it came, and at last, down from the rocks writhed the terrible Dragon himself. And he was far worse to look upon than Arthur had imagined.

He was as big as twenty elephants, and he was green, covered with shining scales. His eyes glowed like the headlights of two engines, and revolved horribly in his head. Steam and fire belched from his huge mouth, and he snapped his long, sharp teeth disgustingly. He was a terrifying sight as he writhed toward Arthur. Dreadfully he roared, lashing right and left with his tail, which uprooted the trees and bushes and dislodged the rocks on either hand till they came tumbling down in an avalanche. His hot breath scorched everything about him, and Arthur began to feel faint by reason of the poison in it. But he stood quite still, waiting for the Dragon, and fingering his magic glass. It was to be a mighty experiment.

Arthur waited until the Dragon was only a few yards away. Then he put the glass to his eye and stared hard at the

beast; stared, and stared, and stared.

Such rudeness made the Dragon very angry. He roared louder than ever and came rushing toward Arthur at redoubled speed. But behold! As Arthur gazed at him the creature began to grow smaller and smaller. First he was no bigger than an elephant, though still terrible. Then he shrank to the size of a crocodile; then of a lion; and finally, when he was only a few feet away, he was no bigger than a cat, snarling and spitting fiercely as ever.

By this time the Dragon began to see that something was wrong. He did not know that he himself was changed, but it seemed to him that Arthur had swelled. It seemed to him that Arthur was a terrible giant; and, for the first time in his five thousand years of life, the Dragon was afraid!

Suddenly he turned tail and began to run away, all the while growing littler and littler in quite a ridiculous fashion. But Arthur was after him valiantly. Now the Dragon was no bigger than a lizard, making a funny squeak as he wriggled through the bushes. His eyes shone like tiny lucifer matches, and his mouth smoked like a cigarette. But for this it would have been hard to see him as he scuttled through the moss and under the ferns, trying to escape from Arthur's terrible eye.

At last Arthur saw that it was high time to lay aside the magic glass, unless he wished the Dragon to escape by "going out" altogether, which would never do. For he must take the creature back to the King.

Now was seen the use of the butterfly-net which Arthur had brought all the way from Kisington. With this in his right hand Arthur chased the absurd little Dragon under a stone, and finally threw it over the wriggling body, just as one would catch an insect. Hurrah! There was the creature tangled in the net, hissing as loudly as a locust. The terrible Dragon of Hushby was caught!

Arthur took from his wallet a reel of thread and tied the Dragon securely, so that he might not escape. And then, chuckling to himself, he strode back to Hushby pulling the Dragon behind him, just as a little boy drags a toy horse by a string. It was a very funny sight!

When he drew near the inn, Margot ran out to meet him with tears of joy in her eyes, for she had been watching for him all this time. Then all the other people came running out, and they cheered lustily when they saw that Arthur was quite unharmed.

"But what of the Dragon?" they said.

"This of the Dragon!" cried Arthur, drawing from behind him the struggling creature. "Here is the famous Terror of Hushby. Behold what I have done to him!"

Folk could scarce believe their eyes. This wriggling little lizard, could he really be their famous Dragon? Then they saw his tiny, fiery eyes, and the smoke coming from his funny little mouth; and they knew it must be a really, truly Dragon. A great silence fell upon them, and every one looked at Arthur in awe. They believed that he must be a wizard who had magicked the Dragon of Hushby. But after that they fell to rejoicing, because now no longer had they anything to fear. Arthur had become the hero of Hushby.

They set him on a seat and carried him on their shoulders around the village, with singing and shouting and huzzaing. And the Dragon went with him, spitting and hissing and lashing his absurd little scaly tail inside a cage made of fine wire. Arthur enjoyed all this greatly. But especially he enjoyed the eyes of little Margot, which followed him, full of admiration. And he said to himself, "It is a fine thing to be a hero. But I wish I had not asked for the King's daughter as my reward. I could choose better now!"

When night came Arthur slept once more at the inn, with the Dragon in his little cage beside the bed. Arthur slept soundly, because he was happy and his heart was honest. But the conquered Dragon did not sleep. You see, his conscience was bad,—he had eaten so many poor and deserving persons. And that gives the worst kind of indigestion.

There was another who did not sleep. And this was Oscar, the wicked. He had seen the Dragon when Arthur showed him to the people, and he knew that the strange little beast was a treasure worth far more than gold or jewels. For there was not another like it in the whole world. He meant to steal the miniature Dragon and carry it to a far land, where he could exhibit it in a museum and gain much wealth and honor. Of course, Oscar meant also to claim that this was a young Dragon which he had taken in a brave struggle with its parents, whom Oscar had killed. In that way, he would become a famous hero.

In the dead of night, when all the inn was quiet, Oscar softly climbed up the trellis to the window of the room where Arthur slept. In the darkness two tiny red spots showed him where the Dragon writhed and wriggled restlessly. Stealthily Oscar reached out his hand to take the Dragon. But when he did so the Dragon gave a hiss which he meant should shake the house, but which really was no louder than the chirp of a cricket. It was loud enough, however, to waken Arthur. The hero sprang from the bed to guard his treasure.

Oscar drew his dagger and rushed upon Arthur. But Arthur had been careful to sleep with his hand upon his trusty weapon. Swiftly he put the magic glass to his eye and looked at Oscar. And lo! the wicked man shared the Dragon's fate. Gradually he shrank and shrank, and though he struck fiercely with his dagger it was of little moment; for Oscar was soon but two inches high, and his dagger's prick was like that of a pin, which made Arthur laugh.

Arthur was merciful, and did not put him out entirely, as he could easily have done. Dropping the glass from his eye he picked up in his thumb and finger the little fellow, struggling like a beetle, and put him under an overturned pint-pot for safe keeping. There Oscar remained until morning, a restless neighbor of the restless Dragon.

But Arthur said to himself, "I have used the magic glass twice. I must be careful, for it can be used only once more before its virtue fades; and that chance must be saved to make my Princess little, since, alas! I must marry her and not dear Margot." Then Arthur went back to bed and slept soundly until morning.

On the morrow Arthur said nothing about this night's event to Mine Host nor to the admiring crowd who came to see him set forth on his triumphant journey to the King. He tied Oscar with thread and put him into his wallet, where the wicked fellow snarled and scolded in a chirp that no one could hear. As for the Dragon, Arthur fastened a tiny gold chain about his neck and secured it to his doublet, so that the creature could crawl up and down his shoulder but could not get away. He looked like one of the little chameleons which ladies sometimes wear; though why they like such unhappy living ornaments I cannot tell.

VI. THE DRAGON OF HUSHBY, PART III

Amid hurrahs and blessings and a rain of flowers, Arthur said farewell to Margot, who loved him, and to Hushby, which he had delivered from the Terror; and once more he journeyed to the King. But this time he went as a hero, whose fame had traveled before him.

The King sent heralds and soldiers to meet him, and a golden chariot to bring him to the city. When Arthur reached the palace he found a great banquet prepared, and the King himself came to welcome him and led him to the place of honor. But the Princess Agnes was not there.

As for the Dragon, every one was mad with delight over the wonderful little creature. When the King saw him he laughed so that his crown nearly fell into the soup. He delighted to tickle the Dragon's tail and hear him spit and hiss like a little tea-kettle. He liked the Dragon much better in this small edition, for he was more conveniently handled. They placed the Dragon's cage in the center of the table, where every one could see him, and the Dragon glared fiercely with his little red eyes, but no one was afraid. How times had changed since this was the Terror of Hushby!

Then the King said: "Brave Arthur, this Dragonet is the choicest treasure of my kingdom. I will keep him in a cage of gold beside my throne, and strangers will come from the ends of the world to see him. It will make my reign famous for all time, and I am very grateful to you. You are a clever fellow, and perhaps, since you have tamed a Dragon, you can tame my daughter as no one else has been able to do,— not even the late Queen or myself. Now, then, to keep my promise. What ho, heralds! Lead forth the maid."

The heralds blew a joyous blast on their trumpets and went to fetch the Princess Agnes. Arthur found himself thinking of little Margot at the inn, and how sadly she had looked after him when he went away. But he knew that, being a hero, he must accept the responsibilities of that position and marry the Princess. He felt nervously in his wallet for the magic glass, for he said to himself:

"Since I must marry this giantess, between whom and me is little love, let me be sure that I can make her small like myself; else there will be no happiness in my family. As soon as we are wed I will stare at the big girl until she shrinks into the proper size, as did Oscar and the Dragon."

Arthur felt into the corners of his wallet for the magic glass—but it was not there! Hurriedly he searched again. It was gone! What was to be done? Must he, then, marry the giant girl and be a slave to her cruel temper all his life? Horrible thought! What had become of the glass? Suddenly he remembered Oscar, who had also been put into the wallet. Oscar likewise was gone!

Arthur saw what had happened. With his little dagger Oscar had cut the threads which bound him and had escaped, taking the magic glass with him.

"What makes your face so pale, brave Arthur?" asked the King jokingly. "Is it the thought of your dainty little bride?"

Even as Arthur opened his lips to answer, there came a shrill cry from beneath his very nose. Looking down he saw Oscar standing on the table and peering over his beaker of wine. In both arms he held the magic glass, and he was turning its shining eye upon Arthur himself.

"Revenge!" cried the little fellow, fiercely. "Revenge! I have learned his secret. I will gaze him smaller and smaller, until he goes out. Nothing can save him!"

Before Arthur could move, Oscar pressed his face to the glass and began to stare as through a window, his malicious eyes fixed upon Arthur's face. With horror Arthur waited to feel himself shrink. He looked about fearfully at the other guests, expecting to see them appear to swell into giants as he himself grew tiny. He stared at Oscar again, who should now seem larger than himself.

But what was this? Nothing happened. The guests were staring open-mouthed with surprise, but they were of the usual size, Oscar was still a tiny dwarf. Arthur rubbed his eyes and looked again. Still nothing happened. The glass seemed to have lost its magic!

Suddenly, Arthur saw what it meant. The magic of the glass was to last only for three trials. Once, before he knew its worth, he had wasted it upon the spider, the rat, and the singing bird. Once the Dragon had felt its power. Its third and last spell had turned Oscar into a midget. Now its virtue was gone. It was but a piece of ordinary crystal, and Oscar's

wicked plan was foiled!

With a squeal of rage Oscar threw the glass crashing upon the floor, and stamped his foot, which made everybody laugh. It was as if a tiny mouse had stamped.

The King stretched out his hand and took up the little fellow curiously. "What is this strange insect?" he asked. "Your Majesty," said Arthur, "he is Oscar, a villain who seeks to mischief everybody. I have punished him as I punished the Dragon, because he tried to rob me of my most precious treasure. He can do no more harm, I think."

"Oscar!" said the King. "Indeed, I know him well. More than once has he done evil in my city, and I have long meant to punish him. You are a clever fellow to handle him so tactfully. And now, we will dub him 'Companion of the Dragon.' He, too, shall have a little cage of gold and shall live with the Dragon for his neighbor. A quaint pair they, Arthur! I thank you for them. But where is my daughter, and why does she delay?"

With horror Arthur heard these words. He had forgotten the Princess. Alas! The glass had lost its power. How then was he to magic her and make her small, as he had hoped to do? How was he to tame this terrible big girl and make her a nice little wife? Arthur wished that he had never set out to be a hero; he awaited the approach of his bride with terror far greater than he had felt in the Dragon's glen.

Presently the heralds came back to the King, and their faces were very grave. "Your Majesty," they said, "we cannot bring the Princess. She has gone; she has fled from the Kingdom with the first royal coachman, who was a handsome young giant after her own heart. Even now they must be far beyond the border of the neighboring Kingdom. She was heard to say that she would have no dwarf for a husband, however great a hero he might be. And when she knew what had happened to the Dragon of Hushby, she was afraid."

There was silence in the banquet hall. Then the King struck a blow on the table with his fist that made the Dragon hop and hiss nervously, while Oscar fell over and bumped his head on a salt cellar. "Well," said the King, "so be it! She was an ill-tempered jade, and I could do nothing with her. You are well rid of her, brave Arthur. But how can I amend this insult to your dignity? Ask of me whatever you choose, and it will not be enough."

Now, instead of looking sad, Arthur's face was shining with joy at his narrow escape. "Your Majesty," he said, "I ask no amend. The lady had a right to her choice, and I hope she may have a giant happiness. Since this royal marriage may not be for me, I must look elsewhere. But I have had enough of adventure and of magic, and I shall now retire into private life."

"Some reward you must have, nevertheless," said the King. "You shall retire nobly. Arise, Sir Arthur! I make you Knight of the Dragon, Lord of the Hushby Marches, and Earl of Kisington. Moreover, whomsoever and wheresoever you choose to wed, I myself will attend the nuptials and will bestow upon the bride a countess's crown of diamonds. Long live the hero of Hushby and Earl of Kisington!"

"Long live the hero of Hushby and Earl of Kisington!" echoed all the guests. The Dragon hissed spitefully and lashed out with his tail, but no one paid any attention to him. Oscar, sulking with elbows on knees, groaned squeakily. But no one paid any attention to him either.

Everybody was thinking of Arthur, and how wonderfully he had become a hero. But Arthur himself was thinking of little Margot at the inn, and how sweet her face would look under the coronet of a countess. And Arthur grinned happily.

VII. THE BARGAIN

You must not suppose that Harold read this whole story to the besieging King without pause. When he reached the end of the first part of the tale, Harold closed the red-and-gold volume and looked up.

"Go on!" urged the Red King. "Why do you stop, boy?"

"It is the end of the volume," said Harold.

Red Rex frowned. "Surely, not the end of the tale!" he cried. "Why, you have stopped short in the middle! That Oscar was up to some trick, I know. I want to hear what happened next."

"I am sorry, Your Majesty," repeated Harold. "It is the end of the volume. The rest of the tale is told in another book."

The Red King's eyes blazed with anger. "Why did you not bring the other book with you?" he roared.

"I was not sure that Your Majesty would like the tale," said Harold. "Besides, they will allow one to take from the library but one book at a time from a set of volumes."

"Then you must return and get the next volume immediately," commanded Red Rex. "I must know what happened to Arthur in his quest of the Dragon. Take the flag of truce and go back to Kisington; and let it not be long ere you return!"

"I am sorry, Your Majesty," said Harold, "but it is too late to take out another book to-day. The rules of the library are very strict."

"Now, did any one ever hear anything so absurd as this!" thundered the Red King, stamping like a bad-tempered child. "What is a mere library, forsooth, to have rules which I may not break?"

"You have rules for your army, do you not?" suggested Harold.

"I should say, verily!" growled Red Rex; "strict, stern rules."

"Well, a library is an army of books," answered Harold; "a peaceful army intended to help people and to make them happy; not to kill them. Our noble Librarian, who is general of a mighty army of books, must have rules as stern and strict to keep his army useful and efficient. If Your Majesty desires the rest of the tale you must wait until to-morrow."

"I will destroy the whole town first!" roared the angry King.

"Then you will never learn the end of the tale," retorted Harold.

It looked as if Harold were in great danger, in spite of the flag of truce. Red Rex stormed and ranted, and his soldiers stood ready with their weapons to do whatever he should bid them. But after a while the warrior's wrath somewhat calmed itself, and shortly he began to chuckle noisily.

"True!" he said. "If I destroy the library I shall not know the end of that tale. That would be a calamity! Well, it is now too late to resume the siege to-day. I may as well continue the truce until to-morrow. But see that you return early in the morning, with the rest of the tale."

Once more Harold shook his head. "I must go to Church to-morrow morning," he replied. "It is Sunday, you know. Surely, you do not fight on Sundays, Your Majesty?"

The Red King looked at him sideways. "I had forgotten Sunday," he said. "I have mislaid my calendar. Now, you remind me,--no, I suppose not. No, I do not fight on Sundays."

"I thought not!" said Harold, relieved. "It would not be quite knightly, would it? I will return to-morrow afternoon, as soon as I have had my dinner; and then we will go on with the story of the Dragon of Hushby. Good day, Your Majesty!"

"Good day!" growled Red Rex, watching him march away between the files of soldiers. "Youngster!" he called after the boy, "be sure you bring back the right volume."

Harold waved his hand in assent.

Now, when Harold told the Librarian and the other Leading Citizens what he had done, they were greatly pleased; for they saw that their city was safe for at least eighteen hours, while their mounted messenger went speeding to King Victor. Harold's chums Robert and Richard were so excited they could not sleep that night. Harold's mother was as proud as a peacock when he told the story to her; though it was with some dread that she looked forward to his return on the morrow into the camp of the fierce besieger. But Harold said:--

"I shall be quite safe, Mother. Never fear! Red Rex is too much interested in my story to hurt me. When he forgets war he is a different man. He is almost pleasant, Mother!"

"What a stupid King he must be to choose war for his pleasure!" said the mother. "But suppose he cannot wait for to-morrow afternoon? Suppose he should decide to take the city and win the library for himself, so that he can read all the books at his leisure. What then?"

"Mother," said Harold, "I believe Red Rex has no joy in reading for himself; no more than you have,--though he may not have your excuse."

"La la!" cried the mother. "What a King is that who has no key to the treasury of books! You are richer than he, my son. With all his armies, you are more powerful than he, my dear son!"

On the Sunday, after dinner, Harold's friends escorted him to the gate; and as before he went to the Red King under the flag of truce. In his hand he bore the second volume of red-and-gold. Red Rex received him sulkily, yet with a certain eagerness.

"Well, boy, have you brought the book?" he asked. "I have been thinking of that tale all the night long, all this morning long. Come, let us hear what happened next to Arthur and the Dragon." Then Harold began the second part of the tale. Red Rex kept him at it, and would not let him rest until he had quite finished both the second and the third parts of the story; though Harold had meant to gain time by reading only the former on that occasion.

But when he had quite finished, Red Rex sat up, rubbing his hands together. "It is a good story!" he declared. "That Arthur was a brave fellow. I am glad I did not destroy your library until I had heard about him. But now I can return to the siege without delay. I give you warning, my boy! Do not go back to that doomed town. Desert those peace-lovers and come with me to be a fighter, like Arthur."

"Arthur fought wicked Dragons, not men," said Harold. "I would not desert if I could. I, too, am a peace-lover, and there is too much in Kisington from which I could not part. Besides, I must return this book safe and sound to the library, even if it is to be destroyed soon after, or I shall be fined. My poor mother can ill afford to pay fines for me!"

"But there will be no one left to fine you," retorted the Red King. "The whole city will be destroyed,--the library, the Librarian, the Lord Mayor, and all! What a ruination it will be!" He rubbed his hands gleefully.

Harold shuddered, but he was firm. "What a pity!" he said. "You really should know our Librarian. And there are still many fine books which Your Majesty ought to hear. You will never know them if they be destroyed now; their duplicates exist nowhere."

"There are none so good as the tale you have just finished, I warrant!" cried Red Rex.

"Oh, many far better than that, Your Majesty!" said Harold. "Indeed, that is one of the least important.--Did you ever hear of the Wonder-Garden, Your Majesty?"

"The Wonder-Garden!" echoed the Red King; "no, that I never did. What means a 'wonder-garden,' boy?"

"Ah, that you will never know, for it is another of the secret tales of Kisington," said Harold. "It is all about a Mermaid, and a Lord Mayor's son, and a fair stranger maiden, who--now I bethink me--might be from your own land across the border. The Wonder-Garden was hers."

"A maid from my land, with a wonder-garden!" mused Red Rex. "I would fain learn of her. I dare say there is good fighting in this tale also. Come, boy; will you read me that tale to-morrow?"

"Yes, Your Majesty; if you will give your kingly word that the truce shall last until the story be finished," replied Harold.

"Ho-hum!" the Red King hesitated. He mumbled and he grumbled; he winked and he blinked. But at last he said grudgingly, "Well, I promise. No soldier shall advance, no weapon shall be discharged until I have heard the tale of your Wonder-Garden."

With this promise, Harold joyfully hastened back to the beleaguered city. Kisington was safe for another day! The Lord Mayor and the Librarian shook hands and went to congratulate Harold's mother.

As for Red Rex, he dreamed that Harold had bewitched him with a red-and-gold book; as perhaps he had done. Were not Richard and Robert at that moment clapping Harold on the shoulder and declaring that he was indeed a "Book-Wizard"? This is the tale which Harold read to Red Rex on the following day; the story of *The Wonder-Garden*.

VIII. THE WONDER-GARDEN

There never were seen such beautiful gardens as bloomed in Kisington-by-the-Sea. Not only every chateau and villa

had its parterres spread with blooming rugs of all colors; but each white-washed cottage, every thatched hut, boasted its garden-plot of dainty posies. Each had some quaint device or some special beauty which distinguished it from the others. For there was great horticultural rivalry in Kisington-by-the-Sea.

Now this was all because Hugh, the Lord Mayor, who was very fond of flowers, had offered a prize for the prettiest garden in the town. The Lord Mayor himself lived on a hill in the center of the town, in the midst of the most beautiful garden of all. It flowed down the hillside from the summit in ripples of radiant color,—roses and lilies, pinks and daffodils, larkspur and snapdragon. All the flowers of the land were there, and many foreigners beside.

Through the garden wound the yellow driveway by which the Lord Mayor passed in his golden coach. He loved to drive slowly down this road, sniffing the fragrance of his flowers; and then out through the streets of the town, observing the beautiful gardens on every hand,—the result of his own love for flowers.

When the Lord Mayor saw all the fair maidens down on their knees in the flower-beds, watering the buds with their little green water-pots, nipping off dead leaves, pulling up scrawny weeds, coaxing the delicate creepers to climb, he would rub his hands and say:--

"Ah, this is good! This is very good indeed! We shall have the most beautiful town in the world, blossoming with flowers, and the most beautiful maids in the world, blossoming with health and sweetness like the flowers they tend. It will be hard to tell which is the fairer, the maidens or the flowers. Hey! Is it not so, my son?"

Then he would chuckle and poke in the ribs the young man who rode beside him.

The Lord Mayor's son was very good to look upon; tall and fair, with curly golden locks and eyes as brown as the heart of a yellow daisy. When he drove through the town with the Lord Mayor, the maidens down on their knees in their garden-plots would pause a moment from their chase of a wriggling worm or a sluggish slug to look after the golden coach and sigh gently. Then they would turn back to their Bowers more eagerly than before. For there was the prize!



THE MAIDENS WOULD PAUSE TO LOOK AFTER THE GOLDEN COACH

[Illustration: THE MAIDENS WOULD PAUSE TO LOOK AFTER THE GOLDEN COACH]

You see, the Lord Mayor's son was himself part of the prize to be won. The Lord Mayor had vowed that Cedric, his son, should marry the girl who could show by late summer the most beautiful garden in Kisington-by-the-Sea. Moreover, he promised to build a fine palace to overlook this prize garden, and there the young couple should live happy ever after, like any Prince and Princess. And this was why the maids worked so hard in the gardens of Kisington-by-the-Sea, and why the flowers blossomed there as no flowers ever blossomed before.

