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Ass and Seven Champions.**

By F. M. ALLEN. 6s.

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B R A Y H A R D



BRAYHARD.

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Champion George—Bewildering Birth-marks—The Enchantress Kalyb sent for—Diagnosis of the Diabolical Female—Father fairly Bamboozled—Palming the Fairy Child with the Whooping Cough—Early Days of the Champion—Our Hero Spoon-feeds the Infant—Kalyb proposes for the Adolescent Champion—Exposition of Magical Treasures—Champion George Tempted—Kalyb relates her History—The Over-Familiar Fiend—Kalyb makes a Deed of Gift—Marriage Contract Signed—The Over-Familiar Fiend finds his Master—Champion George dons the Seven-League Sea-Boots—Our Hero brays too Loudly—Kalyb gives the Bridegroom her Sisters' Address—Departure of our Hero and George—Destruction of the Enchantress and the Over-Familiar Fiend.



HE troubles and adventures of George, Champion of England, began early—in fact with his birth.



His parents were people of noble but respectable lineage who dwelt in their ancestral castle, situated not a thousand miles from the neighbourhood of Coventry.

The infant Champion was born in the following condition: his feet were encased in a pair of clump-soled shoes, a broad arrow was tattooed on

his left arm, the English coat-of-arms covered the small of his back, a flaming dragon was emblazoned on his chest, and an incipient Union-Jack was plainly visible on each cheek.

"This is a most dreadful state of affairs!" said his noble sire. "We must at once send for Madame Hortensia Kalyb, the Enchantress, who dwells in the heart of the forest adjoining our demesne."

Accordingly Madame Kalyb was summoned to the castle.

The Enchantress was an atrociously ugly female of an uncertain age. She had a straggling grey moustache which stood out like a verandah over her mouth; and from her chin sprouted many wiry hairs which gave her pointed under-jaw the appearance of a broom very much the worse for the wear.

When Kalyb gazed at the strangely-marked infant a desire seized her to obtain for her own use and benefit so priceless a treasure—for she was of a covetous disposition and passionately fond of collecting curios. In order to abstract the infant she had of course to divert the attention of the parents.

"Marvellous indeed!" she exclaimed, gazing steadfastly at the babe through the wrong end of a horoscope.

"What is it?" asked the noble father anxiously.

"I think it is whooping-cough," answered Kalyb; "and if you, good sir, would only go yourself to the chemist's for a mixture which I shall prescribe I will

guarantee on my word of honour as a professional enchantress that the shoes will dissolve into thin glue, and the interesting emblazonments will, with the aid of my magic sponge, be completely obliterated."

The anxious parent was not wholly pleased with Kalyb's diagnosis and fidgeted visibly.

"I hope you do not think it is catching?" he inquired.

"Oh, dear no!" replied the Enchantress. "You couldn't catch it if you tried ever so hard. Now, fetch me some writing materials."

The parent instantly placed the materials (consisting of pen, ink, paper, envelopes, and sealing wax) at the witch's disposal. On a slip of paper (which she afterwards folded carefully, put into an envelope and sealed with her own signet ring) Kalyb wrote :

R.	
<i>Syrupus Scille</i> 1 Pint.
<i>Refined Sugar</i> 2½ lbs.

and handed the magical prescription to the father, who disappeared like a shot in search of the most adjacent apothecary.

The Enchantress, taking advantage of his absence, produced a small bottle from her pocket and placed it under the nose of the mother—who had been too frightened to do anything save stare at the visitor—and soon produced a deep and unnatural sleep.

Then Madame Kalyb, by a sleight of hand known to people of her class, palmed off a fairy child (who

had a genuine catching attack of whooping-cough) on the chloroformed mother, and disappeared with the real baby wrapped up in a shawl.

Thus was the future Champion of all England basely decoyed from his ancestral birth-chamber by this most wicked and deceitful witch.

For a considerable period the abstracted Champion was regularly spoon-fed by a magical Donkey, named Brayhard, whose resounding solos were the terror of the neighbourhood.

When Master George was able to stand aloney-proudly, Madame Kalyb observed: "The child is not old enough to be allowed to go to bed in his boots." So she dexterously removed the congenital shoes by simply unlacing them; and then she disposed of them, at an advanced price, to a sea-captain who was in want of an extra-powerful caul, his certificate having been suspended.

From this time forth the Champion suffered more or less from tender feet.

The tattoo marks on the various parts of his body (with the exception of the incipient Union-Jacks, which faded unaccountably in a shower of rain) grew with his growth, and to the witch's eyes were most delightful to behold.

"He will fetch a lot of money," said she, "as an unfortunate but tattooed nobleman!"

For a period of twenty-one years George dwelt uncomfortably enough, in the witch's cavern in the

heart of the great forest, lulled to rest nightly by the braying of our Hero, the magical Donkey.

Ere he had arrived at man's estate Madame Kalyb had grown so fond of the purloined youth that she had abandoned her original idea of disposing of him to a friend who owned a Travelling Museum of Living Curiosities; and eventually she decided, when the proper time came, to instruct him in the business of witchcraft and demonology. She had also suddenly conceived another project in connection with him which the course of this veracious narrative will presently disclose.