Now one day the Lord Mayor drove through the village in his golden coach and came out upon the downs near the seashore. And there, quite by itself, he found a little cottage which he had never before seen: a tiny cottage which had no sign of a garden anywhere about it,—only a few flowers growing in cracked pots on the window-sills, and on the bench just outside the door.

"What!" cried the Lord Mayor, stopping the coach. "What does this mean? There should be a garden here. I must look to the reason for this contempt of my offer." And he jumped down from the coach and rapped sharply upon the door.

Presently the door opened, and there stood a girl, all in rags, but so beautiful that the Lord Mayor's son, who was sitting languidly in the golden coach, shut his eyes as one does when a great light shines suddenly in one's face.

"Hey!" cried the Lord Mayor, frowning. "Why have you no garden, girl? Have you no pride? Do you not dream to win

the prize which I offer?"

"I am a stranger," said the maiden timidly. "No one has told me of a prize. What may it be, my Lord?"

"It is a prize worth trying for," said the Lord Mayor. "The hand of my son there, and the finest palace in the land for the mistress of the prize garden. Does that thought please you, girl? If not, you are different from all the other maidens."

The girl lifted her eyes to the golden coach and met the gaze of Cedric fixed upon her. "I love flowers," she said. "I had once a little garden in my old home. But now I am too poor to buy plants and bulbs and seedlings. How, then, shall I make a garden to please Your Lordship?"

"I will send you plants and bulbs and seedlings," said the Lord Mayor's son, leaning forward eagerly. "You must make haste, for September will soon be here, when the gardens will be judged."

"Thank you, fair sir," said the girl. "I shall love my garden dearly, if you will help me."

Now when the Lord Mayor and his son had returned home, Cedric hastened to keep his promise. For Gerda was the fairest maid in Kisington-by-the-Sea, and already he loved her so dearly that he hoped she would win the prize and become his wife. He sent her the most beautiful flowers that he could find, and transplanted from his father's garden its choicest seedlings; he brought shrubs from the city market.

The meadow between Gerda's cottage and the sea was transformed as if by magic, and became a mass of rare and lovely flowers. The choicest foreign plants, the gayest native blooms, the shyest wild posies, all were at home in Gerda's lovely garden over which the sea-breeze blew. But Gerda herself was the fairest flower of them all. She watched and cared for her garden tenderly, and like the garden she grew fairer every day, she was so happy. She did not know how the other gardens grew, for she did not go to see. But sometimes the Lord Mayor's son came, disguised as a gardener, to see how the flowers fared. And he said that she had the most beautiful garden in all Kisington-by-the-Sea, and he hoped that she would win the prize; which was very encouraging.

No one else knew about Gerda's garden. It was far from town, and no one dreamed that a stranger had come to live there. Besides, the neighbors were so busy, each with her own affairs, that they had no time to go about or ask questions, or gossip; which was a good thing.

No, I am wrong. One person had discovered the open secret. In a villa not far from the Lord Mayor's house dwelt a Countess who was very rich and proud. Until Gerda came she had boasted the finest garden in Kisington, after the Lord Mayor's, made by a whole army of gardeners whom she kept at her command. She was quite sure of winning the prize, and it made her very gay, though she cared nothing at all about flowers. She left all the care of her garden to her gardeners and scarcely ever wandered down its lovely walks. But she longed to marry the Lord Mayor's son and live in a palace. It was the palace that she coveted as a prize, and the honor of being the Lord Mayor's daughter; to ride in the golden coach!

She cared no more about Cedric himself than she did for her lovely flowers.

One day this Countess, who had very sharp eyes, spied the Lord Mayor's son, in his disguise, going past her villa with his arms full of curious flowers such as were never before seen in Kisington-by-the-Sea. And because she had unusually sharp eyes the Countess knew who he was. "Aha!" she said to herself. "This is strange! Cedric is meddling with some garden. I must look into this!" Secretly she followed Cedric through the village and out to the seashore until he came to Gerda's garden. And there she saw him walking with the fair stranger up and down among the flowers. The secret was discovered.

The Countess was a very wicked woman. When she looked over the transformed meadow and saw the beautiful garden which Gerda had made, she nearly died of rage. She knew at once that against this one her own garden had no chance of winning the prize. She stamped her feet in jealous fury and cried:--

"She shall not have the palace! She shall not ride in the golden coach! She shall not marry the Lord Mayor's son! I will see that she shall not!"

The Countess stole home with wicked wishes in her heart and wicked plans in her head. The next day but one was the day of the award, so she had no time to lose. That night when every one was asleep she crept out of her villa and along the road by which she had followed the Lord Mayor's son, to Gerda's garden. Everything was quiet and peaceful. The flowers looked very fair in the moonlight, breathing drowsy perfumes. But the wicked woman cared nothing at all for

them. Taking a great pair of shears from her cloak she moved quickly in and out among the garden beds, cutting and slashing the precious flowers and trampling them under foot.

When she had finished her cruel work, not a single bud lifted its head from the ruin. The flower-beds looked as though a tempest had swept over them. Poor Gerda's garden was quite destroyed! The Countess chuckled as she hurried home through the night: "We shall see now who wins the prize!"

The next day Cedric thought that he would visit the garden of sweet Gerda in which he had taken such an interest. Dressed in his gardener's green smock he went through the town, whistling happily as any yokel. But when he reached the little cottage by the sea, he ceased to whistle. Gerda was sitting upon the doorstone weeping bitterly.

"What is the matter, Gerda?" asked Cedric anxiously, and he sought to comfort her. She could only sob:--

"Oh! My dear garden! Oh! My poor flowers!"

With a sinking heart Cedric ran to the garden close, and there he saw all the ruin that the wicked Countess had wrought.

"Alas! Who has done this?" he cried. But Gerda could not tell.

Cedric's heart was nearly broken. For he loved Gerda so dearly that he thought he could not live if another should win the prize. To-morrow would be the day that would determine his fate. What could they do? Suddenly he had an idea.

"Farewell, Gerda!" he cried, and without another word he strode away.

Then Gerda wept more bitterly than ever. She thought that the Lord Mayor's son was angry with her because her garden was destroyed. This was worse even than the loss of her flowers.

But Cedric was far from angry with her. He had gone away in order to think and plan. He had one hope. He remembered that he had a friend who had once promised to help him in his time of trouble. The time had come.

That very night when the moon rose over the water, Cedric went down to the sea and stood upon a rock and recited this charm:--

"Mermaid, Mermaid, rise from the sea! I am in trouble. Hasten to me!"

Hardly had he spoken the words when there was a little ripple in the water at his feet, and a beautiful Mermaid appeared, clinging to the rock over which the waves dashed prettily in the moonlight. And she said:--

"Lord Mayor's son, you have spoken the charm which I taught you, and I have come from the bottom of the sea. I have not forgotten how once a cruel fisherman caught me in his net, and how you had pity on me and took me to the ocean and set me free. Then I promised to help you, if ever you should be in trouble. What is your grief, Lord Mayor's son?"

Then Cedric told her about Gerda's garden and its mishap. "Ah! She must be the sweet, ragged maid who used to sit upon the rocks and gaze down into my ocean," said the Mermaid. "She has a good heart and loves the sea. Early this morning I heard her weeping bitterly for her lost flowers and for you. She loves you dearly, Lord Mayor's son, and I love you both. What shall I do to help you?"

"Dear Mermaid," said Cedric eagerly, "can you find out the cruel person who has destroyed Gerda's garden? And can you restore the garden itself before to-morrow? I ask these two things of you."

"It is easy to find the jealous woman," said the Mermaid. "Her you will know at the right time. But the garden is another matter. However, I will do my best for the two whom I love. And now, farewell!" With that word she slid down the rocks, and in a little splash of spray vanished into the sea.

Now came the day when the Lord Mayor was to judge the gardens of Kisington-by-the-Sea. In all the towers the bells were ringing merrily, and on every side the flowers and the fair maidens were blooming their brightest. Through the town rode the Lord Mayor in his golden coach drawn by six prancing white steeds, their necks wreathed with flowers; and behind followed a great rout of townsfolk, eager to see the gardens judged. In the Lord Mayor's coach sat Cedric by his father's side. He was dressed all in white, as became a bridegroom, and in his hands he carried a huge bouquet of white roses. His cheeks were white, too, for he was anxious to know what this day should bring, and what maiden was

to receive the bridal bouquet.

Through the town the merry procession moved, and stopped in turn before each garden, at the gate of which a sweet maid waited, her little heart going pit-a-pat beneath her prettiest gown. The Lord Mayor inspected each garden carefully, making notes in a little white-and-gold book. And each fair maiden gazed at the handsome Cedric and hoped that the Lord Mayor was writing down her name to be his daughter-in-law!

But all the gardens were so beautiful that it seemed impossible to choose between them. In each the Lord Mayor looked and looked, smiled and nodded,—"Very good! Very good, indeed! Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! I am truly proud of the fair flowers and the fair maids of Kisington-by-the-Sea. Surely, never such were seen before!"

Then he noted his little memorandum, made a low bow to the maiden, and mounting into the golden coach, whirled away to the next garden. At last, when they had gone quite around the village, they came to the villa of the wicked Countess. The crowd murmured admiringly. There was no doubt about it; hers was certainly the finest garden of all. When the Lord Mayor saw the gay parterres and fountains, the shady alleys and cool grottoes, the wonderful flowers and shrubs growing luxuriantly everywhere, he clapped his hands with pleasure and said:--

"Ah! This is Paradise, indeed! Here surely we must look for our bride. Countess, I congratulate you!"

The Countess was dressed in a most costly gown of white satin and velvet, as though she were sure beforehand that she was to be the bride. She arched her neck and smiled maliciously at the Lord Mayor's son, in whose eyes was no love for her.

"I shall be proud, indeed, to ride in your golden coach!" she said.

Cedric had grown very white, and he looked at the Countess with disgust. She was so much less fair than Gerda, and her eyes so wicked! Must he marry her, after all? Yes, unless the Mermaid had wrought a miracle in Gerda's ruined garden. To that hope he still clung. "Father," he said earnestly, "before you judge that this lady has won the prize, remember that there is one more garden to visit. Have you forgotten the stranger maiden who lives beside the sea, and how you bade her make a garden as the other maids were doing? Let us first go there, for she may be waiting."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Lord Mayor; "I had in truth forgotten the pretty beggar. It is absurd to dream that she should have a garden worth visiting after that of our Countess here. Yet we will go to see, and do her justice."

The Countess laughed shrilly. "A beggar's garden!" she cried. "That must, indeed, be a wondrous sight!"

"Do you come with us, my lady," said the Lord Mayor politely. "Sit here by my son's side in the Lord Mayor's coach. For I trow that here will soon be your rightful place as his bride."

Now it pleased the Countess to ride in the Lord Mayor's coach; and it pleased her more that she was to see the shame of Gerda and the disappointment of Cedric when Gerda's pitiful little garden should be judged. So with a great rustle of satin and lace she gave her hand to the Lord Mayor and mounted proudly into the golden coach. But Cedric sat beside her pale and silent, little like a happy bridegroom. With a snapping of whips and tooting of horns off they went, rattling through the streets of the town, out over the downs toward the sea.

Behind them followed the townsfolk in a great crowd, wondering exceedingly whither the Lord Mayor was leading them. For they knew of no garden here. Presently, with another flourish and a cracking of whips, amid the barking of dogs and the shouts of little boys, the Lord Mayor's coach drew up in front of the tiny cottage by the sea. And the people wondered more than ever. For there was no garden anywhere to be seen.

The Lord Mayor alighted, chuckling as if it were all a great joke, and helped down the Countess, who was grinning maliciously. Last of all Cedric descended and stood waiting while the Lord Mayor with his staff knocked three times upon the door.

Presently the door opened, and there stood Gerda, dressed all in a gown of sea-green silk, with a string of pearls about her neck and a pink coral wreath in her hair. She was so beautiful that all the people in the crowd cried "Oh!" with a sound like the wind in the top of a pine tree, and the Lord Mayor himself fell back a step, staring in surprise. The Countess turned saffron yellow and bit her lips with envy; but still she smiled; for she knew what she had done to Gerda's garden.

As for Cedric, he stood and gazed as though his eyes were glued to fair Gerda's face, until after a bashful silence of a moment she spoke.

"You have come to see my garden," she said. "It is not like other gardens, but I think it is very beautiful. Will you come with me?"

She led them around the cottage to the meadow beside the sea where once had been the beautiful little garden which the Countess had destroyed. But what was this? Where were the lawns and hedges and beds of flowers? Where was the green grass? Gone! Over the spot lay a sheet of rippling water, reflecting the Summer sky.

"What does this mean?" said the Lord Mayor, turning sternly to Gerda. "I ask to see a garden, and you show me a pool of water. Girl, do you jest at the Lord Mayor?"

"Nevertheless, this is my garden, sir," answered Gerda gently, "and a fair garden I think you will find it, if you deign to look closely."

"Nonsense!" said the Lord Mayor crossly, and "Nonsense!" sniffed the Countess with her nose in the air. But Cedric stepped forward with his eyes shining, for he wanted justice done.

"Father," he begged, "let us go nearer, as the maiden asks, and look at this which she calls her garden. Mayhap we shall find something new to Kisington-by-the-Sea."

For when Cedric saw how sweetly the maid was dressed in colors and tokens of the ocean, his heart leaped with hope that the Mermaid had in some mysterious way redeemed her promise.

"Very well," said the Lord Mayor, frowning. "Let us see what this foolish whim betokens. Show us your garden, girl."

Down the slope they went, followed by the gaping crowd which cast curious looks upon Gerda as she walked by the side of the Lord Mayor's son. "Tell me, what has happened, Gerda?" he asked her, speaking low so that no one else might hear.

"Last night," she whispered, "I went to bed weeping for my lost flowers and my lost hope. But at midnight I was awakened by the roaring of the sea. It grew louder and louder, and at last a great wave seemed to burst over the sea-wall and come foaming up even to the cottage door. I was frightened sorely. But in the midst of my terror I heard a soft voice cry:--

'Fear not, gentle Gerda, and weep no more for your lost flowers. The gardeners of the sea have come to restore your garden. And there will be a fine gown for you. Look for it upon the doorstone in the morning. Farewell!' That was all.

The sea ceased its roaring, and peacefully I fell asleep. In the morning I found upon the doorstone this green gown. And when I looked upon the plot where late my poor little garden bloomed, I saw this. Behold!"

As she spoke they came to the edge of the pool. A chorus of wonder arose from the crowd. The Lord Mayor stood with hands raised gazing down into the pool; and every one else was gazing too, with eyes of admiration.

The water was as clear as glass, and one could see to the very bottom of the hollow which had once held Gerda's unlucky garden. Now the basin was floored with polished mother-of-pearl, with beds and borders of colored shells in lovely patterns. There were lawns of many-hued ocean moss, bordered by shrubs of coral, blossoming in every form and size and color,--spikes and clusters, daisy-stars and bell shapes, all the variety of a flower-garden. Sea-anemones and other living plants opened and shut their tender petals. Delicate sea-ferns like maiden-hair and flowering grasses grew upon rockeries of coral. Hedges of sea-weed, green and brown, yellow and pink, waved their fronds gently in the water as leaves do in the air. And to and fro among the branches of sea-trees moved glittering shapes of gold and silver, pink and pale blue. These were the rainbow fishes,--birds and butterflies of ocean, their delicate fins moving more gracefully even than wings can do.

Dear little sea-horses raced up and down the coral alleys, and luminous forms moved among the sea-weed, lighting the garden with living lanterns. Here and there were grottoes of coral and pretty arbors, and the garden was thronged with a multitude of curious sea-creatures even the names of which no man knows. For the gardeners of Cedric's friend the Mermaid had scoured the ocean to find the rarest and most beautiful wonders which grow in a deep-sea garden, such as no mortal eye ever sees.

After a time the Lord Mayor recovered breath to speak. "Maiden," he said, "however you came by this wondrous ocean-garden I do not care to ask. It is enough that we have such a treasure in Kisington-by-the-Sea. Among all our lovely gardens it is the fairest. Among all our curious flowers these living ones are rarest. I therefore judge that to you belongs the prize."

Then a great cheer arose from the border of the pool where the folk were bending eagerly to study the wonders in the waters below. Even the maidens whose gardens had not won the prize cheered,--all except the Countess. She ground her teeth with rage, for she saw that her wicked plot had been in vain.

The Lord Mayor stepped forward and took Gerda's hand. "Come hither, my son," he said, "and take this fair stranger to be your bride. In this spot where her little cottage stands, I will build for you a beautiful villa."

With a happy face Cedric took Gerda's hand in one of his, and with his other gave her the great bouquet of roses. "I obey my father's wish," he said. He needed not to tell that it was his own wish, too.

Thereupon every one cheered again, waving caps and handkerchiefs, for no one could help loving the beautiful pair and wishing them happiness. Only the Countess stood silent and frowning, looking ugly as a goblin.

When the shouting had ceased, Gerda stepped forward and spoke sweetly to the people. "Kind friends," she said, "I am a stranger to your town, yet my garden has been judged worthy of the prize. But I am sorry for the fair maidens who have so long and faithfully tended their lovely flowers. To me it seems that they also should have a reward. In my garden grows a hedge of plants bearing precious fruit,--the pearl oysters, which you see gaping with the white pearls in their mouths. I would have each maid come and take one for her own."

There was great rejoicing and murmuring of thanks as the maidens came forward one by one and bent over the pool to choose each a precious pearl. The Countess alone hung back. "Come hither, Countess," said the Lord Mayor, when he saw that all others had been rewarded save her only. "Come hither and choose your pearl. You should, indeed, have the finest, for your garden would have won the prize but for these sea-wonders by which it was outdone."

"Choose, fair lady," said Gerda, smiling kindly. But the Countess would not come. "I have pearls enough of my own," she snapped. "I need no charity from a beggar!"

"What!" cried the Lord Mayor, frowning. "Such words are not meetly addressed to my daughter-in-law. Nay, they show an evil heart, Countess!"

"Say that she shall do this, Father," cried Cedric, stepping forward eagerly, for he seemed to hear a secret whisper from the Mermaid prompting him; "else we shall think that she was the wicked one who destroyed another's garden in the hope of winning the prize herself."

At this challenge the Countess came forward sullenly to the edge of the pool. To take the nearest pearl she had to bend low, until her face drew close to the water. Suddenly, the watching crowd saw a flash and a splash and heard a shrill scream. The Countess rose, shrieking horribly. A huge crab had fastened himself to her nose, and not easily could she be freed from this unwelcome ornament! At last they tore away the crab, but the tip of the Countess's nose was gone, and she wore a scar always, even to the end of her unhappy days.

This was the Mermaid's punishment for her cruel harm to Gerda's garden.

But Gerda and Cedric lived happily ever after in the beautiful villa which the Lord Mayor built for them on the edge of their wonder-garden beside the sea. And sometimes the Mermaid herself came there to visit them, and to bring them some new precious thing from the watery world where she dwelt.

IX. THE KING'S COAT OF ARMS

The Red King could not disguise his pleasure in the tale of the Wonder-Garden, though he grumbled when he found there was to be no fighting in it. When Harold had finished reading the story, Red Rex patted him on the head and said gruffly,--

"Good, my boy! You do, indeed, read a tale as well as one would wish. But tell me, now; in what part of Kisington is the place where this Gerda had her Wonder-Garden? Is it far from here?"

"Nay, not far from here," said Harold. "About a mile from our library, by the sea, stands the villa where Gerda and the Lord Mayor's son lived happily ever after. I could show Your Majesty the place, if you were not unfortunately at war with our city."

"I would fain see that place," said Red Rex thoughtfully. "I have a fancy that Gerda, indeed, came from my land. I have heard a legend that one of my great-great-grandfather's own sisters was stolen by the gypsies, and carried away to a

far country. It might well be that she ran away from those gypsies, and escaped to this Kingdom, and that it was she whom the Lord Mayor found living lonely by the sea."

"It might well be so!" said Harold. "Oh, Your Majesty! How exciting! Then the Lady Anyse, who lives now at that villa, may be your own far-off cousin."

"She may be, indeed," mused the Red King. "What like is she, Harold?"

"She is tall, and handsome, and has red hair like Your Majesty," said Harold. "I have seen her often when I went to visit the Garden."

"The Garden?" exclaimed Red Rex. "Does the Wonder-Garden, then, still exist?"

"Not quite the same as in the day of Gerda and Cedric," answered Harold, "but yet a wonder-garden. It is called 'The Aquarium' now, and is one of the public gardens of Kisington, given to the town by the will of Cedric and Gerda. The Lady Anyse has it under her care."

"Verily, I should like to visit it and see both its wonders and my long-lost cousin," muttered the Red King.

"What a pity that you are making war upon our city!" exclaimed Harold. "There are so many fine things that cannot be while there is war."

"Yet war must be," answered Red Rex. "And I must be at it straightway." He rose and flourished his sword with a determined air.

"But at least you will spare the east of Kisington, where the Wonder-Garden lay, and not fire gums or arrows in that direction?" suggested Harold, pointing eastward. The Red King followed the direction of his finger.

"Yes, that I will promise," said Red Rex, after a moment's hesitation. "I promise that; lest otherwise I might injure my own blood royal. Because I am King I must not forget that!" He swelled his chest proudly.

"*Noblesse oblige!*" murmured Harold. "It was the motto of the Lion Passant."

"I know that motto well; and what of a lion passant?" inquired Red Rex. "A lion passant is one of the emblems in my own royal coat of arms!"

"Then, Your Majesty has not heard the tale of the Lion Passant?" asked Harold, feigning surprise. "It is one of the best known in our land. You will find your royal lion in the arms of our city of Derrydown; and there is a tale to account for that."

Harold began to smile as if the memory of the tale pleased him.

Red Rex frowned. "It is too late to hear that tale to-night," he murmured.

"Yes, Your Majesty," agreed Harold. "Besides, I cannot tell it by heart. I should have to get the book from our generous library. I can read it better; there is so much in the manner of the writing. It is a pity Your Majesty is in such a hurry to fight, or I might bring that book hither to-morrow and read you the pleasant tale."

The Red King fidgeted. "I am losing time at a terrible rate!" he growled. "Think of what harm I might be doing! When have I wasted hours like this, you wheedling boy?"

"I do not think these hours are wasted. It is war that wastes," said Harold.

"Fudge!" retorted Red Rex; "we must have war. Was that lion a red lion, Harold?"

"A red lion, Your Majesty," nodded Harold.

The Red King grew excited. "I must, then, hear about him!" he cried. "It is my duty.--What ho, there!" he shouted to his men who were making ready to continue the siege. "I have changed my mind. We will not fight for another day. Take this boy back to the city, and proclaim continued truce until he returns to us."

"Your Majesty is wise," said Harold with shining eyes. "I think you will not be sorry to hear the tale of the Lion Passant."

So the crisis was delayed for another day; and Kisington blessed Harold. They made a feast at the poor widow's cottage from presents sent by the Leading Citizens. Richard and Robert sat at the head of the table, one on each side of Harold, and all his other boy and girl friends sat down the sides of the table, and he told them all about his adventure with the besieging King. One and all begged him to let them go with him on the following day. But this, of course, Harold could not promise. He was the only one who could read well enough to charm the War-Lord. They all wished that they had learned to read as well as Harold.

When on the morrow Harold returned to the Red King, this is the story which he read from one of the peaceful books of Kisington--the story of *The Lion Passant*.

X. THE LION PASSANT

A long time ago, in one of the narrowest side-streets of Kisington, stood an old curiosity shop, full of strange things. It was a dark little den inside, so dark that the outer sunshine made the old shopman blink as he stood in the doorway talking with the stranger. The stranger was a Medicine Man, and he had just sold a bottle of his famous Elixir of Life to the old shopkeeper.

"Yes, sir," said the Medicine Man, as he turned to go, "you will find my Magic Elixir all that I claim it to be. It will bring back youth and beauty to the aged. It will give sight to eyes that see not, hearing to deaf ears, speech to the tongue-tied and motion to limbs that have never moved before. It will also cure whooping-cough."

"I hope so," said the old man in an eager voice. He had heard only one word in six of the stranger's talk. "I hope so, for I need it very much. Shall I take it all at once, or--" But already the Medicine Man was halfway down the road, with the gold coin which the old man had given him safe in his deepest pocket. The old man returned into his shop, blinking more than ever, and stumbling over the piled-up rubbish as he went. It was an abominably crowded little room. Each corner, each shelf, each hook in wall or ceiling was occupied. Everything was piled high or filled up with something else.

In the midst of all kinds of curiosities, the Lion Passant stood waiting. He had been waiting there so many years that the Old Curiosity Shop man had quite given up hope that any one would ever come for him. The Lion was very old; older than the shop, older than the old man who kept it, older than anything else in the shop--and that was saying much.

The Lion was cobwebby and scarred; but, notwithstanding, he was a fine figure of a beast. He had been finely carved out of oak and colored a warm gules, though now somewhat faded. He was carved in the attitude of marching along a parti-colored pole of gules and silver. His dexter paw was raised in the air, his red tongue hung out and his tail was curved gracefully over his back. There was something which I cannot exactly describe of grand and dignified about the Lion Passant,--what the books call a "decayed gentility."



HE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY TALKING WITH THE STRANGER

[Illustration: HE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY TALKING WITH THE STRANGER]

The old man stumbled and blinked his way toward the door at the rear of the shop. He was eager to try the Elixir of Life and become young again, and he hurried faster than was wise in the shadowy labyrinth. Just as he was opposite the Lion Passant, he caught his foot in a sprawling chair and stumbled forward, with both arms stretched out to save himself. Away flew the bottle of Elixir, *smash!* against the head of the Lion Passant. The glass shivered into a thousand pieces, and the precious golden drops went trickling down over the carved beast, over the table, onto the floor, where it made a dusty pool about the feet of a cracked china cat.

"Oh, me! Oh, me!" groaned the old man. "All my precious youth wasted, and no money left to buy more! Oh, me! What an unlucky day it is!" And he stumbled out to tell his wife all about it. Now, as soon as he had left the shop, strange things began to happen there.

"Marry, come up!" exclaimed the Lion, licking his red tongue. "I am a-weary of this. My leg is asleep." And he set down the dexter paw, which he had been holding in that position for four hundred years or more.

"Wow!" cried the China Cat from the floor. "My cracks are growing together again! I believe I am as good as new!" And she arched her back and yawned.

The Lion lashed his tail once, to be sure that he could really do it, and looked about the shop in disgust. "I must away!" he said.

"Oh!" cried the Cat, lazily, beginning to lick her paw, as if she had always been doing so since the discovery of China. "You are so restless! Where are you going?"

The Lion stepped gingerly down from his striped pole to the table, and from there to the floor. As he did so, he seemed to increase in size, so that by the time he had reached the shop door he was as large as an ordinary lion. "I am going to seek *Them*," said the Lion, with dignity. "I am, as you see, a Lion Passant, the crest of a noble house. Many years I have been separated from my people. I have waited for Them to come for me. Every time the shop-bell tinkled it has waked an echo of hope in my heart. But They do not come; I must, then, go to Them." He sighed deeply.

"How will you know where to find them?" asked the Cat, respectfully.

"I shall seek Them in the halls of the mighty," said the Lion proudly. "They were of the noblest in the land, I remember."

"By what name shall you know them?" asked the Cat again, who was inquisitive.

The Lion became thoughtful. "The name?" he repeated. "The name? I have forgot the name. But I was the crest that They bore in battle, the figure on their shields, the carving above their hearths."

"Yes, but times have changed, folk say," objected the Cat. "How shall you know your people among the New Ones?"

"I shall recognize Them," said the Lion confidently. "I shall know Them, the proudest, the mightiest, the bravest, and most fair. Besides, is there not the family tradition? Once, in the far ages before even I was carved, the first knight of our line had an adventure with a lion; hence my figure upon Their crest. I know not the tale complete; but this I know--that from that time on, no one of Them has been able to see a lion, to speak or hear the name, without sneezing thrice. So it was in that day, so it has been ever since."

"That, indeed, is something definite," yawned the Cat, as the Lion stalked out into the sunshine. "Well, I'm glad I have no tradition but one of comfort." And she curled herself up on a piece of ancient gold brocade.

So the Lion went forth to seek his people. He had not gone far before he overtook the Medicine Man, who had sold no Elixir since leaving the Curiosity Shop. The Lion padded up behind him so silently that the man did not hear him until he was quite close; then the Lion gave a gentle roar.

"Abracadabra!" cried the man, turning pale and shaking till his teeth rattled. He was so ignorant that he did not know a Heraldic device when he saw one. But he had seen pictures in books and knew that this brilliant red beast was no ordinary lion.

"Kind youth," said the Lion grandly, lifting his paw and curving his tail in the old way, "I owe you much. Your Magic Elixir has given me life and motion. If there is aught I can do for you, I shall be glad."

The man's face was full of wonder. "You owe much to the Elixir?" he cried. "Oh, pray explain!"

So the Lion explained. When he had finished the simple story, the Medicine Man's face was illumined with a great idea. "It is magnificent!" he cried. "It is beyond my wildest dreams. For, to tell you the truth--but why tell the truth? This justifies me, certainly. Now, if you would but go with me as a Living Testimonial?"

The Lion bowed. He did not like the idea, for it threatened notoriety; but he felt a sense of duty. "*Noblesse oblige*," he murmured. "It is Our motto. Nothing can hurt my pride, if it has a foundation upon truth. I will go with you until I feel that my debt is paid."

"It is well!" said the man. And they journeyed together. Naturally, the appearance of a warm crimson lion caused considerable excitement in the streets of Kisington. Folk crowded around him and the Medicine Man, and when they heard his story, they bought eagerly of the Elixir. "He is the crest of a noble house come to life!" they whispered among themselves. "What noble house?" The Lion listened eagerly for the answer; but heads were shaken in reply. No one recognized the device.

There was one thing which annoyed the Lion. This was the tendency of the Medicine Man to exaggerate the powers of his Elixir. As time went on, he began to add the oddest stories to the one he told about the Lion. Was that not wonderful enough? The Lion was astonished, shocked, outraged. He protested, but in vain. The habit of exaggeration,

once contracted, becomes a terrible master. The Medicine Man seemed unable longer to speak the truth.

One morning when he was telling his wicked lies to a company of trusting women and children, the Lion rose from the center of the eager circle and stalked away from the Medicine Man. "*Noblesse oblige*," he said. And they never saw each other again. I dare say the seller of the Elixir and his descendants have been doing business in the same way ever since.

Now, the Lion journeyed for many months through the Kingdom without finding a trace of his family. He scanned carefully the entrance to every great palace and castle. He caused some confusion in traffic by dashing out to examine the crests emblazoned upon the panels of the chariots which passed him on the road. He even halted foot-passengers to inquire, courteously, if he might look more closely at certain devices upon chain or brooch or bangle which had caught his eye. Especially, he surprised with his attentions several persons who had sneezed violently in his presence. But in vain. He failed to find the clue he sought.

Folk would fain have helped him in his search; for his manners were gentle and gracious, and his bearing unmistakably noble. Folk liked him. Many would have been glad to prove themselves, through him, scions of that great family which he undoubtedly represented. But all their efforts to sneeze at the right time were fruitless. They went away crestfallen before his reproachful gaze. Sometimes, the Lion would spy a lovely face, or a manly figure, which appealed strangely to him. "Surely," he would say to himself, "surely, this noble-looking person is one of Them. Something seems to tell me so!" And he would assume his heraldic pose, with dexter paw lifted and eloquent tail curved high, waiting wistfully for the sneeze of recognition to follow. Sometimes, alas! came, instead, a laugh of scorn, or an unkind word. He learned that noble figures and lovely faces do not always adorn like natures.

Well, many months passed by. Footsore and weary, the Lion still traveled upon his quest. He felt very old and lonesome, homesick for his marble halls, hopeless of finding them. He came, one noon, to an inn on the outskirts of Derrydown Village. Over the door of the inn a signboard creaked and flapped in the wind. The Lion looked up. He beheld upon the sign the picture of a red lion! The traveler was greatly moved. "Surely," he thought, "this must be the arms of some great family in the neighborhood--perhaps my ancestral castle is hereabout!" But when he explained things to the Landlord, that worthy dashed his hopes once more. No family with such a device was known in those parts.

"However," said the Landlord, eyeing the Lion appraisingly, "I have an idea! If you will remain with me for some hours, I will show you something. The Prince and his train are to pass here on their way to the Ancient Wood, where they will hunt. In the company will be all the grandest nobles of the Kingdom. Surely, some of your family will be among them. Here is a splendid viewpoint! Do you remain beside my door in your grand attitude. You will see and be seen. If your folks are there, you will be sneezed at; which is what you want. It will be, beside, a grand advertisement for me--a real red lion guarding the Red Lion Inn!"

The Lion agreed. That night, when the Prince's cavalcade passed through Derrydown, huge and red, with lifted paw and curved tail, the beast stood at the door of the Red Lion Inn. Many stared in wonder. Many paused to inquire. Many entered and partook of the dainties which Mine Host had prepared against this very happening. The Prince himself paused, pointed, and asked a question. The Lion's heart leaped wildly! There was a curious expression on the Prince's face; it seemed drawn and twisted--was he about to sneeze? Alas! No. With a harsh laugh, the Prince gave the Lion a cut with his whip and bounded past; after him, the last of his followers. The Lion's skin smarted and his heart writhed. He kept his temper with difficulty; but--it was the Prince. *Noblesse oblige*.

When they were out of sight, his head drooped. There was no one in all that gallant company who belonged to him. But the Landlord had reaped a rich harvest from the Lion's presence. When once more the village was empty of nobility, he came to the Lion, rubbing his hands, contentedly. "Old fellow," he said, "I have had profit from you. Now, I will give you supper and a bed in my stable for the night. And why should we not make this arrangement permanent? You see, your folks are gone. The family has run out and no one any longer bears or recognizes the crest. You are an orphan; but you can still be of use to me. Why not become the supporter of my inn?"

"Gramercy!" quoth the Lion, with dignity. "I will accept the supper, for I am very hungry. But as for sleeping in the stable, that I cannot do! I prefer a bed on one of the fragrant haycocks in your meadow."

"To that you are welcome, if you please," said the Landlord graciously. "And, to-morrow, we will talk again of the other matter."

So the Lion had his supper, and then went wearily to sleep on a haycock in the thymy meadow. He was sad and disillusioned, and the Landlord's words had taken away his last hope. He began to wish that he had never come alive.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will go back to the Old Curiosity Shop, and see if the old man can un-medicine me. For a crest without a family is even a more forlorn thing than a family without a crest!"

The Lion awakened with a start. "*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!*" sounded in his ear. He sprang to his feet and looked around. Opposite him stood a little girl in a ragged gown, with a basket on her arm, staring at him with big, round eyes. She did not seem in the least afraid. The Lion was annoyed. He had been dreaming of his noble family, and it was very disappointing to be awakened by this beggar with her mocking "*Ker-chew!*"

"Away with you, child!" he said. "I am weary and peevish. Do you not know better than to awaken a sleeping lion?"

"*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!*" The child sneezed again so violently that she nearly fell into the haycock.

The Lion was agitated. "What can this mean?" he thought. "It must be an accident which has caused her to sneeze at the word. I will try again." He began firmly, "When a lion--" But again he was interrupted by the violent sneezing of the little maid as soon as the word had passed his teeth.

The Lion shivered. Could this really be? Was it possible that this vagrant was an offshoot of the noble family which he had been seeking? If so, he must be in no hurry to claim relationship! The child put her hand into her basket, smiling.

"Good Lion," she said, "*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!* I like you. Will you have a bit of bread?" And she held out to him a fragment of her luncheon.

The Lion was touched. He did not like bread, but he could not refuse a child, and he ate it painfully. "What is your name?" he asked at length.

"Claribel," she answered.

"Your other name?" he persisted.

"Claribel," she repeated. "Just Claribel--that is all."

"Where do you live?" asked the Lion.

The child pointed over her shoulder. "Near the Ancient Wood, yonder," she said. "I came to Derrydown to the market. I have sold my dolls; now I am going home with the money."

"Dolls?" queried the Lion, interested in spite of himself. "You make dolls?"

Claribel nodded. "Rag dolls," she said. "My mother made dresses for the villagers. Now I make dolls out of the pieces in the old rag-bag. It buys me bread."

The Lion's heart was softened. "You are so little, Claribel!" he exclaimed. "Have you no one to take care of you?"

The child shook her head. "My mother is dead. I am alone in the world," she said.

"But have you no relatives--no one of noble kin in some palace, some castle?" the Lion cried eagerly.

The child laughed. "I know of no castles," she said; "no kindred at all. I never had any, I think."

The Lion gave a groan. "I will go back to the Curiosity Shop!" he said whimsically. "Good-bye, child!" He started away. But, turning for a last look, he saw Claribel, with her eyes full of tears.

"Do not go!" cried the child. "I like you so much, dear Lion--*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!*"

The Lion's heart melted. "You are so little!" he said, "too little to be going on these roads alone. I will see you home." So they took the long road together, the child skipping happily beside the Lion, with her hand in his red mane. And the farther they walked together, the more the Lion liked Claribel, who sneezed whenever she spoke his name, but looked at him with kindly eyes.

They came at last to the hut where Claribel lived alone. It was a tiny cottage on the edge of the wood. The Lion looked at it long and hard. It was so different from the castle he had hoped to find! The child pulled him by the mane, and he went in. The hut was very poor, but spotlessly neat and clean.

Claribel led the Lion to the fireplace and began to blow meager sparks with the bellows. "I will keep you warm and give you bread to eat. You shall stay and live with me and be my dear big watch-dog!" she said.

The Lion sighed. But he could say nothing; he was so tender-hearted. "I will run away in the night," he promised himself. And then, on the mantel-stone above the fire, he spied a roughly-scratched shield. On the shield was the small figure of a lion passant, with dexter paw raised and curved tail. Below it was scrawled the motto, "*Noblesse oblige*."

Claribel saw him staring at it with big eyes, and began to laugh and sneeze. "Yes, my mother loved it," she said, "and I love it, though it always makes me sneeze just as you do. That was why I liked you from the beginning. Some day I shall learn what the words mean; then I shall be rich and happy."

The Lion did not run away that night. He slept with his nose on his paws beside the fire and dreamed grand dreams of castles and fair ladies; of gold-broidered banners on which *he* was emblazoned in crimson glory, and of the battle-cry, "*Noblesse oblige!*" echoing all about him.

But in the morning he was awakened, for the second time, by the sound of three soft little sneezes. "Excuse me!" said Claribel's dear little voice; "I tried not to, but I could not help it. I was so afraid you would not be here when I woke up. It might all have been a dream. But as soon as I saw you, I had to sneeze;--it is very odd!" She laughed and laughed, and the Lion roared in sympathy.

"I shall not go away," he said. "I want to be a real Supporter, not a heraldic one. I shall stay and try to help you learn the meaning of the motto over the fireplace."

"Oh, I am so happy!" cried Claribel, clapping her hands. "Already, I have thought of a way you can help me very much. I have always wanted to make a lion doll--*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!* But I never before had any lion--*Ker-chew! Ker-chew! Ker-chew!*--to copy, except that flat one over the fireplace. Now I can shape them after you and sell them in the market, and we shall grow rich, oh, so rich!"

And so it befell in the days that came thereafter. For Claribel's clever fingers snipped and pieced and seamed together the bits of cloth, until she had a lion so like her new friend that she almost sneezed her head off when he was finished. And, lo! She had invented a new kind of toy, which was speedily the rage over the whole kingdom.

In time, the making of lion-dolls became the great industry of Derrydown, whereof the people had much profit, especially Claribel, whose idea it was. And the folk of the town loved her dearly, because she had brought prosperity to them all. And they were devoted to the Lion, who went to and fro among them with gracious dignity, serving Claribel and serving them, so busy that he had no time to worry about escutcheons.

No family so poor but it had its little lion of carefully pieced rags, which it fondly prized; not merely because it was a quaint toy and indestructible, but because it was to them a token of their noble, friendly beast and of the motto which he had taught them. (But they had taught him many things, also.) And in latter days a crimson lion became the seal of the Guild of Toy-Makers in that shire. And a new tradition began to grow about the Lion Passant, concerned entirely with his service to the people.

So, in seeking Them, the Lion found himself. And he lived happy ever after.

XI. HOPE

"Dear me!" said Red Rex, when Harold had finished this story. "I never saw one of those lion-dolls which your tale mentions. I would that I had one to present to my little girl."

"Have you a little girl?" exclaimed Harold in surprise. "Why, I had no idea that you were the father of little children."

"Well, why not?" asked the Red King crossly. "I have a dear little girl of seven, and her name is Hope."

"Oh, if you have a dear little girl of your own, how can you make war on a city where other dear little girls live?" cried Harold. "I cannot understand!"

"No, you cannot understand, because you are only a child yourself," said the Red King. "When you are grown up you will feel differently."

"Your Majesty, I do not think so," declared Harold, shaking his head decidedly. "When I have learned all the books in our library, and seen all the countries there are to see, and done all the interesting things there are to do, there may be

time to think about war. But these other matters will keep me busy all my life, I should think."

"Rubbish!--Can one purchase a lion-doll in your city?" asked Red Rex, changing the subject uneasily.

"Yes," said Harold. "Every child in the city owns a lion-doll. Your Majesty ought to visit the great factory at Derrydown, near where Claribel lived,--where the dolls are still made. It is close by the Ancient Wood, where there was such good hunting, and where David had his adventure with the Old Gnome, you know."

"No, I do not know the Old Gnome," retorted the Red King peevishly. "How do you expect me to know all the legends of your precious country? We know nothing about this Kingdom in my own warlike land."

"Then why should you want to fight us?" asked Harold. "If you had taken the trouble to know us better, you could then judge whether we deserve to be fought. But I think you would like our people if you knew them."

Again Red Rex changed the subject. "What of the hunting in this Ancient Wood?" he asked. "When I have taken your city, and after it the rest of your Kingdom, I will go there to hunt."

"There was good hunting," said Harold, "once upon a time. In those days one had to beware the wicked Gnomes of the Great Fear. That was why the Old One fled."

"What about this 'Old One,' and this 'Great Fear'?" asked the Red King. "I suppose that is another story which you want to read to me."

"Nay; I do not care to read the tale unless Your Majesty wishes it," said Harold with dignity. "But if Your Majesty desires a lion-doll for your little Princess, I can get one for you and return with it and the story at the same time. There is a dear little girl in the story. I think your daughter must be very like her."

The Red King gnawed his red mustache and frowned forbiddingly at Harold. At last he slapped his knee and gave a grunt of assent. "Well," said he, "fetch me the doll and the book. I may as well give my soldiers another day's holiday. But in sooth, this has gone on too long! To-morrow's tale must positively be the last. I hope there will be much fighting in it. Your tales are something too peaceful for my taste. Look, now! Your city must be destroyed in short order, because I have set my heart on it."

"Will Your Majesty promise me one other thing, beside the truce, till my return?" begged Harold, looking up in his face with a winning smile.

Red Rex frowned and tried to look very wicked and cruel.

"Well, what is it now?" he growled.

"Promise me, Your Majesty, for the sake of your little dear daughter, whose name is Hope, that when you fight again you will spare that part of the city where the schoolhouse stands. Robert and Richard and all my friends are there."

"What part of the city is that?" asked Red Rex sullenly.

"It is the west part," answered Harold, pointing in the opposite direction from that in which he had declared the Wonder-Garden to have been.

"Very well; I promise," said the Red King. "*Noblesse oblige.*"

Harold had no difficulty in getting a lion-doll for the Red King. Indeed, when they knew for what purpose it was intended, and what Harold had gained by his clever winning of the promise from Red Rex, every child in town wanted to send his or her lion-doll to the little princess, whose name was Hope.

They came to Harold's home from all parts of the city, bringing their dolls, until the High Street was crowded. But the Librarian and the Lord Mayor were unwilling to accept any of these, for none of them was quite fresh and new. Most of them had an arm or a leg dislocated, or bald spots on their yellow fur; which proved how fond the children were of these noble pets, how much they hugged and fondled and frayed them.

The Lord Mayor himself went to the largest shop in Kisington and in the name of the children of Kisington purchased a royal lion-doll, nearly as big as a real baby lion, with a patent voice inside which made it cry "*Gr-r! Gr-r!*" when you twisted its luxuriant tail. And this was to be the toy of the little Princess Hope.

With this wonderful toy under one arm and a basket under the other, which contained among other things a green-and-gold volume from the library, Harold kissed his mother and went once more to the camp of Red Rex. He found the monarch there alone, save for his bodyguard. His soldiers had gone to enjoy themselves in the neighboring woods, glad indeed of their continued holiday.

When Red Rex saw the great lion-doll he clapped his hands on his knees and roared with laughter. And it was the first time Harold had heard the War-Lord laugh,--a terrible sound! But when Harold showed how to make the lion itself roar, by screwing its tail, the Red King fell over on his back and nearly died of laughing.

"Oh! Oh!" he cried, wiping the tears from his bronze cheeks. "How the little Princess will squeal when I twist that lion's tail! How she will laugh when she hears the creature roar!" And he went off in another fit.

Harold stood by grinning and saying nothing.

The Red King took out a huge purse from his girdle. "And now, what shall I pay you for this wonderful toy?" he asked. "I suppose it is worth many golden crowns?"

"It is worth your promise to the children of Kisington, Your Majesty," said Harold. "It is a gift from them to your little Princess whose name is Hope. The children hope you will remember your promise to them."

"I am a King. I do not forget," said Red Rex haughtily.

"Nevertheless, Kings do forget sometimes," murmured Harold. "But this lion will remind you of your kingly crest, and of the Lion Passant whose motto you know so well."

"True," said Red Rex, and he looked at the lion-doll earnestly.

"And now, shall I read to Your Majesty the story of which we spoke?" asked Harold, opening his basket and taking out the green-and-gold-volume.

"Begin," commanded the Red King, settling himself cozily on his back, with his head lying on the soft fur of the new lion-doll. "But unless there is a deal of fighting in it I shall go to sleep. I am very weary."

Thereupon Harold began to read in his best manner the gentle tale of *The Hermit Gnome*.

XII: THE HERMIT GNOME

Long, long ago, in the farthest corner of the Kingdom, was a mountain covered with a pathless forest. Human folk never came this way. The shadows of the forest were gloomy, and the sounds of the forest were strange, and the name of the forest was full of dread. Men called it the Great Fear. For it was here that the Gnomes lived and did their wicked dealings.

The Gnomes were ugly and deformed and black; no larger than the Elf-People, but instead of Fairy kindness their minds plotted evil. They lived in the hollows and cracks of the mountain. Some of them camped out under the great, poisonous toadstools which they loved, as they loved everything dangerous to man. And all day long they dreamed, all night long they wrought mischief. They were at the bottom of many of the evil happenings in Kisington and elsewhere. For they could wreak their evil magic from a long distance.

Now, of the race of Gnomes there was one apart. He was a queer little fellow, the oldest, the ugliest, and the crookedest of them all. His face was wrinkled like a brown walnut; and his little misshapen body was bent under a hump which was the biggest part of him. But his mind was not evil. He was quite harmless and mild and lazy, and he hated the dire doings of his fellows who would neither mind their own business nor leave him to his.

For centuries things went on from bad to worse in the Great Fear. At last the Old Gnome could bear it no longer.

"I am very old and tired," he said. "It is almost time for me to curl up in the long sleep. But I cannot sleep here! I should have bad dreams. I will leave the Great Fear, which owes none of its name to me. I will go and become a Hermit, as men say."

So spoke the queer little Gnome. And one bright noon when all the other Gnomes were dreaming with shut eyes,--for they hated the daylight,--he stumbled away as fast as his crooked little legs could take him south from the Great Fear. Now, beyond this was a meadow, which was the borderland across which human folk dared not approach the haunt of

the Gnomes. And beyond the meadow again was an Ancient Wood, which, though he did not know it, was on the outskirts of Derrydown. Thither the Old Gnome betook himself, and found it very good indeed. Like the Great Fear it was dense and shadowy and cool. In places it was very dark. But there was scarcely a spot whence you could not, when the sun shone, catch speckled gleams of gold upon the moss; or, when the moon beamed, spy a wealth of filtered silver. For the Ancient Wood was intersected hither and yon by paths of the woodchoppers. And sun and moon love to peer down through the man-made windows in the green roof of trees and beautify the ways which human feet have trod.

The Old Gnome peered and pried about the Ancient Wood, seeking a hermitage. At last he came upon the hollow stump of a tree, hidden in a clump of feathery fern. It was thatched with green lichens without, and carpeted within in a mossy pattern of green and gray and scarlet. Little hard mushrooms, growing shelf-wise one above another, made a winding staircase up to the doorway. Portieres of finest spider-wrought tapestry swayed before door and window and draped the dark-hued walls; while across one corner hung a hammock of heavier web, the very thing for a weary Gnome's resting-place.

As soon as the Old Gnome spied this stump he cried,—"Ha! This is the spot for me! Here will I make my hermitage. And when the time comes for my long sleep, here will I rest forever." For you must know that the Gnomes do not die, being immortal like the Fays; but unlike them growing older and dryer and drowsier until they are fit only for eternal sleep.

The Old Gnome was soon at home in his cell; and very peaceful and cozy he found it. For several days he lay and swung in his hammock, growing comfortably drowsier and drowsier, too lazy even to gather berries for his food. He would soon sleep without waking; and by and by the moss and lichens would grow over him, too, and he would become a silent part of the Ancient Wood,—a little green mound such as you yourself may have seen many a time.

But one day while he was snoring, with his wrinkled hands folded peacefully on his little chest, he heard a sound which made him open his eyes with a snap. It was the noise of an axe chopping. The Old Gnome sat up nervously and peered through his knot-hole window. A woodcutter was at work at the very next tree.

"Hello!" said the Old Gnome, staring open-eyed; "That must be a *man*!" For this was the first mortal he had ever seen.

Forgetting his drowsiness, he climbed up his staircase and peered closely at the creature from behind a curtain of fern.

It was a strong young man, who wielded the axe heartily against the giant oak. The Old Gnome watched him curiously, admiring the lithe sweep of his arm and the rhythmic bend of his body.

"They are goodly folk, these men!" he sighed, looking down on his own misshapen frame. "How can those evil brothers of mine care so much to vex and trouble them?" And he turned over and tried to go to sleep; but the sound of the axe kept knocking at something within him.

Suddenly, the man made a mis-stroke. The axe slipped and came down upon his sandaled foot. With a cry he dropped the axe and fell to the ground, lying very still and white.

"Ha!" frowned the Old Gnome, "the work of my brothers! Some one of them must have charmed that axe. But how strange he looks! Doubtless it is pain, which I do not know. Ah, pain must be something very sore!" And he felt a throb of pity.

He hobbled to the spot where the woodman lay. Across his leg was a deep gash and on the moss were drops of crimson. The Old Gnome looked at them wonderingly, for the Gnomes are bloodless. "How beautiful the color!" he cried, and he touched his finger to one of the drops. Immediately a thrill went through his cold body, and he seemed to feel a fresh draught of life. New impulses came to him.

"These men!" cried he, "how weak they are, after all! How greatly they need aid. I can help him now,—even I!" And his ugly little face wrinkled into the first grin it had known for centuries.

He called to mind his long-forgotten skill in herbs, and hunted in the Ancient Wood for certain plants of healing. One he crushed and laid upon the wound to stanch the blood. Others he set out in the ground close under the young man's nose, so that they seemed to be growing naturally there.

Presently the woodman opened his eyes and stared about him dazedly, but the Old Gnome had hidden himself. As he gained strength, the woodman tore a strip of linen and bound it upon his leg. Then, sniffing the aromatic herbs which grew conveniently at hand, he plucked a bunch with which to make a lotion, and with it limped painfully from the wood.

The Old Gnome watched him go with curious eyes. "I wonder if he will return," he said to himself. And he decided not to sleep until he should know how it fared with the young man.

It was not many days thereafter before the woodman returned to the forest. The lotion had been wondrous helpful, and had healed him more quickly than he had dared to hope; for he was eager to be at work again. Limping slightly, for the wound had been a sore one, David began work anew.

Day by day the Old Gnome watched him, half jealously at first. But the more he watched the more he liked the ways of the intruder. The woodman sang at his work; his eyes sparkled and his lips smiled as if with pleasant thoughts.

The Old Gnome found himself smiling too, unseen behind the fern. "I will not sleep yet awhile," he said, "for there is work to do."

In the night when the Ancient Wood was silent he toiled long and heartily at the crafts wherein he was wise. And the woodman tasted the result. For the Old Gnome made the berries to ripen more quickly in that glade. He caused delicious mushrooms to spring up all about. He coaxed a spring of fair water from the bed where it slumbered underground and made it gush into a little basin where David came upon it gladly. He caused medicinal herbs to grow, and certain fragrant plants that drove away the mischievous insects sent by his brother Gnomes. All this the Old One did while David was away; and the young man did not know. But he was very happy and busy. Now, one day the young man finished his woodcutting, and lo! he had made a clearing in the Ancient Wood large enough for a tiny house; but the Gnome did not know this. David looked about him at the spring and the flowers and the berries of the pleasant place which the Old Gnome had prepared, and said, "It is good!" Forthwith of the logs which he had felled he began to build the house itself.

When the Old Gnome saw what David was about to do, indeed he was angry! For he said,--

"Oho! I did not bargain for this. This is my wood! I want no neighbor,--though a merry visitor was not unwelcome. What is to become of my solitude, of my hermitage? And how am I to sleep, with another restless creature living close by forever and ever?"

For several days he sulked in his cell and would not work. But finally the merry sound of the young man's whistle keeping time to the wheeze of saw and the knock of hammer made the Old Gnome smile again, and he said to himself,--

"Well, what of it? True, I shall have a neighbor for good and all. But he will be alone and speechless, since there is no one with whom to chatter; and he will never trouble me. Let him build here if he will."

David builded his house; and a pretty little place it was, for he was a careful workman and his heart was in it. When all was done he laid the axe aside, hid the hammer and saw, put on fine new clothes and went away across the meadow, whistling happily as a bird. It was the Gnome's first chance to see the inside of a man's dwelling, and he lost no time in going there, you may be sure. He found many things to wonder at, for naturally it was very different from a Gnome's hermitage. But nothing surprised him more than the wreaths of flowers which David had hung over door and window and fireplace, over bed and chairs and table, so that the place was like a fragrant bower prepared for a beloved guest.

The Old Gnome shook his head. "Strange folk, these men!" said he. "Why, and why, and why?" But he brushed up the sawdust, which David had forgotten in a corner; and he re-piled the kindlings on the hearth, which David had hastily put together for a fire. He neatly spread the bed, which David had clumsily prepared; and he made tidy the kitchen which, in his eagerness to don his new clothes, David had quite overlooked. Then the Old One went back to his cell and lay down in his hammock, chuckling. "How surprised the fellow will be!" he said.

At night the Old Gnome heard voices in the wood, and sprang up from his hammock angrily. "More of them?" he cried. "Am I to hear human prattle around me, after all?" And he peered from the balcony of his cell with eyes almost as fierce as those of his brother Gnomes in the Great Fear. He stared and stared at what he saw. For the young woodcutter was returning in his fine clothes, and with him was a fair maiden, also in holiday gear. Both looked very happy and smiling.

They entered the open door, and the Old Gnome watched to see David's surprise when he should discover how matters had improved in his absence. But the woodman was thinking so much about his pretty new wife that he had eyes for nothing else. However, she looked about her with surprise and pleasure, and the Old Gnome heard her say to her husband,--

"Ah, David! What a tidy housekeeper you are! Or is it some Fairy who has made the house so neat and ready for me? Surely, no one but a beautiful, kind Fairy would sweep the floor so spotless and make so smooth the bed. Oh, I am glad

we have a Fairy friend!"

What David replied the Old Gnome did not hear. He was filled with wondering delight. A Fairy! The sweet little thing had thought it must be a beautiful Fairy who had done this work! The Old Gnome looked whimsically down at his bandy legs and ugly body, and sighed and smiled.

"Ah, if I were but a Fairy!" he said. "Fairies are beautiful and good; they live forever young and gay, and there is no end to the kindness they may do. But I!"--he sighed again,--"a Fairy, indeed!" And he hobbled away to his cell, thinking kindly of the little wife who of all the world had spoken the first word of praise for him; and of the strong young man who loved her.

Now happy days followed in the little house in the Ancient Wood; happy days, too, for the Old Gnome in his hermit's cell. For he was busy all the time doing kind deeds for his new neighbors; without their knowing it. Sometimes he set the table for the morning meal. Sometimes he helped in the churning and made the butter come quickly. Sometimes he blew the fire like a little bellows; a hundred and one things he found to do about the cottage. And it was his reward to hear the young wife say,--"Oh! David, the good Fairy has been here again. What a dear, good, beautiful Fairy it must be!"

The Old Gnome was very careful to keep his ugly face out of sight, you may be sure.

Days went by, and the Old Gnome was ever more and more busy in the hut of the young people, so that really I do not know how they would have done without him. He was scarcely ever in the hermitage nowadays, except for a few hours' sleep by daylight; and he scarcely found time to look after his own affairs, such as they were, so little of a hermit was he become! But every night the young wife set out a bowl of curds and cream for the beautiful Fairy who helped her; and sometimes David left half his luncheon of bread and cheese in the woods, for his unknown friend. The Old Gnome was growing fat and merry because of this good fare; but he seemed as little like a Fairy as ever.

The months went by; and one day a surprising thing happened. The Old Gnome, sleeping in his hammock, was wakened by a strange, shrill little cry. He sat up and listened wonderingly. It was broad daylight, but at the risk of being seen he ran as fast as he could, and climbing up the vine of eglantine peered in at the chamber window whence came the cry. And there lying on the young wife's bed was a wee pink baby! The Old Gnome looked at it long and earnestly; and the more he peered the more he liked the look of this newest little neighbor.

"It is as beautiful as a Fairy!" he thought. "I must be good to it, and perhaps it will grow to love me."

From that time the Old Gnome had no rest at all. Unseen--wrapped in a cloak of shadows--he sat for hours while the baby was asleep, fanning the flies away from its little face. When it was restless, he kept the clothes over its tiny feet, drawing them up as fast as the baby kicked them away. And when the young wife came, she would say,

"See, David! Our Fairy has been watching over our baby, just as it watched over us. Oh, now I feel quite safe from those wicked Gnomes who live in the Great Fear!" At this the Old Gnome would chuckle from the corner where he lurked, and where only the baby's bright eyes could pierce the cloak of shadows. It was a great day for the Old Gnome when first the baby smiled at him. It was a still greater day when she held out her little arms to him, and the Old One knew that they were friends. Soon she was lisping words in her shrill voice; and one of the first things she tried to say was "Fairy friend." She looked straight at the Old Gnome when she did it, and a thrill went through him at the words. She saw him; yet she thought he was a Fairy! Poor little mite! He dreaded the day when she should know the difference. But the baby seemed to love him more and more every day, and the Old Gnome's cell became her favorite playhouse.

When she grew old enough to talk, she and her mother spoke often of the Fairy friend; and the little girl told strange tales of his doings when no one but herself was about, for still he shyly crept into his cloak of shadows when the grown-up folk were near. When the mother asked what like the Fairy was, she shook her head. "I cannot tell!" she would answer. "Not like you, Mother dear; but beautiful also, and good and merry."

Now, the woodcutter's wife was a very good woman, but she was curious. The more she heard about the friendly, mysterious Fairy whom her child alone had seen, the more she longed to see him for herself. This was not kind; for she knew he did not wish to be seen. But she was sorely tempted. One day she heard the little one out in the Ancient Wood laughing and talking merrily with some one. "It is the Fairy!" said the mother, and she picked up her toes and crept noiselessly to spy upon them.

There was the baby sitting on a bed of moss; and there, plainly seen without his shadow-cloak, was the Old Gnome,

turning somersaults for her and dancing on his crooked legs to make her laugh.

But the mother did not laugh at what she saw! She burst out of the bushes with a cry and seized the baby in her arms. "My child!" she screamed. "Oh, the wicked Gnome! Help, David, help!"

Her cry summoned the woodcutter, who came running up, very pale, with his axe in his hand. "What is this?" he asked. "Who is injuring my child?"

Sobbing, his wife pointed to where the Old Gnome cowered, blinking, caught at last in the sunlight outside his cell.

"A Gnome!" cried David in horror. "One of the pests from the Great Fear! What are you doing here, Monster? How shall we pay you to go away and leave us in peace?"

"I will go away," said the Old Gnome humbly, "though I belong not to the Great Fear, and I came here before you. My wish is not evil you-ward. It is I who am a friend. But I will go." With a kind look at the baby he turned away.

But the baby struggled down from her mother's arms and ran after him crying,--"No, no! Do not go away, dear, beautiful Fairy! Mother! Father! It is the friend whom we all love. I have heard you praise him. Do not send him away."

"The Fairy!" cried the father, running to capture her.

"It is no Fairy, child!" said the mother. "It is one of the ugly, wicked Gnomes who do only evil. Let him go!"

But the child struggled and shrieked. "He shall not go! It is the beautiful Fairy who helps us. I have watched him doing all the kind things you say the Fairy does, and I love him dearly. He shall not go!" The father and mother looked at each other, then at the shrinking Gnome. "Is this true?" they demanded, "or is this some wicked Gnome-trick which has bewitched our child?"

The Old Gnome bowed meekly. "Alas! I am no Fairy, as I fain would be," he confessed. "But I loved to hear you call me so. I am a Gnome; but I have done no evil, only good, so far as my skill went. The happy days are over now. The child knows the truth. No one will ever again think me beautiful or good. I had forgotten how old I was; I had almost grown to feel young again in the merry, busy days of service. But now the time has come indeed for me to lie down in the long sleep. I will go away and find a new cell, and curl me up in a happy dream which will last forever."

Once more he turned to go. The father and mother were silent.

But the baby burst into violent weeping. "Oh, he is beautiful, beautiful, the kind, dear Fairy! Do you not see how beautiful he is, Mother, Father?" she cried.

The Old Gnome turned and looked at her, smiling sadly and shaking his head with a tender light in his eyes. "No, no!" he said, "not beautiful; only loving!"

"But yes!" cried the mother, staring amazedly. "Think, David, of all he has done for us. He does, he does look beautiful to me!"

David stared also. "From the day my foot was wounded," he said, "only good has befallen me here. And if he has done it, the kind little fellow!--Yes, yes! He does, indeed, look beautiful to me!"

"Ah!" cried the child, laughing and clapping her hands. "I was right! I knew he was our kind Fairy, all the time. If he is good, he is no Gnome. It is only a name. If he seems beautiful to us, then he is beautiful, indeed. He is a Fairy! He shall live here with us and we will love him forever."

And lo, as she spoke, the Old Gnome looked wonderingly down at his body. He seemed to have changed. He was no longer crooked and old, but light and airy and beautiful. Over his head arched gauzy wings and his dress sparkled like dew. Also he felt young and full of power to do things he had never done before.

"I believe I am a Fairy!" he cried joyously. "And I may live and love and serve forever, and never be tired or sleepy!"

So it fell out as they all wished. And the hermit's cell became a Fairy palace.

XIII: HAROLD'S LUNCHEON

When Harold finished reading the story of the Hermit Gnome to the Red King, he looked up to see how his listener had enjoyed the tale. And lo and behold! Red Rex was fast asleep! He lay on his back in the afternoon sunshine, and a noise came from his half-open mouth rather like the *Gr-r!* of the lion-doll, when its tail was screwed.

"Well!" said Harold to himself; "I cannot return to the city until His Majesty wakes up; for that would not be polite, and his bodyguard would not allow it. I may as well make myself comfortable and be patient. The longer he sleeps the longer time we shall have in safety to wait for help from our King."

Harold opened the little covered basket to replace the green-and-gold volume from which he had just been reading, and in doing so caught sight of the luncheon which his thoughtful mother had packed, in the fear that he might be hungry ere his return. He took out the folded napkin and peered eagerly below. There was a huge wedge of apple pie! Harold licked his lips and his eyes sparkled, for there was nothing of which he was so fond as apple pie. "I must have at least a bite this minute!" he said to himself, and opening his mouth very wide he prepared to bite into the juicy wedge.

Just at this moment Red Rex opened his eyes.

"Pitkins!" he cried, "what is going on? Is this part of the story?" For at first he did not know that he had been asleep.

"No, Your Majesty," said Harold; "it is a piece of one of my mother's famous pies. Will you share it with me?"

"That I will!" said Red Rex, sitting upright and stretching out his hand eagerly. "It looks like apple pie. There is nothing in the world I like so well as apple pie."

"Your taste is the same as mine," said Harold merrily, carving the wedge with his knife into two equal triangles. "I believe Your Majesty never tasted better pie than that. It is made by a famous rule."

Red Rex munched his share greedily, sitting opposite the munching Harold. And as they ate they eyed one another, not unfriendly. When he had finished, the Red King said,—"By my sword! That is the best piece of apple pie that ever I tasted, or hope to taste! Your mother must be a wondrous cook, Harold."

"That she is!" cried the proud boy. "And she is the best mother who ever lived. She made six of these wonderful pies for me, because she knows that I like them so much. I saw them this morning on a shelf in the pantry."

"Six juicy apple pies!" murmured Red Rex, smacking his lips at the thought. "Where do you live, boy?"

"I live on the High Street, which leads from the market-place, in a little house next the butcher's shop," said Harold, wondering why the King asked.

"I will remember that," said Red Rex, nodding his head solemnly. "I owe your mother a happy memory for that piece of delicious pie."

"It is made from the recipe for the King's Pie," said Harold. "No wonder you approve it, being like His Hungry Majesty of old."

"The King's Pie!" exclaimed the surprised monarch. "Pray, what do you mean by that?"

"It is another story, Your Majesty," said Harold, grinning. "I think it is the best story of all. But I suppose you would not care to hear it to-morrow."

"Oh, go along with you and your stories, you young beguiler!" cried Red Rex with a great roar, at the same time poking Harold playfully with the point of his sword. "I see that you would keep me here forever at the walls of your city, listening to your tales."

"Not forever," said Harold, with an air of candor. "I do not think that even the library of Kisington could furnish new books for as long a time as that,—though, to be sure, you might hear some of the same ones over again. But, indeed, you have no idea what treasures still remain in that casket! This tale of the King's Pie is one of the rarest, I think."

Red Rex seemed to be thinking very earnestly about something. "The King's Pie," he murmured, more than once. "H'm! H'm! It is of a deliciousness! Ha! Ho!" And he smacked his lips again, thinking of the tantalizing wedge which was now no more. Suddenly he spoke: "I have decided to wait yet another day," he announced. "I will hear that tale to-morrow. And if it contains a recipe for the famous pie, I shall want you to copy it off for me. Bring pen and paper, my lad."

"That I will!" said Harold joyously. For this meant still another day's delay; and the time was now near at hand when they might expect to see help coming from the Capital City where their good King Victor lived. This was Wednesday, when he took leave of the Red King.

XIV: THE ROBBER

Harold was very weary when he returned to the cottage that evening; and he was still more weary before he tumbled into bed. For in the mean time he had to learn his school lessons for the following day, and tell the other boys all about his adventures. He slept like a top; quite like a top,—for sometimes during the night there came from his little room beyond the kitchen a sound like a humming top.

It was about midnight when Harold was awakened by a peculiar noise. It was a queer, clicking, tapping noise that seemed to come from the kitchen close by. Harold sat up in bed and listened. Some one was certainly moving about in the kitchen. It was probably his mother, he thought. And yet, what could his mother be doing there at that time of night? Stealthy steps crossed the kitchen; just then Harold sneezed,—he could not help it. There was silence.

Presently he heard a noise in the pantry, which was next his own little room. Harold rose and crept noiselessly out of his chamber. Yes, there was someone in the pantry. The door was open,—something not allowed in his mother's kitchen rule. An uncertain light flickered behind the pantry door. Harold could not see plainly, but there certainly was some one meddling with the dishes on the shelves. Suddenly a silhouette came between Harold and the light, and he saw the shape of the intruder. It seemed to be a very tall old woman in bonnet and shawl, and her great hand was carrying something from the pantry shelf to the mouth within the bonnet.

Harold felt himself growing very angry. Who was this stranger who dared to force a way into their cottage and eat up the hard-earned victuals which his mother had painfully prepared? Such doings were rare indeed in Kisington. It was a wicked thief, a robber, a house-breaker! Even though it was a woman, she must be punished.

There was a key in the lock outside the pantry door. Quick as a flash Harold made a leap for it, and turned it in the lock. At the same time he shouted to his mother who slept in the room upstairs,—"Quick! Quick, Mother! There is an old woman in the pantry eating up the food! I have caught her at it!"

In a few minutes his mother's feet came pattering down the stairs. But in the mean time what a hubbub was going on in the pantry! Evidently the thief had no mind to be discovered and taken in her criminal act. There was the sound of overturned boxes and barrels, the crash of crockery and glass. The thief was smashing the pantry window!

"Open the door, Harold!" screamed his mother. "She is climbing out the window!"

It did not seem possible that the thief could do this, it was such a tiny window. But, sure enough! when the door was opened, and Harold and his mother crowded into the pantry, they were but just in time to seize the hem of the old woman's shawl, as her last leg squeezed through the casement. Harold held on to the shawl tightly, however, and off it came in his hands. It was a very nice shawl.

"Who ever heard of a thief in Kisington!" exclaimed the mother. "Who could it be? I never saw a shawl like this. Let us examine what she has taken, the wicked old creature!"

Harold got a candle, and presently returned to the pantry, where his mother was groping among the smashed crockery for some other clue to the thief. When the light flickered on the pantry shelves the mother gave a scream of surprise and anger. "My six beautiful pies!" she exclaimed. "The thief has stolen my six beautiful apple pies! Oh, what a wicked old soul!"

"Those lovely pies!" groaned Harold. "See, Mother, she has gobbled one and left the empty plate. The others she has taken away with her."

"I wish they may choke her!" cried the mother angrily. "Now you will have none to take to your Red King to-morrow. I was going to save the finest of all for him, in the hope that it would soften his hard heart."

"It will never soften his heart nor please his stomach now, Mother," said Harold ruefully. "And still more I regret the other five pies which I know you meant for me. When shall we ever see such pies again?"

"They were made from the last of the flour and apples and sugar sent you in gratitude by the Leading Citizens," said Harold's mother sadly. "I am sorry your reward is thus wasted, my poor boy! What spiteful neighbor could have spied

them through the pantry window and planned this midnight raid at our expense?"

Harold shook his head mournfully. "I do not know any one in Kisington whom I could suspect," he said. "Come, Mother, let us go back to bed. To-morrow we will look further into the matter. We have at least this handsome shawl as one clue, which if it does not find us the thief will be very nice for you to wear."

They went to bed again, and slept until morning.

Now in the morning before school Harold took the shawl and went to his friend the Librarian and told him what had happened during the night. The Librarian was greatly shocked to hear of a theft in town and went with Harold straight to the Lord Mayor.

The Mayor examined the shawl carefully and shook his head. "This is very strange!" he said. "This is no shawl made in Kisington, or in our Kingdom. It is a strange foreign shawl, and very valuable. I am glad to believe that the thief must have been a foreigner, or a gypsy, or a vagrant of some sort. But how did she find her way into our guarded city? I must look into this! Meanwhile, my lad, since you have suffered loss and damage to your pantry and to your feelings the Leading Citizens will see that you are made whole at their expense; I will answer for their gratitude to you."

"My Lord," said the Librarian, patting Harold affectionately on the head, "our boy has done so well already in handling this savage King, may we not expect still more from him now that the time is so critical? King Victor should soon be coming to our aid. If we can but postpone the siege for at least another day! Suppose Harold should invite Red Rex, under a flag of truce, to visit and inspect our Library?"

"Good!" cried the Mayor. "When you go to Red Rex this afternoon, Harold, my boy, see what you can do further in the matter."

"I will try, my Lord Mayor," said Harold. "But Red Rex is growing very impatient. I fear that I cannot much longer keep him amused with our tales."

"Clever lad! You have already done right well," said the Librarian, embracing Harold proudly. "And I dare say you will be able to do yet more. Now, run along to school; for we must not forget our everyday duties, even in these times of excitement and danger."

So Harold went to school, and you can imagine how many questions he had to answer at recess time. The Librarian went to his books and the Lord Mayor to his desk. And Harold's mother went down on her knees, cleaning up the wrecked pantry.

But where was the strange old woman all this time?

XV: THE BANDAGED HAND

As soon as school was over on Thursday afternoon, Harold started once more on his errand to the War-Lord. As usual, he was accompanied to the city gate by a crowd of schoolboys and girls who envied him his luck and wished that they could go all the way with him. But this, naturally, the City Fathers would not permit. One boy carried Harold's coat, and another his strap of schoolbooks. A third brought the basket with Harold's luncheon, while Robert carried the flag of truce,--proud boy! But Richard, Harold's special chum, was the proudest of all. For he was trusted with the precious volume from the library containing the story of the King's Pie, which Harold was to read to the War-Lord on that day. All gave a great cheer when the gate was unbarred; and all the little girls waved their handkerchiefs when with a gay shake of his hand Harold stepped out into the danger zone.

Red Rex received him as usual, sitting upon the green hillock. Harold noticed straightway that the War-Lord's hand was bound up with a bandage, and that he had a cut over his left eye, which made him look fiercer than ever.

"But I thought there was a truce!" exclaimed Harold, gazing at these tokens of trouble. "How came you to be thus hurt, Your Majesty?"

"Nay; it was an accident," said the Red King gruffly. "Say no more about it, pray. Well! I have no time to waste to-day. Things are coming to an issue. Let me hear your story as quickly as possible,--if you have brought one, as I think."

"Yes, Your Majesty," replied Harold. "I have brought you the spicy story of the King's Pie, which I think you will like. I had meant, in order to illustrate the story, to bring you also one of the veritable pies. But that, alas! I am now unable to

do. My mother made a pie especially for this purpose; but it is gone with others which were to be mine, and for which I grieve on my own account. A wicked thief stole them all during last night. So I fear you will not appreciate the story so well as otherwise you might have done."

"Perhaps I shall," said the War-Lord whimsically. "Perhaps I shall appreciate it all the more."

"Now, what means Your Majesty by that?" cried Harold, wondering very much at these strange words. "It was such a fine pie! A large, fat, juicy, rich, crisp, crusty pie,--just such a one as the King enjoyed in the story."

"Yes, I know!" said Red Rex. "Go on with the story, right speedily, with no more details of that tantalizing, vanished pie!" And he licked his lips and shifted his seat as he sat upon his hillock.

Obediently Harold opened the book which his chum Richard had handed to him just inside the city gate, and began to read the toothsome tale of *The King's Pie*.

XVI: THE KING'S PIE

There was great excitement in Kisington; for the King was coming with his new young bride, and the town was preparing to give them a famous welcome.

Hugh, the Lord Mayor, was at his wits' end with all that must be done. As he sat in the Town Hall holding his aching head, while a mob of decorators and artists and musicians, costumers, jewelers, and florists clamored about him, there came to him a messenger from Cedric, his son. Cedric was one of the King's favorite friends, and he knew His Majesty's taste well. So he had sent to the Lord Mayor a hint as to how the King might best be pleased. Being a man of few words, this is how his message ran:--

"His Majesty is exceedingly fond of pie."

Long pondered the Lord Mayor over this mysterious message, reading it backward and forward, upside down and crisscross, and mixed up like an anagram. But he could make nothing of it except what it straightforwardly said: that the King was exceedingly fond of pie.

Now, in those days pie meant but one thing--a pasty; that is, meat of some sort baked in a dish covered with dough. At that time there was no such thing known as a pie made of fruit or mincemeat. Pie was not even a dainty. Pie was vulgar, ordinary victuals, and the Lord Mayor was shocked at his son's even mentioning pie in connection with the King.

"Pie, indeed!" he shuddered. "A pretty dish to set before a King on his wedding journey! How can pie be introduced into my grand pageant? The King can get pie anywhere, in any hut or hovel along his way. What has Kisington to do with pie?"

The Lord Mayor snorted scornfully, and was about to dismiss his son's hint from his mind, when he had an idea! A Pie! A great, glorified, poetic, symbolic Pie such as could be carried in procession decorated with flowers! That was a happy thought. The Lord Mayor dismissed every one else and sent for all the master cooks of the city.

It was decided to accept Cedric's hint for what it was worth, and make Pie the feature of the day. There should be a grand pageant of soldiers and maskers and music. And, following the other guilds, last of all should come the cooks, with their ideas of Pie presented as attractively as might be, for the edification of the King. Moreover, the Lord Mayor said, in dismissing the white-capped company:--

"To whichever of you best pleases His Majesty with the pie, I will give this reward: a team of white oxen, a hundred sacks of white flour, and a hundred pieces of white silver."

"Hurrah!" shouted the cooks, waving their white caps. Then away they hurried to put on their thinking-caps instead and plan for the building of the King's Pie.

Now, among the cooks of Kisington there were two brothers, Roger and Rafe. Roger, the elder, had one of the hugest kitchens and shops in Kisington. But Rafe, the younger, had only a little old house on an acre of land under a little red-apple tree, with a little red cow who gave a little rich cream every day. Rafe was very poor, and no richer for having a brother well-to-do like Roger. For the thrifty cook had little to do with Rafe, whose ways were not his ways.

Rafe cooked in his little kitchen for the poor folk of the town, charging small prices such as they could pay. Indeed, often as not he gave away what he had cooked for himself to some one who seemed hungrier. This is a poor way to

make profit of gold, but an excellent way to make profit of affection. And Rafe was rich in the love of the whole town.

Roger was among the cooks whom the Lord Mayor summoned to consult about the King's Pie. But Rafe knew nothing at all of it, until one afternoon he was surprised by a visit from his brother, who had not darkened his door for many a day.

"Well, Brother," said Roger, briefly, "I suppose you are not busy, as I am. Will you work for me for a day or two? In fact, I need you."

"You need me!" said Rafe, in surprise. "How can that be, Brother?"

"I have a great task at hand," said the master-cook; "a task that needs extra help. You must come. Your own work can wait well enough, I judge."

Rafe hesitated. "I must cook for my poor people first," he said.

Roger sneered. "Your poor people, indeed! I am cooking for the King! Will you hesitate now?"

"Cooking for the King!" cried Rafe. "Ah, but he is not so hungry as my neighbors will be to-morrow without their rabbit-pies."

"Rabbit-pies! It is a pie for the King that I am making!" shouted Roger, in high dudgeon,—"such a pie as you and your louts never dreamed of. Now what say you? Will you come?"

"I must do my own small cooking first," said Rafe firmly.

"Very well then," growled Roger. "Cook for your beggars first; but come to me to-morrow. Every cook in town but you is engaged. I must have your help."

"I will come," said Rafe simply, and Roger bade him a surly good-bye without thanks or promises.

The next morning, when his own simple tasks were done, Rafe hied him to his brother's kitchen, and there he found great doings. Roger was superintending the preparations for baking an enormous pie. A group of masons had just finished building the huge oven out of doors, and about a score of smiths were struggling with the pie-dish, which they had forged of iron. It was a circular dish six feet across and three feet deep; and it looked more like a swimming-tank than anything else.

Rafe stared in amazement. "Is that to hold your pie, Brother?" he asked.

"Yes!" growled Roger. "Now get to work with the other men, for the crust must be baked this morning."

Three assistant cooks in caps and aprons were busy sifting buckets of flour, measuring out handfuls of salt and butter. Others were practicing with long rolling-pins made for the occasion, so big that a man had to roll at each end. On the ground lay a great round piece of tin, six feet across, pierced full of holes.

"What is that?" whispered Rafe to one of his fellow cooks.

"That is to be the lid of the pie," answered the cook. "See, they are lifting it onto the dish now. It will have a strong hinge, and it will be covered with crust."

"And what is to fill this marvelous pie?" asked Rafe, wondering still more. "Tender capon? Rabbits? Venison? Peacocks? What is suitable for a King? I do not know."

"Ah, there you show your lack of imagination!" cried the cook. "Master is a great man. This is a poetic pie. It is to be filled with flowers, and on the flowers will be sitting ten beautiful little children, pink and sweet as cherubs, dressed all in wreaths of flowers. And when the pie reaches the King, the top will be opened, and they will all begin to sing a song in honor of Their Majesties. Is it not a pretty thought?"

"Well, if the King be not too hungry," said the practical Rafe, doubtfully.

"Nonsense!" cried the cook testily. "Would you make out our King to be a cannibal?"

"Nay," said Rafe; "that is why I doubt. However, I am here but to assist in this colossal plan. Hand me yon bag of salt."

All day long at Roger's kitchen the cooks worked over the King's Pie. At noon came a band of ten mothers, each with a rosy, smiling baby. They placed the children in the great shell to see how they would look. Every one cried: "Charming! Superb! But ah! we must not tell any one, for Roger has paid us well, and the other cooks must not know how he is to win the prize to-morrow!"

Weary and unthanked, with his meager day's wage,--a little bag of flour and a pat of butter, sugar, and a handful of salt,--Rafe went home, musing sadly. "A team of white oxen; a hundred sacks of white flour; a hundred pieces of white silver,--what a prize! If only I could earn these, I should be rich, indeed, and able to help my poor neighbors. But Roger will win the prize," he thought.

He spread on the table his frugal supper. He had emptied his larder that morning for a sick woman. He had but a few apples and a bowl of cream. It was the first food he had eaten that day, for his brother had forgotten to bid him to his table.

As he was taking a bite from one of the rosy-checked apples, there came a tap at the door.

"Enter!" cried Rafe hospitably. The hinges creaked, and there tottered in a little, bent, old woman in a long black cloak, leaning on a staff.

"Good evening, Son," she said, in a cracked voice. "Are you a man of charity, or will you turn away a poor old soul who has had nothing to eat for many hours?"

Rafe rose and led her to the table. "Sit down, Mother," he said kindly. "Sit and share my poor supper: a few apples from my little tree, a sup of the cream which my good little red cow gives me,--that is all; but you are welcome."

"Thanks, Son," said the old woman, and without further words she began to eat. When she had finished she sat for a few moments looking into the empty bowl. Then she said:--

"Son, why do you not bake a pie for the King?"

"I!" cried Rafe, astonished. "How can I make a pie? You see all I have in my cupboard. There is nothing but a little bag of flour, a pat of butter, a handful of sugar and salt."

"It is enough," said the stranger. "Son, I will show you a secret. You have been kind to me. Now I will tell you that which until this day no man has known. You shall make the King a pie, indeed!"

"But, Mother," interrupted Rafe, smiling, "you do not know what manner of pies are being made. There will be many, though I have seen but one--a giant pie, a glorious pie, all golden crust and flowers and pink little babies who sing!"

"Humph!" grunted the old woman. "A pie for a pasteboard King. Why not cook a pie to tempt a hungry man?"

"The King is, indeed, a man," mused Rafe. "But how shall I make a pie without viands of any sort?" (As I have said, to speak of a pie in those days meant always a dish of meat or game or poultry.)

"I will tell you," said the old woman. "Have you not a tree of red apples? Yes, luscious apples of a goodly flavor, for I have tasted them." She leaned forward, whispering earnestly: "Make your pie of them, my Son!"

"Apples! A pie of apples!" cried Rafe. "Who ever heard of such a thing!" (And at this time, indeed, no one had.)

"Nay, you need not laugh so scornfully," said the old crone. "You shall see! I will help you."

At her command Rafe fetched out the bag of flour, and the butter, salt, and sugar. Then he went to gather a basket of apples, while the old woman mended the fire and mixed the dough. Wonderingly he watched her pare the apples, core and slice them, and cover all with a blanket of crust laid softly over, but not tucked in at the edges as for an ordinary pasty. Soon the pie was baked, all flaky and brown. When it came smoking hot from the oven, the old woman slipped a knife under the blanket of crust and lifted it aside.

"See," she said, "the apples are steamed and soft. Now I will mash them with a knife and mix the butter and sugar generously therein. This one must ever do, Son, last of all. This is the crown of my secret, the only recipe for a perfect pie."

Rafe watched her curiously, by no means convinced. Then, from a pouch somewhere concealed in her robe, she drew

out a strange round nut, such as Rafe had never seen before.

"This is the final blessing," she said. "See, I will grate a little of this magic nut into the pie." Forthwith it was done, and a whiff of spicy fragrance reached Rafe's nose, and, more than anything, gave him confidence in this strange new pie.

"It smells worthy," said Rafe hungrily.

Without a word the stranger drew from under a cover a little pie baked in a tiny tin, an exact copy of the other. "Eat," she said: "eat and judge if my secret be worth keeping."

Rafe sunk his teeth into the warm, crisp crust and ate eagerly. His eyes sparkled, but he spoke no word till the last crumb was gone.

"Oh!" he said, "it is a magic pie! Never such have I met before! Never, in all my life!"

The old woman nodded. "A magic pie," she said. "And still better when you serve it with the yellow cream of your little red cow."

"It is a pie for a King!" said Rafe. "But shall I be allowed in the procession, Mother?"

"All the cooks in Kisington who choose may march with that guild," said the old woman. "Bear your pie proudly in your own hands, wearing your cap and apron. I will send some one to walk beside you and carry the jug of cream. She shall be here to-morrow when you milk the little red cow. Treat her kindly for my sake."

"Mother, how can I ever thank you--" began Rafe. But, with a quickness which seemed impossible to her years, the old woman had slipped out of the door and was gone.

The next morning bright and early Rafe went out to milk his cow. And there beside the cow stood a young maid, the fairest he had ever seen.

"Good morning, Rafe," said the maid, dropping a curtsy. "I am Meg, and I have come to help you carry the King's Pie." She smiled so sweetly that Rafe's heart danced a jig. She was dressed in a neat little gown of blue with a white apron, and had set a dainty cook's cap on her flaxen curls. And she wore red stockings and shoes, with silver buckles. From under her apron she drew a little blue jug. "See, I have brought this to hold the cream," she said, "and it is full of red strawberries for your breakfast. Milk the little red cow, Rafe, and then we can eat and be gone as soon as I have skimmed the cream of yesterday."

In a happy daze Rafe did as she bade. Merrily they breakfasted together on a wheaten loaf and milk and berries which the maid had brought, as if she knew how hungry Rafe would be. Then Meg skimmed the cream for the blue jug, and they were ready to start. Rafe, in his white cap and apron, bore the precious pie, while Meg walked along at his side. A merry, handsome couple they were.

When they came to the market-place they found a great crowd assembled. "Ho, Rafe! Rafe!" people shouted to him, for every one knew and loved him. "Come here! Come with us!"

But Rafe answered: "Nay. I am going to walk in the procession with the other cooks. I have a pie for the King."

"A pie! A pie!" they cried good-naturedly. "Look at Rafe's pasty! Of what is it made, Rafe? Grasshoppers or mice?" For they knew how poor he was. But Rafe only smiled and pushed his way to where the cooks were gathered. They, too, greeted him with jests. But he insisted that he must march with them. So they gave him place at the very end of the line, with the little maid at his side. But when he saw the wonderful pies all around him, he sighed and shook his head, looking ruefully at his own simple offering. The little maid, seeing him so look, said:--

"Never mind, Rafe. You are giving your best to the King. No one can do more than that."

The people waited. The hands of the great clock in the market-place crept slowly around until they marked noon. Every one began to feel uneasy, for it was close upon the dinner-hour, and the long procession had not moved. The King and Queen were late.

At last there sounded the blast of a trumpet, which told that the King and his bride had arrived, and that the Lord Mayor had led them to their seats on the balcony in front of the Town Hall. Every one gave a sigh of relief. But then there was another long wait, while the hands of the clock crept on--on, and the people watched and craned their necks

eagerly. The Lord Mayor was making his speech, and it was very long. Finally arose more shouts and huzzas,--not because the speech was good, but because it was ended. And presently another trumpet gave signal for the procession to start.

Off they went, through the streets full of cheering, hungry people. Soldiers and bands of music led the way; then came the maskers and the flower-maidens, the city guilds and all the arts and crafts. Finally passed along the yoke of snowy oxen, with ribbons in their ears, drawing a white wain in which were the bags of flour and silver, the prize to be given the best pie-maker of Kisington. When the company of white-capped cooks came within sight of the King, he laughed merrily, rubbing his hands, and said:--

"Cooks! Now we shall have something worth while, for I am growing hungry, indeed!"

And the young Queen whispered: "So am I!"

Then came the pies. And such pies! Carried on the shoulders of sturdy boys, drawn on floats by teams of ponies, wreathed in flowers and stuck over with banners and mottoes, the pies passed along before the hungry King. And not one of the pies was real! Gradually the King's smile faded.

There was a wonderful big pie fashioned like a ship,--rigged with masts and sails and manned by sailor-dolls. There was a fine brown pasty like a bird's nest, and when it passed the King, off came the cover, and out flew four-and-twenty blackbirds croaking lustily.

"Good-bye, dinner!" sighed the King, looking after them wistfully.

The Queen nudged him and said: "Sh! Behave, Your Majesty!" But she also began to look hungrier and hungrier.

There passed a pie in a carriage drawn by six mules. It seemed piping hot, for steam came out of it. But when it reached the King it blew up with a *bang!* scattering showers of blossoms over the royal party.

"My faith!" cried the King; "methought this was the end of all things. But it seems not. Here come more and more empty pies!"

The Queen smelled of her salts and grew paler every moment.

One pie had a musical box inside and played a sweet tune as it passed the King. In one was hidden a tiny dwarf, who popped out like a jack-in-the-box when the Queen pulled a golden cord.

Still the procession moved on, and so did the hands of the clock; and the King's hands moved to his ample girdle, which he tightened sharply. But both he and the pale young Queen were too polite to ask the Lord Mayor for buns or something to sustain them.

The pie which caused the greatest excitement as it passed along, drawn by four white horses, was that of Roger, the master cook, who walked proudly beside it. When it came opposite the King the carriage stopped, the cover was lifted, and ten beautiful babies on a bed of roses waved their little hands and began to sing.

The Queen leaned forward eagerly, forgetting to be hungry. "How sweet! The darlings!" she murmured. "Oh, this is the best of all!"

Roger the cook heard her and flushed with triumph.

But the King grumbled: "Humph! They look good enough to eat, but--my faith! I hope that this is the end, for soon I must eat something, or I shall become a cannibal!"

"Your Majesty!" protested the Queen, faintly.

But the King interrupted her.

"What comes here?" he cried. "This looks sensible!" It was Rafe and the pretty maid bringing up the rear of the procession. Side by side they walked in cap and apron, he bearing the small, delicately browned pie, she with a jug of yellow cream. No one paid any attention to them, but closed in around them, following Roger's chariot.

When Rafe and Meg came opposite the King and Queen, they turned and Rafe bowed low, holding up the pie as high as he could. The pretty maid curtsied gracefully, and offered the cream-jug with a winsome smile. The crowd was fain to

hustle them on; but the King struck the floor with his staff and pointed eagerly at the pie.

"Hold!" he cried. "What have you there?" Every one stopped and began to stare. Rafe bowed again.

"'T is a pie, Your Majesty," said Rafe simply,--"an apple pie."

"With cream for the top," lisped the little maid, curtsying again.

"Apple pie!" cried the King. "Who ever heard of an apple pie! A pie should be of savory meat. But of apples!" Words failed to express his astonishment.

"Butter and sugar, Sire, go to the making of it, and the dust of a wondrous nut. Will you taste it, Sire?" Rafe held out the pie temptingly.

"With thick cream to pour on the top--yellow, sweet, rich, thick cream!" said Meg, lingering over each word as if it melted on her lips.

"Give hither that pie!" almost shouted the hungry King. "I will look into this matter." And, drawing a dagger from his girdle, he seized and stabbed the pie to the heart. Sniffing at it eagerly, his eyes grew round, and he smacked his lips. "It is good, I wager my scepter!" he cried. "Hand me the cream, fair maid."

The little maid stepped up and daintily poured cream upon the shattered pie, and without more ado the King began to eat with his dagger. (This was not considered bad manners in those days.) After the first mouthful he stopped only to say: "Food of the Fairies! Pie of the Pixies! Cook, you are a magician!" He went on at a rate which threatened not to leave a mouthful.

But the Queen pulled at his sleeve. "A bite for me, Your Majesty," she begged.

And, with an apology, the King handed her what was left, watching her wistfully till she ate the last crumb.

"Delicious! I never tasted anything finer!" she cried. "I must have the recipe."

"I must have the cook!" cried the King, turning to Rafe, with a broad grin on his merry, fat face. "You must come with me and cook such pies for every meal. Yes, I will have them for breakfast, too," he insisted, in response to a protest from the Queen.

Just then up stepped Hugh, the Lord Mayor.

"Sire," said he, bowing low, "will Your Majesty deign to point out to me the pie which has best pleased you, that I may have it set in the place of honor, and give the prize to the maker?"

"That I cannot do," said the King, "for the pie no longer exists. I have eaten it!" And he slapped his generous waistband. "But give whatever prize there may be to this worthy fellow, whom I now dub Baron Applepy. Baron, wear this ring in token of my pleasure in your pie." He drew a fine ruby from his finger and gave it to Rafe.

"And this is for the little maid," said the Queen, taking a beautiful pearl necklace and tossing it over Meg's curls.

But Roger, the master cook, stood by and tore his hair when he saw what was happening.

Then up came the yoke of white oxen drawing the cart bearing the prize. And the Lord Mayor gave a goad into Rafe's hands, with words of congratulation.

"Now, mount and come with me," said the King.

But Rafe hesitated.

"Your Majesty," he replied, "I see no way to make another pie like this which has pleased you. For I have no more of the magic nuts wherewith to flavor a second."

The King frowned. "What! No more pie! Is this to be the first and the last? Sirrah, I am not pleased!"

Then little Meg stepped forth. "The magic nut is the nutmeg," said she. "My name is Meg, and Granny called the magic nuts after me. I know where is hidden a store of them. These are my dower."

She emptied her pockets of the nuts which they held, and they were a precious handful.

"Ha!" cried the King eagerly, "you must marry Baron Applepy, that he may use your dower in our behalf."

Rafe and the maid looked sidewise at one another.

"You are willing, my dear?" said the Queen, smiling upon Meg.

"Yes," whispered she, with red-apple cheeks.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Rafe when the Queen looked at him.

But again he seemed troubled.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I cannot leave my poor neighbors. There will be no one to cook for them at my prices."

"You shall have your own price from me," said the King.

Rafe bowed low. "You do me great honor," he said humbly. "But I cannot leave my poor people, my house and my cow and my apple tree; indeed, I cannot."

The King looked very angry and raised his staff with a gesture of wrath. But the Queen laid her hand upon his arm.

"Why may he not live where he will and yet cook the pies for us?" she said. "A messenger on a fleet horse can bring them to us every day. We shall then have pies like that first delicious one, made of fresh apples from that very same red-apple tree of his. They would be best of all."

"True," said the King, reflecting for a moment.

"Please, Your Majesty!" said Meg, in her most winsome tones. "I do so long to help Rafe pick the red apples for your pies and skim the yellow cream of the little red cow. And please, I do so long to help him cook for his poor neighbors, who will miss him sadly if he goes. Now that we have the prize, we can do much for them. Please, Your Majesty!"

"Please, Your Majesty!" echoed Rafe.

"Please, Your Majesty!" begged the Queen.

So the King hemmed and hawed and yielded. "But see, Baron Applepy," he said, "that you make me three fine pies every day, for which my swiftest messenger shall call. Now, farewell to you--and to all! We must be off. It is past dinner-time."

"Heaven bless Your Majesties," said Rafe and Meg, bowing and curtsying low.

Then Rafe lifted the little maid into the white cart beside the hundred sacks of flour and the bag of silver, and amid shouts and cheers away they drove the white oxen toward the little house on the acre of land under the red-apple tree, where the little red cow was waiting for them.

And there they lived happily ever after, making three pies a day for the King at an enormous price, and feeding the beloved poor people, their neighbors, for no price at all.

XVII: THE MYSTERY OF THE PIE

Red Rex greeted the close of this story with an enormous sigh. "Three of those delicious pies every day!" said he. "Would I had a messenger to bring such to me!"

"It might be arranged, Your Majesty," suggested Harold, "if our two countries were at peace. I know that my mother would be glad to make such pies for you, even as Rafe and his Margot did for the King of old. The distance from Kisington to your Capitol is not so very great, I think; and doubtless Your Majesty has messengers fleetier than the one of long ago."

"And your mother's pies are quite as good!" exclaimed Red Rex. "I have never tasted better. So fat, so juicy, so generous! The tops fine, rounded hills; the crust so crisp, which your knife crunches daintily; the sight and smell of them is tempting!" The Red King's eyes rolled in his head and he swayed ecstatically, like a poet composing a rhyme.

"And yet you have seen but a wee wedge of one pie!" exclaimed Harold. "It must have pleased Your Majesty, indeed, to make your impression so true."

Red Rex eyed him strangely. "H'm, yes," he said. "I have a vivid imagination in such matters. I can almost fancy I have eaten a whole pie--two--three--four whole pies! What a feast!"

Harold's eyes had been straying toward something white concealed in the grass not far from the Red King's seat. He took a step forward now, bending low. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Five pies, Your Majesty!" he cried, looking straight at the King. "There were six, which the old woman stole. Here are five empty pie-plates!"

"What a strange coincidence!" cried the Red King, flushing and twiddling at his sword-hilt uneasily. "These coincidences do happen quite startlingly sometimes. Ha-hum!" He coughed and frowned forbiddingly.

"Surely, none of your men could have stolen my mother's pies (and, indeed, one of them was yours), Your Majesty. They would not have been so mean!"

"They would not have been so reckless," corrected Red Rex. "No, no! it took courage to make such an attempt; great courage, my boy!"

"Courage!" cried Harold. "I call it something else,--to steal the pies of a poor widow and deprive her son of his desserts. I call it mean and disgraceful!"

"Tut, tut, boy! You do not know what you are saying!" blustered the War-Lord, growing very red.

"Often it takes courage to do what others call an ill deed. And an ill deed is ill, only as you look at it; so I say! Everything depends upon the point of view; remember that. Suppose the man who stole those pies was starving and needed them for his comfort?"

"Suppose, indeed!" retorted Harold. "Suppose he came to our front door and asked my mother for them, like a gentleman? She would not have refused to sell, if he had money. She would have given, if he had none. She is like that, is my good mother!"

The Red King shook his head. "Suppose the man was an enemy, and too proud to ask a favor? All's fair in war, my boy. Everybody knows that."

"Then war is all wrong, as we always said," Harold replied. "Right is right, and wrong is wrong. Stealing is stealing, and meanness is meanness,--war or no war. If war makes men think differently from the rule of every day, there is nothing to be said for it. Hello!" Harold interrupted himself, for something else had suddenly caught his eye.

He had been making his way toward the pile of pie-plates, and now he stooped and picked up something lying on the grass beside them. It was a queer, old-fashioned bonnet. As he touched it out fell a rolled-up calico apron. One of the strings was gone. Harold's eyes leaped from it to the Red King's bundled-up wrist. The other apron-string was doing duty as a bandage there.

"Ho! Ho!" cried Harold, staring at the Red King's purpling face. "This is the old woman's bonnet, and her apron. A disguise! I begin to see! You, Your Majesty,--you were the old woman yourself!"

"You are very sharp, youngster!" said Red Rex sulkily. "Begone to your home and leave me to finish my work."

"If I go," said Harold slowly, "I shall tell the whole town what I have discovered. The news will travel through the Five Kingdoms--how a King disguised as an old woman stole six pies--"

"Hold!" cried Red Rex sternly. "Enough of this impertinence! Remember to whom you speak, boy! I am a King."

"Yes, you are that King. But I thought always it was the '*Knave of Hearts* who stole the tarts,' not the King. How did Your Majesty manage to do it?" asked Harold curiously.

"Aha!" The Red King tried to appear easy and unconscious. "It is my turn now to tell a story, is it? Oho! You want to hear how the old woman got into your careless town, do you? And how she went along your unguarded streets, do you? And how she crept into your unbolted cottage, do you? And how she found the goodly row of pies sitting on

the pantry shelf? Ah! I shall never look upon their like again!"

"Nor I," said Harold promptly. "And one was yours, Your Majesty."

Red Rex cast down his eyes. "That is the thing that chiefly troubles me," he said. "I am sorry I did not know the fact. Your mother was very thoughtful, Harold."

"Please tell me all about it, Your Majesty?" begged Harold, settling himself comfortably on the grass before the War-Lord. "I want to hear the story. It is your turn now. You owe me that, at least."

"Well," said Red Rex choosing his words slowly. "You see, I had to have those pies. Kings may take what they choose, because,--well, because they are Kings. That is reason enough,--say I! After that first bite you gave me, I felt that I needed more to make me happy. A King has a right to be happy, whatever happens to another,--say I. I had brought disguises with me; for we have ever found them useful in making war. Last night I dressed up as an old woman, in petticoat and apron, bonnet and shawl. None of my men knew. As soon as it was dark I went to the gate of your town, pretending to be a countrywoman returning to Kisington from a visit beyond the frontier, who had not heard of the siege, and begged the guard to let me in quickly out of danger's way. Oh! You are such stupid, trusting folk in your Kingdom! The men believed me, and let me in because I seemed old and it was late, and they pitied me. The fools! Pity is out of place in war-time. A city so ill-defended deserves to be taken and harassed,--say I!"

"We are trustful in our town because our own hearts are truthful and kind," said Harold.

"When the warders had let me in," went on Red Rex, "I passed along the main street toward the market-place, with my basket on my arm; and no one noticed me, for it was dark. I knew my way; you told me yesterday how the streets lay. Presently I came to a great, handsome building with a ruined porch,--upon my word, huge as my summer palace by the sea!--out of which people passed in a constant stream, with books under their arms."

"It was our library," said Harold proudly.

"So I judged," went on the Red King. "I concealed myself in an angle of the building until it should be darker, and watched. Little children came out of that library, who in my country would be playing at war with guns and toy cannon. Old men and women, whom I should expect to see caring only to smoke and mumble and gossip about past wars, brought out books which they hugged lovingly. Young maids, such as in my land care only to look at the soldiers and dance and prink; and young men who should be drilling or dueling or talking war,--all these came out looking happy and content with the books which they had in hand. I never saw such a sight!"

"Yes," said Harold; "It is always so in Kisington. We have no time to think about war or soldiers or killing."

"Strange!" muttered Red Rex. "I was tempted to go myself into that great building and see if any book might be found with a message in it for me. But I did not take the risk."

"I know such a Book!" interrupted Harold; "a Book of Peace."

"I guess what you mean," said the Red King hastily. "We have that Book in my kingdom, too, of course. We honor it highly,--do not think otherwise! We have it in the churches, and bind it in gold, and keep it as something curious and old. But we do not often read it--why should we? A peace book has no message for our brave and warlike people. To think so is absurd!"

"Oh!" said Harold.

"Well," continued Red Rex; "after a long, long time the streets were quite empty. Presently I heard the chimes of midnight. Then I crept out of my hiding-place and stole along the High Street, of which you had told me, till I came to the butcher's shop. Beside it, sure enough, was a little cottage with a thatched roof which I knew must be yours. The window was open, and I looked in; no one about. The door was unlocked, and in I went. What carelessness!"

"We never lock our doors in Kisington," said Harold. "We think it would be rude not to trust our good neighbors, who trust us."

"Huh!" grunted the Red King. "In my Kingdom every door is double-barred, locked and bolted beside. He who trusts nobody is never disappointed,--so I say."

"I should hate to live in that kind of Kingdom," murmured Harold. "But I know what happened next," he went on,

continuing the Red King's story. "You fumbled along the wall with a noise like a mouse. You stepped on a creaky board."

"I crossed the kitchen on tiptoe," said Red Rex. "I challenge any man of my size to go more softly. Not a sound in the little house; no trace of you. My dark lantern showed me two doors. I knew one must lead to the pantry,--but which? Do you know what I did? Ah, I am clever! I put my ear to each door in turn. At one I heard no sound. At the other, presently, I caught the noise of gentle snoring. Just then,--some one sneezed."

"Yes," said Harold; "I tried to smother it, but I could not do so."

"By that sneeze I knew certainly that this was your bedroom, and that the other must be the pantry. I kept very quiet, and there was no more sound from you. I hoped you were asleep. I opened the pantry door very gently, and crept in. I flashed my lantern upon the shelves. Ah! There they were,--six beautiful, brown, luscious apple pies, as you had said. Um! Um! I could hardly wait to begin. I pulled out my dagger and attacked one of them. It melted in the mouth like magic! Just then I heard a hullabaloo from your bedroom. What lungs you have, you rascal!"

"I yelled as loudly as I could," said Harold modestly. "But Robert can make more noise."

"I hope I may never hear him, then!" cried Red Rex. "Well; I heard the key turn in the lock, and knew you had trapped me, you dog! I heard steps on the stair, and knew I had no time to waste. Hastily I put the five remaining pies in my basket and made for the window. I knew it would never do for me to be caught in Kisington! To be sure, there was a truce. But I did not know how your Magistrates might regard the right of a King to take his own way with a truce. What triumph for your city to capture me, the besieging War-Lord! It might not be. But your pantry window is of a smallness! I nearly perished in my attempt to squeeze through. The glass cut my hand and my forehead. I thought once I was stuck for good. Some one clutched at my shawl. I let it go. It is priceless, woven tissue of the East; but I let it go."

"We have it safe," said Harold.

"I shall never claim it," asserted Red Rex. "Well, soon I was safe outside. I found myself in your back garden, on the city wall. You folk are so careless,--to build houses on a city wall! From there one can drop into safety without any trouble. I did so. It is your own fault if fugitives escape from your city,--say I. Whatever happens to you, it is your own fault,--say I!"

"Then it will be your own fault if I tell this tale of you to our City Fathers to-morrow,--say I." Harold looked at Red Rex mischievously.

"Nay," said the Red King hastily. "You must not betray me. This tale must not become common history. No one will understand my point of view. I begin to think that no one will see my bravery in making this attempt. So few persons are open-minded and generous! You will not tell your City Fathers, Harold? *Noblesse oblige*, remember. You are my guest, and I have told you a tale in return for yours. I could detain you by force, breaking the truce yet once more. But I will not do so. I suppose I am a fool!"

Harold had been thinking hard. "No; I will not tell the story,--but on two conditions."

"What are they?" asked Red Rex.

"The first is this," said Harold. "For the sake of the pies you stole (one of which was your own), during the siege of Kisington you shall spare from force or damage that part of the city in which stands my mother's little house."

"Gladly will I promise that," agreed the Red King.

"Spare the *north*, then," said Harold, pointing. "You must not aim any weapons against the north."

"The north is safe," repeated Red Rex. "I agree not to point weapon or aim force against the north section of your city."

"Then all Kisington is saved!" cried Harold. "Already, before now, Your Majesty has promised to spare the *east*,--for the sake of Gerda's garden; the *west*,--for the children's school, in the name of your Hope. Now you promise to spare the *north*. The south only remains,--and that is *here*, Your Majesty, outside the walls!"

Red Rex grinned sheepishly. "Harold," he said. "You have outwitted me, and outplayed me. Kisington is indeed safe from me. I have no choice now but to raise the siege and go my way home. And to tell you the truth, I shall not be sorry to spare the town. Since visiting, even so briefly, within your walls, seeing the kind-faced people, the goodly buildings,

and especially the noble library, I have conceived an affection for the place. I am glad of an excuse not to destroy it. If it were possible, indeed, I would that I might see the interior of that house of books. I would fain know more of the Chronicles of Kisington."

"Why may it not be, Your Majesty?" said Harold. "We will say nothing of this night's adventure. Come to-morrow with a flag of truce and be our guest, even as I have been yours. I will show you our library. Maybe you will hear another tale, even in that noble home of books.--But first you must hear to my second condition."

"True; I forgot that," said Red Rex gravely. "What is your second demand, Harold?"

"It is this," said Harold with a twinkle in his eye. "Your Majesty tells a tale so well, I fain would hear another. To-morrow you shall tell me a tale. I make that my second condition."

Red Rex hesitated, hummed and hawed. "Needs must," he said at last. "Though I am no story-teller, I will think up some yarn from the tales I have heard in my travels, and that you shall hear, my boy. But surely, I need tell it to no others than yourself?"

The Red King looked so miserable at the idea of talking to an audience that Harold laughed and said,--"Nay, Your Majesty. Let me have the treat to myself. I will come here as before, after school, hear the story, and then bring you back with me. The town will receive you as an honored guest, and we will make high carnival."

"Agreed," said Red Rex.

"Agreed," said Harold, and they shook hands formally.

The Red King had one last word. "Harold," he said shamefacedly, "I am sorry about the pies. I am ashamed. I would give them back, if I could. I will pay for them roundly."

"Your Majesty," said Harold graciously, "do not mention it!"

Here follows the tale which the Red King told to Harold on the next day; a tale which he had heard in his wanderings in a New World far across the ocean to the west; a tale of the Red People--*Little Bear*.

XVIII: LITTLE BEAR: AN OJIBWAY LEGEND

Once upon a time there was an old Indian couple who had three daughters, but no son. The two older girls were very beautiful; but the youngest was plain and unlovely. Yet she was the wisest of the three. Her name was Little Bear.

Now, there came a time when the father and mother grew too old to work as they had done all their lives. It became necessary that the two older daughters, who were strapping big girls, should go away to find work in order to take care of the family.

"Take me with you," begged Little Bear.

But the older sisters shook their heads.

"No," they answered; "you would be of no use to us. You are too little. You must stay at home."

The two sisters started upon their journey alone. But they had not gone far when they heard the patter of feet behind them. They looked around, and there was Little Bear running after them as fast as she could go. The sisters were very angry. They took Little Bear and tied her to the posts of the wigwam, so that she should not follow them again. Then once more they started upon their journey.

They had traveled but a short distance when again they heard a noise behind them. And there was Little Bear running toward them with the poles of the wigwam upon her back.

The sisters were astonished and very angry indeed. They undid Little Bear from the posts and tied her instead to a huge pine tree which grew close by. And they said: "Now will you stay where we leave you, bad Little Bear?"

Once more they went upon their way. But a third time they had not gone far when they heard a great noise behind them. *Bumpety-bump! Bumpety-bump!* Along came Little Bear with the pine tree upon her shoulders!

The sisters were now very, very angry. They untied Little Bear crossly, with many jerks, and fastened her to a great rock on the side of the hill. And they said: "Now we shall see whether you are anchored or not, you obstinate Little Bear!" So they went upon their way.

Presently they came to a wide river, and they had no boat in which to cross. They sat down upon the shore and moped, seeing no way to continue their journey.

But suddenly they heard a terrible noise behind them, and there once more was Little Bear, running toward them with the great rock on her back.

This time the sisters were glad enough to see her. They unfastened the rock and threw it into the middle of the river. Then they laid the pine tree upon the rock, and so they had a bridge upon which to cross. Merrily they passed over, all three. For this time Little Bear went with the other two. And they did not send her away, because she was so strong and useful. Presently, on the other side of the river, they came to a wigwam, where lived an old witch-woman with her two daughters.

"Where are you going?" asked the old woman.

"Our parents are very old," said the three girls, "and we are going to seek our fortune."

"Come in," said the old woman kindly. "Come in and have supper with us, and sleep to-night in the wigwam with my daughters."

The travelers were glad to go in, for it was growing late. They had a nice supper in the tent, and when it was night the daughters of the old woman and Little Bear's two sisters went to sleep in a huge bed. The sisters of Little Bear were on the outside, with the two others between them.

Little Bear did not go to bed. She sat up with the old woman beside the camp-fire, telling stories, until it was very late and the old woman fell sound asleep. She snored loudly; but to make sure, Little Bear reached out and pinched her gently.

When she found that it was not shamming, she crept softly to the bed where the four girls slept and changed their places. After this Little Bear's sisters were in the middle, and the old woman's daughters on the outside. When Little Bear had done this, she crept back to the fire and lay down, pretending to be asleep.

In a little while the old woman awoke and pinched Little Bear to see whether or not she was really asleep; and although it hurt dreadfully, Little Bear did not stir, or make a sound, but seemed to be dreaming fast. Then the wicked old woman sharpened her long, bright knife and stole to the bed where the girls were sleeping, and before they knew what was happening she had cut off the heads of the two girls on the outer sides of the bed. But it was her own two daughters whom the cruel creature had killed, though she did not know it, in the dark! The wicked old woman lay down to sleep, chuckling to herself. But when all was quiet, Little Bear awoke her two sisters and they all three crept away from that cruel wigwam, hurrying on their journey.

Now, in the morning when the old woman awoke and found what a dreadful thing she had done, she was annoyed. She screamed and cried and tore her hair, and then she jumped up into the sky and pulled down the sun from its place, hiding it away in her wigwam, so that Little Bear and her sisters might be lost in the dark.

In the pitchy blackness, worse than night, because there were no stars, the three stumbled on and on, groping their way; and it was very uncomfortable indeed. At any moment they might run into some terrible danger.

At last they saw the flicker of a little light, and made their way toward it. They found that it was a man carrying a torch and looking about for something.

"What are you looking for?" they asked.

"I am looking for the sun," answered the man. "The sun is lost, and we are in great trouble because of it. Tell me, have you seen the sun?"

They said "No," and asked him to lead them to his village, which he did. And when they came near they saw the twinkle of many lights. All the men of the town were looking for the sun, and there was great distress among them because their Chief was ill, and he could not get well until the sun should be put back into his place in the sky, and the days be bright again.

Little Bear asked to see the Chief, and they took her to where he lay dying.

"Great Chief," said she, "I think that I can help you."

"Can you bring back the sun, Maiden?" asked the Chief feebly. "That is the only thing that will help me."

"Yes, I can do so if you will give me two handfuls of maple sugar and your oldest son," said Little Bear.

The Chief agreed. Little Bear took the maple sugar and went back to the wigwam of the wicked old woman. She climbed up on the outside and threw the sugar down through the chimney-hole into the kettle of rice which the old crone was cooking. Presently the hag tasted it and made a wry face.

"Bah!" she cried; "it is too sweet. I must go and get some more water to put in the kettle."

As soon as the old woman left the wigwam to get the water, Little Bear jumped down from the tent-roof, ran inside, and found the sun where the witch had hidden it away. Up she tossed it into the sky; and lo! the world was bright and beautiful once more.

Then she returned to the village, where the old Chief received her gratefully. As he had promised, he bestowed upon her his oldest son. But Little Bear did not want him. So she gave the young Chief to her eldest sister for a husband; and they were very happy.

Now, when the old woman saw the sun shining once more in his usual place, she was very angry. She screamed and she cried and she tore her hair. Once more she jumped up into the sky, and this time she tore down the moon, hiding it away in her wigwam, just as she had hidden the sun.

Then again the good old Chief fell sick, because now the nights were pitch dark; and he asked Little Bear if she could help him.

Little Bear said: "Yes, I will bring back the moon, if you will give me two handfuls of salt and your next oldest son."

The Chief agreed. Little Bear took the salt and went again to the old woman's wigwam, doing as she had done before. She tossed the salt into the kettle of soup, and when the old woman tasted it she made a face and said: "Ugh! This soup is too salt. I must get some more water to put in the kettle."

As soon as the old woman was out of the way, Little Bear ran in and seized the moon, which was hidden in a corner. She tossed it up into the night sky, where it hung like a lovely lantern, and every one grew happy again.

Immediately the old Chief became well, and was glad enough to keep his promise and to give Little Bear his second son. But she did not want him for herself. She married the young man to her younger sister; and they were very happy.

This time the old woman was very angry indeed. She came by night to the village and stole the Chief's beautiful horse, all covered with little tinkly bells. At this misfortune the old Chief fell ill once more; for he was very sensitive.

Once more Little Bear offered to help him if he would give her two handfuls of maple sugar and two handfuls of salt, and his youngest, handsomest son. Of course, the old Chief agreed.

A third time Little Bear went to the old woman's wigwam and found her making soup. She did just as she had done twice before; only this time the sugar and the salt together made a horrid mess! When the old woman went out to get more water for a quite new soup, Little Bear slipped into the tent and found the horse. As a precaution she first took off his little bells, so that he should not make a noise to bring back the hag. She removed all the little bells but one, and that one she missed, it being hidden under a lock of his mane.

Gently she led the horse away. But alas! The one little bell which she had overlooked began to tinkle as they fled. *Tink! Tink! Tink!* Through the wood the old woman heard it and pricked up her ears. *Hop, hop, hop!* Along she came, hobbling after them faster than any horse could gallop, and she caught Little Bear before she could escape.

"Now I will be even with you for all that you have done!" cried the old woman.

She put Little Bear into a great bag and tied the bag to the limb of a tree. Then she went away to get a big stick with which to beat her victim to death.

But Little Bear did not wait for this to happen. While the old woman was looking for the stick, Little Bear bit a hole in

the bag and crept out. She took the good horse, this time without any bells to give the alarm, and hid him in the bushes ready for flight. Then she put into the bag all the old woman's choicest things--her dishes and food, and the breakable furnishings of her wigwam--until the bag was round and bulgy as if Little Bear herself were inside.

Chuckling to herself, Little Bear hid in the bushes where she could see what happened upon the old woman's return; and merry enough the sight was! Little Bear nearly died of laughing, and had to stuff a corner of her blanket into her mouth lest she should betray herself.

For the old woman came hurrying up with her huge club, and began to beat the bag fiercely. *Crack! Smash!* went the pots and pans. *Smash! Crack!* went the dishes and the other things. But the wicked old woman went on beating harder than ever, thinking that she was breaking the bones of poor Little Bear.

Presently Little Bear grew tired of the smashing and crashing, and thought it was time to be off. She mounted the Chief's good horse and galloped swiftly away to the village, where her sisters were awaiting her anxiously, because she had been gone a long time.

When the Chief saw his good horse once more, he was greatly delighted and grew well immediately; he was so sensitive. As he had promised, he gave to Little Bear his youngest son, who was the handsomest of the three, though not wise. Little Bear loved him dearly; so she married him herself and they went to live in a fine wigwam which the Chief gave them, near the other two brothers and sisters.

But the Little Bear's husband did not love her. He was sulky and said: "I wish my wife were beautiful like the other maidens! Why must I marry an ugly Little Bear? I wish I might have had one of her pretty sisters instead!" And he was cruel to Little Bear and made her weep.

But after a while she dried her tears, and was angry to think how foolish she had been in choosing this youngest son for herself, just because he was so handsome. She thought about it for a long time.

One day she said to her husband: "You do not love me, because I am an ugly Little Bear. Take me and throw me into the fire."

"I do not love you," said her husband, "but I cannot kill you, for then the Chief would punish me."

"Do as I tell you!" said Little Bear, and she stamped her foot.

The young man was afraid, for he knew that Little Bear was very wise and powerful. So he did as she bade him, and threw Little Bear into the fire. This made a great noise in the wigwam, and presently up came running Little Bear's two sisters.

"Wicked man! What have you done to our dear Little Bear?" they cried.

"I have done only as she told me," said the young man sulkily. "Little Bear is not beautiful, but she is wise. So I did what she told me to do. I threw her into the fire."

"Oh, wicked man!" cried the sisters again, bursting into tears.

Just then they heard a strange sound in the fire, and turning, they beheld a most beautiful maiden with dark eyes and raven locks coming out of the flames. She smiled at the two sisters, and turning to the young man said:--

"Husband, do you know me? I am Little Bear, who was wise but not beautiful. Now I have become beautiful, but I am still wiser than before."

"O my wife!" cried the husband eagerly. "I do not care whether you are wise or not--that matters little to me. But I love you with all my heart, you are so beautiful!"

Little Bear laughed and said: "You were unkind to the ugly Little Bear, though she loved you. You are like most men; you care more for beauty than for wisdom. But I have grown wiser than I was when I married you and I do not care what you think."

And Little Bear, now the most beautiful young woman in the village and the pride of the tribe for wisdom, lived happy ever after.

XIX: THE RED KING'S VISIT

"That is a fine story!" cried Harold, clapping his hands after the Red King had finished telling the tale of the Little Bear. "I wish I could remember all the tales that I read, and tell them as well as you do, Your Majesty!"

Red Rex looked pleased. "It is a tale that, when I am not at war, I tell often to my little daughter," he said. "She likes all kinds of stories, but especially those of countries different from our own."

"Then she ought to hear the Tales of Kisington!" cried Harold.

"So I think," mused Red Rex. "I would that you could read them to her, even as you have read them to me, Harold."

"Perhaps some day that may be," answered Harold. "But meantime Your Majesty may hear our tales and tell them to your little Princess when you return. She will like your way of telling them better than reading from a book, I know."

"Yes, I must read those tales again, at your library," said the Red King. "I must study them well, so that I can tell them without losing the point of each, as I am prone to do. My little Hope will be glad. Heretofore, I have never had time enough to read her as much as she craved."

"The library will welcome you," said Harold. "I can answer for that. It would rather have you inside its doors reading than outside battering down the statues and the glass! Will Your Majesty come with me now and visit the Town of Kisington under the flag of truce?"

"That will I," answered Red Rex.

Forth then went Harold and the Red King to the gates of Kisington. Side by side they went, with the flag of truce between them, borne by a big man-at-arms. After them followed a guard of the Red King's men; but these remained behind when the great gate swung open to admit Harold and his royal guest.

There were no soldiers to be seen anywhere in the streets of Kisington. It seemed a town wholly at peace. The Lord Mayor and the Librarian were waiting to receive them, and crowds of people thronged the street to catch a glimpse of the War-Lord, who for nearly a week had been besieging their city without firing a shot since that first day. Harold recognized among the crowd the faces of many of his school-mates, and presently, when he found the opportunity he beckoned to his chums, Robert and Richard, who were in the front ranks.

"Keep close to me," Harold whispered to them. "By and by I dare say you will have a chance to speak with Red Rex himself."

Robert and Richard needed no second hint to keep close at Harold's heels. Proudly they stepped along, one on either side of their friend, behind the Red King and the Lord Mayor who followed the Librarian and the bearer of the flag of truce. To the marketplace they went, the other school children trotting along in the rear of the little procession, and gazing with almost as much pride and awe at their lucky comrades as at the dreaded enemy, Red Rex. Indeed, the whole Town of Kisington seemed moving in the wake of these six most important personages.

What conversation took place between Red Rex and the Lord Mayor was never recorded. But it seemed to grow gradually pleasanter and pleasanter. By the time they had reached the steps of the library, their faces were wreathed in smiles and they beamed at each other like old friends.

At the door of the library the Librarian turned and, with a wave of his hand, said to Red Rex,—"Welcome, Your Majesty, to the treasure-house of Kisington."

"Glad am I to enter these doors," replied the Red King courteously. "For here, I believe, live the wonderful books which during these past days have been giving me much pleasure." He laid his hand on the shoulder of Harold and smiled. One would hardly have recognized the face of the grim War-Lord who had begun the siege so savagely. "I would fain see those friendly books in their own home," he went on.

"That you shall do, Your Majesty," said the Librarian; "for Kisington is so proud of her treasures that she is ever glad to welcome a stranger to the enjoyment of them. Is it not fortunate, Your Majesty, that the library is still standing to entertain you? Recently it was in great danger of being destroyed, as you may have heard." (The Librarian was an exceedingly polite gentleman.)

At these words the Red King turned redder and bowed gravely. "The Books themselves rose up for the protection of

books," he said. "They have proved in this case to be the best weapons of defense. I am beginning to think that they are better than any soldiers."

By this time they had entered the main hall, where a delegation of Leading Citizens awaited them,—in holiday robes and with expectant faces. They greeted Red Rex with profound bows, which he acknowledged graciously.

The Librarian then turned to the rows of patient, peaceful books which lined the walls, ready to be made useful. "Yes, Your Majesty. These are our bulwarks and batteries and bayonets," he said simply.

The air of the room was still and quiet, full of peace and kindness. Beautiful pictures looked down from the walls. Noble statues stood in the niches. Soft lights came in at the windows and fell on the tables and desks, and on rows upon rows of fair volumes, well-dusted and cheerful. The shattered windows had been screened; the broken marbles removed; so that there was nothing to reproach Red Rex or to speak of discord.

The War-Lord looked up and down and around and along, and spoke no word. All the books seemed listening, waiting for him to speak. They were indeed like soldiers, shoulder to shoulder, standing at "attention."

"It is a noble army!" exclaimed Red Rex at last, and his voice was low and gentle. "It is the best kind of army for the world, I see, as I have never seen before. I would it were mine!"

"It is yours, Your Majesty," said the Librarian. "You have but to make free use of it. These soldiers are free-lances, at the service not of one master, but of any one who employs them intelligently. Read them, Your Majesty, and so make them yours, if you will." The Librarian spread out his hands in a generous gesture.

"By my Hope, you are hospitable and magnanimous!" cried Red Rex. "I am tempted to take you at your word. Come, let there be no more war between us. Let us make no brief truce, but agree, instead, upon a true, lasting peace. Already I have promised this Harold of yours to spare the city, east, west, and north,—which is the whole of it. But come; promise me now to spare me the scorn and hatred which you owe for my unfriendliness. Let us spare each other and be friends. For I would know more of your books and of your people."

"Good, Your Majesty!" cried the Lord Mayor, stepping forward. "By all means let there be peace. We have no wish for anything else. Our hastily gathered soldiers are eager to return again to private life. Send away your army, and let peace be proclaimed with no more formality than our true words given each to other in this library, with the witness of the books."

"Done!" shouted Red Rex. "Here is my hand on it!" And he shook hands first with the Lord Mayor, then with the Librarian, then with the other Leading Citizens. Harold and his chums were standing modestly a little way apart. He called the boy to his side and laid an arm affectionately about his shoulder. "Here is your true peacemaker," said Red Rex. "If Harold had not been so good a reader, I should never have been here in peace with you at this moment. To Harold and his books I owe the vision of what a library really is."

"Your Majesty," said Harold promptly, "will you also shake hands with Richard and Robert? It will make them very proud."

"That will I!" cried Red Rex. And he not only shook hands, but clapped the boys on the shoulder, calling each by name; which was a thing for them to remember all their lives.

"Now!" announced the Red King, taking a large seal ring from his finger and handing it to his soldier who bore the flag of truce. "Take this ring, and go back to my army; bid the generals lead their men home, and busy themselves in some useful work until my return. For as for me, I shall remain for a space in this peaceful city, in this peaceful Kingdom, to learn something further of its ways and wonders, which interest me hugely."

The soldier saluted and retired. And shortly after was heard beyond the walls the *tramp, tramp* of a retreating army. The Red King was alone in Kisington, among the books.

Little cared he for what went on outside. He was carried away by the fascination of a world new to him. The Librarian led him from room to room, from stack to stack, from shelf to shelf of tempting books. The Red King was fairly bewildered by the opportunities offered. He wanted to read all the volumes at once.

"I never dreamed there were so many books in the world!" he cried. "How can a man live long enough to read them all, if he does nothing else all his days?"

"Do you wonder we have no time for war, Your Majesty?" asked the Librarian.

"No more war for me!" declared Red Rex. They had reached a division of the books labeled in huge letters OUTLAND TALES. The Red King laid his hand upon a volume bound in green-and-silver, like ice. "This has a tempting look," said Red Rex. "Are these also Chronicles of Kisington?"

"Yes, in a sense," answered the Librarian. "The deeds here recorded happened not in our Kingdom; yet, being tales gathered by our forbears in their travels around the world, to and from Kisington, they had a part in our history. They helped our fathers the better to understand and sympathize with the stranger, and so made for the peace which they loved."

"This is a story for me," declared Red Rex, who had been peeping into the ice-bound volume. "I would fain hear another tale interpreted by my little friend. Harold, will you read me this story, as you have read so many ere now? I long to hear your pleasant voice again."

"I will read whatever Your Majesty wishes," replied Harold. "Shall we go into this alcove where we shall be quite undisturbed and undisturbing?"

"By all means," said Red Rex. And here, in a cozy comer under one of the great windows, with Richard and Robert on either side of him, Harold read to the delighted King the Icelandic tale of *The Bear's Daughter*.

XX: THE BEAR'S DAUGHTER

Once upon a time, on an island far to the north of Kisington, whither only the bravest sailors dared to venture, lived a boy named Hans. They called him Hans the Hunter, because he loved so much to hunt and fish. He was a tall, brave, and sturdy lad, and he loved his life and was proud of his nickname. He had a hard spot in his heart, or he would not have been a hunter.

One day Hans went out with two other lads to hunt. It was in the early spring, the season when the ice breaks up in the rivers and begins to move seaward, like the hearts of men. The three wandered for many miles over the ice and snow until they came to the frozen bed of a river; but they did not know it was a river, the water of it flowed so far below the cakes of ice which concealed it, while over all was a thick crust of snow.

At this spot Hans the Hunter, who was after big game, left the others and started toward the south. Presently in the snow his sharp eyes spied the tracks of a huge bear. He was greatly delighted, and began to follow the slot so eagerly that he hardly marked where he was going. But all on a sudden he felt an unsteady motion under his feet. The ground seemed slipping beneath him. The snow parted and the ice cracked, and he spied blue water in the gaps between. Then he realized that he was upon a river, afloat upon a cake of ice!

Hans was greatly terrified, and made haste to leap upon a larger floe, for the former was too small to hold his weight, and threatened to turn upside down. Still he was in great danger; for before he knew it the river had carried him out into a bay of floating ice, far from the steady land. To and fro he leaped on his long legs, over the moving mass, hoping to find a way of escaping back to the shore. But presently he saw to his horror that he was rapidly floating out to the ocean upon a huge ice-floe, which was fast separating from the others. He was adrift upon a barren island of ice!

Scarcely had he had time to realize this, when Hans had another shock. As he came around a huge pillar of ice, he almost stumbled upon a huge white bear lying asleep upon her side. It must have been the very same bear whose tracks had led Hans into danger, and which he had quite forgotten. With a hunter's instinct Hans raised his gun to shoot her. But at the moment, before he pulled the trigger, the bear opened her eyes and spoke to him; and it did not seem so very strange to hear her speak his own language.

"Why do you seek to kill me?" she said piteously. "I have done no harm to you, Hans the Hunter. Moreover, if you kill me you will yourself die of cold within a few hours. If you lie down upon the ice to sleep you will freeze to death. But if you rest against my thick fur I will keep you warm. O man! Why must we be enemies? We are bound on a dangerous sea voyage together. Be my friend! Catch fish for me, so that we shall not starve. So, helping one another, we shall live comfortably on this floating home until we are able to go ashore."

"Gladly will I do what you say," agreed Hans the Hunter, for he saw that her words were wise.

After that Hans and the bear became partners. By day, with the tackle which he always carried in his wallet, Hans fished for their dinner; and, indeed, the bear's huge appetite kept him busy! By night he snuggled against the warm fur of his

neighbor and slept soundly, not feeling the cold. So they kept their bargain.

Many days went by, and the bear came to love Hans dearly. Indeed, he liked her, too. But Hans loved himself better, for he was a selfish lad.

One morning Hans awoke with a start, conscious of an unusual movement near him. The bear was stirring uneasily in her sleep. But something else close beside him writhed and wriggled. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Nestled against the bear's white fur was a tiny newborn child, a beautiful baby girl. Hans sat up and stared at the prodigy. What did it mean? Where did the baby come from? At last an idea came to him.

"Oho!" he said to himself. "Now I know what it all means! This is the Enchanted Bear of whom I have heard so much,-- the great White Bear of the North. That is why she could talk to me, and why I could understand. That is why her newborn cub is a human child, *until she looks at it*. Mistress Bear has not yet seen her little one. Ho! What a prize for a hunter to take home! This enchanted bear-baby will remain human, if I can steal her away where her mother will never set eyes on her. That will be something to show the other fellows, I should say!"

On the preceding night Hans had noted that the ice-floe was approaching nearer to the land. This morning they were very close to shore. Many ice-cakes floated about, and by jumping from one to another long-legged Hans knew that he could make the land. Very gently he took the little white baby, so soft and warm, in his great hands and wrapped it under his coat, so that the old bear should not see it. Then silently and stealthily he prepared to depart. But when he moved away from her side the old bear wakened suddenly and called after him,--

"Where are you going, friend Hans? What are you doing with my little cub that I have never seen?" Hans did not stop to explain, but clasping the baby tightly, darted off over the ice-field toward the land. Surprised and fearful, the old bear rose and looked after him with wide eyes of reproach. Then when she realized what he meant to do, she shook herself with a mighty roar, and her eyes grew bright and fierce. She started in pursuit.

It was a terrible chase! Hans was swift-footed; but after all the ice was not his natural ground. The bear who had seemed so clumsy traveled over the ice with miraculous speed, as polar bears do. Hans heard her panting behind him, drawing nearer and nearer, and his heart sank low. He knew how sharp her claws were, and how strong her teeth. She was gaining upon him; but he would not give up the baby. The hard spot in his heart grew harder. Burdened as he was, he turned about and raising his gun fired it at the bear. His aim was good,--for was he not Hans the Hunter? With a moan the great bear fell, and he saw a stream of blood dye the ice-floe which he had so long shared with her as a home.

Hans did not pause to mourn over the faithful friend who had kept him alive and warm for so many nights; but leaving her on the ice to die, sped shoreward with his burden, jumping lightly from cake to cake of ice until he reached the land.

After wandering about for some time Hans found a deserted fisherman's hut, where he built a fire and cherished the baby which he had stolen. The little thing seemed to thrive under his clumsy care. He tarried in the hut for some days, managing to get food for the baby and himself. Then he took the child and made his way inland until he came to a little village. He found that it was miles and miles from his former home; but the people were kind and urged him to stay. So Hans decided to settle down and live here, practicing his trade as a hunter, and earning enough to keep himself and the child in comfort. And every day the stolen baby grew dearer and dearer to Hans the Hunter.

Years went by. Hans became a big man, the mightiest, most famous hunter in all the countryside. Presently the little girl was grown up, too. And she had become the most beautiful tiny maiden in the land. Her name was Ursula, which means "Little Bear-Girl," though no one knew why Hans had given her this name. Folk supposed that she was called after the holy Saint Ursula. Hans, as you may guess, never told the lass about her bear-mother whom he had so cruelly wronged.

Hans loved Ursula so dearly that he hoped some day she would become his little wife. For a long time Ursula laughed and put him off; but at last she consented.

One fine day they drove to Church and were married. After the wedding all the village folk crowded around the sleigh in which Hans was to carry his young bride home, and wished the couple joy and good luck. For everybody liked big Hans, who was cruel only to animals; and they adored his little Ursula, who was cruel to nobody. She looked very pretty as she sat beside Hans, all pink and white and smiling, wrapped from head to foot in snowy furs which Hans had given her for a wedding present. Merrily they waved good-bye to the crowd as they drove away. And every one said, "Was there ever seen a handsomer, finer couple?"

It was a gay, long ride home through the forest, and the pair were very happy. The sun shone dazzlingly on the jeweled

snow, and the evergreens sparkled with icicles. The little brook, hidden under the ice, peeped at them through sundry chinks here and there, chuckling merrily as he ran. The sleigh-bells jingled heartily and the horse pranced as if he, too, shared the joy of that happy wedding day.

Suddenly, as they came out into an open space, the horse stopped short with a frightened snort, and stood gazing with wild eyes, trembling in every limb. Something huge and terrible blocked the road. In the middle of the way stood a great white bear, upright upon her hind legs.

Hans recognized her at once; it was his old friend whom he had betrayed! After all, she was not dead, as he had hoped, but after twenty years had come back to confront him. She was staring fixedly at Hans,--she had not yet seen little Ursula muffled in her furs. With a cry Hans threw himself between his young bride and this terrible sight.

"Come to me, my Daughter, my Cub!" cried the mother-bear in a deep voice. "Come to me!"

Ursula gave a strange, wild cry and struggled in the arms of Hans. "What is it?" she said. "Oh, what is it? I must see!"

At the same moment her voice died away into a low whine, then rose into a howl such as an animal gives in pain. Struggling from her husband's arms she leaped from the sleigh.

Instantly Hans followed, holding out his arms piteously and calling, "Ursula! Ursula!"

But the white, furry figure did not hear. It was hurrying forward toward the great bear.

"Come to me, my Child!" said the bear again. "Leave the wicked man who betrayed his friend and sought to kill her. Come, let us punish him!"

Her words ended in a fierce growl, which was echoed by the other white figure, as she turned about and looked at Hans. And oh, what was this! With horror he saw that his little bride had, indeed, turned into a furry white bear. Her eyes burned red and angry as she looked at him, and she showed her teeth as if her mother's words had turned all her love of Hans into hatred, for the old bear's sake.

She seemed about to spring upon Hans and tear him to pieces. But suddenly her look changed. She folded her paws upon her furry breast, and Hans saw tears, human tears, come into the little bear's eyes. It was the last token of her human life, the last gleam of her fondness for him. She could not punish him as her mother bade. She would not let evil happen to him, even though he had done such a cruel wrong, because she had once been his little Ursula.

Dropping upon all fours she ran toward her mother, and they laid noses together for their first caress. She seemed to say something to the old bear in a silent language, which was answered by a deep, sullen growl. After this, without a further glance at Hans, the two bears turned about and trotted away together into the forest. Hans the Hunter never saw them again.

But after that the gun of Hans hung rusty on the wall of his lonely hut. The hard spot in his heart had melted.

XXI: RED REX AND KING VICTOR

Hardly had Harold finished speaking these last words in the tragic story of the Bear's Daughter, when there arose from the market-place such a hubbub and commotion that the Red King's comments on the tale were quite lost. Voices were shouting and cheering; trumpets were blowing and drums beating; over the clang of weapons and neighing of horses one caught the *tramp, tramp* of marching feet.

Red Rex sprang to his feet, drawing his sword and growing very red in the face. Once again he was the fierce and terrible War-Lord. But Harold did not notice. He was too much excited at the tumult going on outside. He ran hastily to the window and looked out. The square was full of soldiers and banners and gayly decked horses. Men-at-arms crowded the side streets, pouring continuously into the square. The ruined porch of the library was crowded. A guard stood at the portal.

In the center of the square, bestriding a white horse, sat a stately figure, dressed all in white armor. His snowy head was uncovered and he spoke to the cheering people smilingly.

A great shout arose as he finished his speech. "Long live our good King Victor!"

Harold joined in the shout. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

And Robert and Richard, scrambling up beside him, echoed the cheer,--"Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live King Victor!"

"Our good King has come to Kisington at last!" cried Harold, turning back into the library.

He had quite forgotten his warlike guest and why King Victor had come to Kisington. Indeed, for the moment every one seemed to have forgotten Red Rex. The Librarian, the Lord Mayor, and the other Leading Citizens had disappeared, and the library seemed quite empty. But in one corner of the alcove where the last story had been read, Red Rex was standing at bay. He had drawn up before him a heavy table, behind which he stood, sword in hand, one foot advanced, his red beard bristling.

"Yes, I am trapped!" snarled Red Rex. "You have caught me, boy. But you shall pay for this!"

Harold and the Red King stood staring at one another. The *tramp, tramp* of feet sounded on the staircase, coming nearer. Along the hall came the tread. The door of the hall opened, and a martial group crossed the threshold. Foremost came their King, King Victor himself, the splendid, white-haired peace hero. The three boys dropped each on one knee before him.

For a moment the King stood gazing about him mildly, without speaking. He was tall and stately, but his eyes were kind, even merry, and with all his dignity there was nothing to strike fear even into the heart of a child. Presently his eyes caught the figure of the trapped War-Lord, barricaded and at bay in the corner.

He stepped forward with a friendly air and held out his hand. "Welcome, Cousin!" he said in a hearty voice.

Red Rex glared at him, fairly bristling with rage. "Do not mock me!" he blustered. "I know well enough that I have been trapped and that the word of the Lord Mayor of this town, given to me, will not count now. But you shall not take me alive. I will slay the first who lays hand on me!" He waved his sword furiously. Harold had never seen him look so terrible.

"Nay, nay!" cried King Victor mildly. "You mistake, indeed, Cousin!"

But the enraged Red King would not listen, and went on with his wild accusations.

"I have been trapped by children!" he raged. "Delayed by tales! Deceived by promises! I trusted all these and disbanded my army, fool that I was! But take me if you can!" Again he flourished his sword and ground his teeth.

King Victor stood looking at the War-Lord without speaking. At last he raised his hand with a grand gesture and said with emphasis and sincerity, "You are making a great mistake, Cousin! You are not trapped. The promise of the Lord Mayor is sacred. In my land a word is as good as a treaty. You are quite free to go, if you list. But, indeed, we hope you will deign to stay, as our honored guest. It is the first time you have graced our Kingdom with your presence, Cousin. We long to be friends with you; to see lasting peace between our neighboring lands."

"You come with an army," retorted Red Rex sullenly. "You came in response to summons. You came to combat me."

"That is true," assented King Victor. "When we heard that Kisington was besieged, we gathered together our peaceful army and hastened hither in the interests of peace. But we arrive to find, instead of a bloody siege, a peaceful King enjoying this library. We hasten to add our own welcome to that of Kisington's Leading Citizens. We invite you to remain, Cousin, and enjoy not only these but other treasures of our Kingdom which it may be to your advantage to know better."

"If my army had not disbanded," blustered the War-Lord, "you would not be speaking to me so debonairly."

"Maybe not, maybe not!" agreed King Victor.

"Yet, our volunteer police force embraces every citizen of our Kingdom. We should have surrounded you without trouble or bloodshed, Cousin. We could have persuaded your army by sheer force of numbers and opinion, without doubt. But let us not think of that. Let us rather consider the pleasanter things which surround us. Shall we not be friends, Cousin? We know your Kingdom well. We have read and studied about it thoroughly in our books. We have, indeed, traveled all over it in peaceful disguise. Come, you ought to become as well acquainted with ours; then I am sure we should never misunderstand one another again. Say, Cousin Rex, shall it be?"

He advanced a step nearer the other, holding out his hand and smiling genially. His sincerity was plain.

The War-Lord dropped his sword. "I believe you!" he cried, stepping forward and grasping the proffered hand. "Cousin, Neighbor, let there be peace between our whole kingdoms; even as we promised between myself and Kisington."

"So be it!"

The two monarchs embraced in kingly fashion, and sat down in a retired alcove for a pleasant chat.

It was not long before Harold was summoned to the pair. King Victor received him kindly, and Red Rex grinned. "We have heard the tale of your service to the State and to our Royal Friend, Harold," said King Victor graciously. "We would fain give you a suitable reward, my brave Bookworm. What shall it be? Tell me your wish."

Harold flushed and stammered. "I do not wish a reward for the little I did, Sire," he said. "I had no thought of that. Indeed, it was a pleasure to read for His Majesty."

"Yea, so we believe!" smiled the King. "Yet some reward we owe for your true office. What shall it be?"

Harold hesitated, thinking. "Truly, for myself I ask nothing," he said. "Yet, perhaps, Sire, you would help my mother, my dear mother, so that she need not work so hard while I am learning to be a scholar."

"It shall be so!" cried the King. "She shall have a little maid to help her; money to pay the rent, buy food and clothes and modest pleasures. These shall she have. But for yourself, Harold? We must show you some special favor, for our own comfort."

"Well," said Harold, "one thing I scarcely dare to ask. But I should like more time to read in the library while His Majesty is here. Maybe I could serve him better if I had not to go to school these days. May the school children have a vacation of a week, Sire?"

"A fortnight!" cried King Victor, beaming. "It is the very pith of our talk, my boy. For a week the King our Cousin is fain to tarry in Kisington, and he asks no better than yourself to be his guide, philosopher, and friend. Then for a week he will be my guest, traveling with me over the Kingdom, visiting certain places whereabout you have made him curious by your stories. He asks that you may go as his page. Both these things are possible if we grant the school a fortnight's recess. It shall be done. But still, this is little reward for your wise doings, my boy. Ask something more."

"Then, Sire, I beg this," said Harold, with shining eyes. "Let Robert and Richard go with me as assistant pages. That will be a merry vacation for us all; no better boon could I ask!"

The King laughed merrily. "A boy's wish!" he said, "but it shall be granted. Now, come hither, Harold." With these words King Victor threw over the boy's shoulders a heavy gold chain with a cross hanging from it. "Blessed are the peacemakers," quoted King Victor. "Wear this, Harold, a token from your grateful country. And with it goes the gift of a hundred books, which you shall choose for yourself, to be the beginning of a library of your own,—Book Wizard, as they call you!"

The bells of Kisington began to peal gayly and continuously, a triple rejoicing. The beloved King being in town was sufficient reason for festival. Therefore,—*Ding dong!* Peace was declared forever between the two neighboring nations. Therefore, *Ding dong! Ding dong!* A holiday for the school children of Kisington, Harold's friends. Therefore,—*Ding dong! Ding dong! Ding dong!*

Harold went home to his mother with the glad news. And proud enough she was of her lad when she heard why all the bells were ringing, and saw his golden cross.

XXII: THE BOOKS CONQUER

Thus began the wonderful fortnight of vacation that Harold and Robert and Richard never forgot in all their lives.

For a happy week the War-Lord tarried in Kisington. He spent much of his time studying at the library, reading many books, but especially such tales as Harold thought the little Princess Hope would enjoy. Many of these he heard Harold read aloud; sometimes in the cozy alcoves of the library, where they could disturb no one; sometimes in the sumptuous apartments of the palace which King Victor had put at the disposal of Red Rex; oftenest and best of all in the little thatched cottage of Harold's mother, where the Red King came to feel perfectly at home. For one of the first things Harold did in his vacation time was to invite the War-Lord to dinner.

"We shall have for dessert one of my mother's famous apple pies," promised Harold with a twinkle. The Red King blushed; but he accepted the invitation in a truly kingly spirit.

There was now plenty to eat and drink in Harold's home, and a nice little maid to help his mother and make the days pleasanter. It was a very merry party that gathered around the table in the kitchen that night. Richard and Robert were there; for the Red King had taken a fancy to them, and they all talked together like old friends. The Red King had many thrilling adventures to tell them of his roving life. And Red Rex was learning many new and novel things of them all the while. For this was the first time he had ever eaten in a thatched cottage, or in the company of simple strangers.

When the great pie was brought in, all steaming and spicy, Harold and the War-Lord exchanged a peculiar glance.

"Your Majesty has tasted my pie before," said Harold's mother innocently. "I sent a piece with Harold's luncheon one day, and he tells me you approved of it. That is why we have it to-day for dessert."

"Ah! I approve of it, indeed! I shall never forget your pie, dear little Mother!" cried the Red King with a laugh. "It is worth adventuring much to obtain even a bite of pies like yours."

"They taste best of all at midnight," said Harold mischievously.

"That I cannot believe," said Red Rex, frowning at him. "I never ate pie so delicious before this day!"

"Do you think one piece of pie hot is worth five pies cold, Your Majesty?" asked Harold.

"Yes, indeed!" cried the Red King, turning still redder. "Especially if eaten in such pleasant company."

"So thought not the wicked old woman who stole my pies," said Harold's mother. "I wonder if she will ever dare to claim that beautiful shawl which she left behind her?"

"I dare say not," frowned the Red King. "And inasmuch as the Lord Mayor declares that she must have been a native of my Kingdom, intruding within your walls, I hereby make over to you that shawl which she has forfeited by her wicked deed. Wear it henceforth without a qualm, Mother."

She wore it to church the very next Sunday, and all the ladies envied her this last piece of good luck which seemed to follow the coming of the Red King.

Red Rex was eager to visit every corner of Kisington about which he had heard in the Chronicles. Since this was vacation time, Harold and Robert and Richard were overjoyed to be his guides. They visited the Old Curiosity Shop where the Lion Passant had lived dumbly for years before the coming of the Patent Medicine Man. The store was still kept by a wheezy old fellow with a cough; though he was not the same who had spilled the Elixir over the Lion Passant. Of him the War-Lord bought so many curiosities that he and his little old wife became quite rich, and never had to worry about the future any more.

They visited the ruined old castle, a little way out of Kisington on the road to Hushby, where Arthur had found the magic glass, made by his uncle the Amateur Magician. It was now all in ruins, inhabited only by bats and owls and rats. But the Red King prowled about the crumbling chambers with the greatest delight, and took home a paper of pebbles as a souvenir for the little Princess Hope, who made "collections."

They visited the famous bakehouse of the Rafe-Margot Company, where a kind of pastry called "Kingspies" was still made after the old recipe, which had first been used in the oven of the premises. For this was the site of the little red house that had stood on the acre of land under the red-apple tree. All these had disappeared; and the Kingspies, which the Red King tasted eagerly, were not as good as the home-made variety of which Harold's mother had inherited the secret. For there is something magic about the pies that a mother makes in her own kitchen which no factory can imitate.

At this factory Red Rex left a large sum of money to pay for Kingspies which should be given to any hungry man who asked; particularly if he asked at midnight,—which seemed, indeed, a strange condition! But Harold understood why the Red King did this thing. And Harold never told any one,—not even Robert and Richard.

One day they all went to visit what had been Gerda's Wonder-Garden, by the sea. It was now called the Aquarium, and was a public park, free to all the people of Kisington. It was quite as wonderful as ever, for it was full of all the strange and beautiful creatures of the sea, and Red Rex marveled greatly to see them there.

In charge of the Aquarium was the Lady Anyse, who was a descendant of Cedric and Gerda. She came to greet them when she heard of their arrival, and as soon as their eyes met she and the Red King gazed at each other long and earnestly. She was tall and stately, and very beautiful. She had red hair like the King's, and bright blue eyes; and she was afraid of nothing. She and Red Rex stared at each other long and earnestly, without speaking.

At last Red Rex said:--

"In sooth, I believe you are, indeed, of my kin! Something tells me so. I am sure that Gerda, your great-great-grandmother came from my Kingdom, and was sister of my great-great-grandfather."

"I think so too," said the Lady Anyse.

"Cousin," declared Red Rex, "you have been too long away from the land of your fathers. Will you go back with me, to my little daughter? She has no mother, and she needs one badly; some one from a peaceful Kingdom. I think she needs you. I am going, moreover, to make for her a splendid Aquarium, like this of Kisington. This also will need your care."

"I think so too," said the Lady Anyse.

"Then you will come back with me?" begged Red Rex, more eagerly than he had ever begged for anything in his life. "It will make a new bond between our Kingdoms, so that we shall never be at war again."

"I think so too!" said the Lady Anyse, who was a woman of few words.

So that matter was happily settled, to the Red King's great content. And a happy thing, indeed, it proved for the little Princess Hope and for the two Kingdoms.

When the second week began, Red Rex left Kisington to visit King Victor at the Capital City. Harold and Robert and Richard accompanied him as pages, each wearing a beautiful suit of velvet and gold, and each riding on a fine little white pony, the gift of Red Rex.

What a glorious trip that was! For first they made a detour to the Town of Hushby. There still stood the inn where Arthur had met pretty Margot who afterwards became his Countess, and where he had his first adventure with the wicked Oscar. From there the party went up into the mountains where the Dragon used to live. Harold and the other two boys scrambled about among the rocks, and after a while they found the very place which had been the Dragon's den. It was a cave fifty feet long and twelve feet high, very black and gloomy. And in it were a great many skulls and bones of persons whom the Dragon had killed and eaten in those dreadful years, long, long ago. But now it was empty and forgotten.

From Hushby they rode to the Capital City, which was all decked with banners and flowers to receive Red Rex, the ex-War-Lord. Then began a season of royal merrymaking to celebrate the peace between the two Kingdoms. There were banquets and dancing and games and pageants, processions and concerts and fireworks, all of which the Red King and his three pages enjoyed hugely. King Victor was very kind to them, and made them happy in every way he could devise.

He invited them to the Royal Museum, where they were privileged to view some of the most precious treasures of the Kingdom. They saw in a glass case on a velvet mat the tiny stuffed Dragon himself; he who had once been the Terror of Hushby. They saw, too, the now un-magical glass with which Arthur had vanquished his enemy. It looked like any other mere reading-glass with an ivory handle, and it was hard to believe what wonders it had done. In this same collection was the first pie-plate brought by Rafe's messenger to the King, after that clever cook became pie-maker-in-ordinary to the throne.

Here, too, was the glove of that royal giantess, the Princess Agnes, who had refused to marry Arthur because he was too little. It was as broad as a palm-leaf fan, and much thicker. Close by the monster glove lay a tiny white moccasin, which had once been worn by Ursula, the bear's daughter, and which had been brought back from the far land of that sad story by one of the sea-rovers of Kisington, who had first told the tale.

Here also was one of the partly-grated nuts with which Meg had flavored the first King's Pie; and a precious pearl from Gerda's Wonder-Garden, the gift of the grateful Mermaid. There, worn to rags, by the passage of many years, was the original lion-doll made by Claribel, from the model of the Lion Passant. And this the Red King liked best of all. But there were many interesting things in the Museum of King Victor which recalled to Red Rex the stories that Harold had read to him.

One day King Victor and a merry party rode to the town of Derrydown in the north. Here was the great lion-doll factory, started by Claribel and the Lion Passant, which had made their fortune and that of Derrydown. The party stopped at the old Red Lion Inn where the sign still swung over the door as in the days when the Lion Passant had first been struck by its resemblance to his family crest. And because it was his family crest also, Red Rex made the landlord a handsome present. In these days the Red King was generosity itself.

Hard by the Inn was the very same tiny hut in which Claribel had lived; and over the fireplace still showed dimly the carved coat of arms and the motto, *Noblesse oblige*.

When Red Rex saw this, he stood and stared at it a long time, saying nothing. "I used to think that meant 'A King can do no wrong,'" said he at last in a low voice to King Victor. "Now I believe it means, 'A King must do no wrong.'"

"So I too believe," agreed King Victor. "But I would make the motto say still more. Every one can be noble, and a noble must do no wrong."

"It shall be the motto of my people!" declared Red Rex. And so it became.

But there were other tales of this neighborhood which Red Rex remembered. "May we not go hunting in the Ancient Wood, of which I have heard?" asked Red Rex while they tarried in Derrydown. "I understand that it is not far, and that there is great game to be had in those still coverts."

"Nay; in these days we do not hunt in my Kingdom," replied King Victor. "Since hearing the tale of the Bear's Daughter it has been no pleasure for any of us to kill or hurt any dumb creature."

"Ah!" cried Red Rex. "I had forgot that story! Hans wounded a poor friendly bear who had done him no harm. That was cowardly, indeed! True, Cousin. Neither do I wish to hunt any more. It was that tale which you punctuated by your noisy arrival in Kisington, do you remember? I picked out that story for myself; and it has done a service to the wild creatures of my Kingdom, who will henceforth be safe from me and mine. But, indeed, though we do not hunt, I would fain see this Ancient Wood, where the Old Gnome lived in his hollow tree."

"We will go this very day," answered King Victor. And go they did. Sure enough, in a clearing they found the house which David had built for his little wife, snug and clean and empty. Close by in the thick woods the three boys discovered a giant tree-stump, papered with moss and hung with cobweb hammocks, which they felt sure had been the house of the Hermit Gnome in the days before he became a Fairy.

"I must bring my little daughter Hope to see this place," declared the Red King. "She would love it best of all. What good times she would have with me here in the forest! I would tell her the story of David, and learn myself to be a woodsman."

"It is more amusing than war," declared King Victor. "With books in the city and woodcraft in the wild, who would be a soldier? Look, now! I will give to your little Princess Hope as a gift this tiny cottage, where David and his wife and little daughter lived so happily. When she comes to visit our Kingdom,--often, as I hope,--you can play at being a woodsman; which is a good game. But you must promise to let me be your guest for at least one night of each visit. For I, too, love these woods and this little house which has been my secret retreat for many years. Will you accept my gift for your little daughter, Cousin?"

"Gladly do I accept!" cried Red Rex. And they shook hands gayly.

Still further they penetrated across the meadow to the woods once called the Great Fear. Red Rex was anxious to know more of that once dangerous neighborhood. But since peace had become the fashion in the Kingdom, the wicked Gnomes, who had tried as long as possible to prick war-poison into the hearts of men, found their occupation gone. When the good King's peace plans reached their ears the Gnomes groaned in despair. They held a council, and decided unanimously to curl up forthwith in the long sleep and let the world alone.

There was now no sign of them, save where here and there a gnarled arm or burly bended knee seemed to push up from the ground. But these were so covered with mould and moss that it was impossible to tell them from the fallen tree-trunks or mounds of earth. Harold and Robert and Richard did not disturb these mossy mysteries. In times of peace it is better to let sleeping Gnomes lie. Only the makers of ammunition and warships and newspaper scareheads (of whom there were none in King Victor's land) would be eager to see those busy-bodies awake and at their malicious work again, causing peaceful places to become a Great Fear.

When the happy fortnight ended, the Red King went back to his Kingdom and his little Princess Hope, taking with him the beautiful Lady Anyse.

Then began a time of peace in that hitherto restless land; a time of peace and prosperity and happiness, of neighborliness and the exchange of friendly doings. King Victor went to visit the erstwhile War-Lord, and in that time taught the Red King many useful arts of peace. And who, think you, went with King Victor on that visit? Who but the good Librarian and Harold, his adopted son. The Librarian had his pockets full of plans for a grand new library to be established in the Capital of Red Rex. And Harold had his pockets full of stories for the little Princess, and his bag full of sweetmeats for that same wee lady, made by his kind mother who was now pie-maker-general to the Red King, according as they had planned.

Harold and the Princess Hope, who was the dearest of little girls in pink-and-gold, became the best of friends. And when the following summer she came with Red Rex and the Queen Anyse to live in the hut in the Ancient Wood and play at being wood-folk, Harold and Richard and Robert came also. The three boys encamped (like Boy Scouts) in the woods close by the hollow tree which had once been the cell of the Hermit Gnome. And they used his house for their cooling cellar!

So ended the Siege of Kisington, where the books conquered. And the days of peace continued until the time when Harold, having become a famous scholar, was chosen Librarian and Governor of Kisington.

In those days there were no more forts or walls or jealous boundaries between the Kingdoms; for the lands were one in peace and good-will. There were no armies or weapons or disputes; for the nations understood and loved and trusted one another, and their rulers were wise men and women.

In those days the Princess Hope had become the most beautiful book-loving maiden in the world, and the wise Governor of her father's fairest city, adjoining Kisington.

Of course you can guess what happened next?

And they lived happy ever after.

THE END