One day Madame Kalyb invited George to her private cavern, which was situated in the heart of the ordinary cavern and thus spake to him :—

“ George, my boy, for twenty-one years have I nurtured thee in the fond belief that I was thy mother; but know now that there is between thee and me no blood relationship whatsoever !”

The young man did not like at the moment to give vent to his delight at discovering this fearful old hag was not his parent but he could not help expressing his astonishment !

“ You don't say so,” he gasped.

“ Yes, George,” said the witch. “ It is but too true. And before I proceed further I will relate to thee briefly some particulars of mine own career. At the age of eighty-four I was tempted to sell my soul to a Demon for a ninety-nine years' further lease of life and a com-

plete set of magical utensils. To-night with the going down of the sun the ninety-nine years will have duly expired, and the lease can be renewed only by my marriage with a Champion. The only Champion of my acquaintance is thy beloved self; and as it is leap-year I do not mind doing as I do now" (here she threw herself on her knees and held up her hands supplicatingly) "and asking thee to present me with thy hand. We can get married by special licence ere the sun sets behind yonder horizon. See, I have the document!" she cried, rising from her knees and holding her arms aloft with the precious' authority to wed. "Do not hesitate!" she cried. "For another ninety-nine years we can live apart happily and make lots of money. I will instruct thee in all the arts of magic and lay at thy disposal the vast treasures of my cavern. Do not hesitate, George!" she cried again. "Have no conscientious scruples, for there are not, as I have already assured thee, any impediments of kinship to come between thee and me."

The young man was at first inclined to scout the offer indignantly, but when she spoke of treasures and magical utensils his head was fired with the desire to obtain them. So he thought he would temporize with the ancient female.

"Fair Enchantress!" said he; "thou speakest of treasure and implements of magic. For twenty-one years have I resided in this abode of thine and none of these things have I seen. Show them to me ere I decide."

“George!” she murmured, “thou art keen; but it is only natural thou shouldst ask me to prove my words as I have unblushingly lied about our relationship since first I met thee, warm and young. But I lied for *thy* sake, in order not to frighten thee from my abode by the awful smell of the harmless but necessary sulphur. I have ceased to practice magic since thou camest to the use of reason—I burnt my broomstick on thy seventh natal day: but now that we understand each other I will begin afresh. See!” she cried, snatching up her magic wand, which was coated inches thick with dust, “See!”

And she struck the wand three times on the table.

A cloud of dust filled the room for a moment. Then the place smelt most abominably; and from the centre of the floor rose a Demon, limelight and other magical effects illuminating his transparent frame.

“Hand me my treasures, minion!” said the witch and the Demon, bowing politely, deposited a large japanned trunk on the earthen floor of the cavern, and disappeared in a cloud of smoke, leaving behind him a distinct and powerful odour of sulphur fumes.

“Now, George,” said Kalyb, opening the chest and muttering incantations over it, “here is some of the regular enchanted stock-in-trade. I paid very dearly for the lot, having been foolish enough to purchase them at a cheap sale (as it was advertised) of Bankrupt witchcraft material in our enchanted sphere at the time I joined the business. This is the sword of

Damocles which will cut anything except a poor relation. This the skeleton key which will open any door except a door 'on the jar.' These are a pair of seven-league sea-boots, which, remember, will lose their powers if holes or slits for the corns are cut in them. And here is the hat-band which renders the wearer invisible to any one except a widow, an ass, or an undertaker. With these—and they are but a sample of my magical ware—the world should be easy of conquest. The magical powers of these articles, I should add, are strictly transferable.”

George was greatly impressed by the contents of the japanned trunk which Kalyb had exposed to his wondering gaze, but he felt he had only her word for their magical virtues, though being of a most gallant nature he did not like to say rude things to a lady—not even to one of a hundred and eighty-three summers, who had lied to him unblushingly for twenty-one summers.

“What about the treasure—by which I understood you to mean gold and jewels?” asked the youthful Champion.

“Here!” she cried, touching a cupboard with her wand.

The door of the cupboard flew open, and showers of precious stones and golden sovereigns came tumbling to the ground.

“This is marvellously like the Electric Sugar dodge,” he could not help saying.

“Test them!” she cried, carrying a fistful of diamonds and a fistful of gold to the sceptical Champion.

He rang a few of the sovereigns on the table and bit them with his handsome white teeth; and then he tried to break some of the diamonds by placing them on a flat iron and hammering them with the cavern poker; but coins and jewels stood the tests, and George was obliged to confess that it was real treasure.

"Thou art still not satisfied," murmured the love-stricken witch; "and the sun is declining."

"Look here!" said the Champion of England. "If I wed with thee, what sort of a life do you reckon I shall lead? Do you expect me to come home to tea and that sort of thing?"

"My George!" she cried indignantly. "Certainly not. On the contrary, I want thee to abandon tea altogether. It is a noxious beverage. I drink a lot too much of it myself. Have I not already told thee we should live most happily apart—much as I love thee? What I should wish thee to do, after the wedding is concluded and the renewal of my lease obtained from the head Demon of Darkness, is to go forth into the world and conquer all before thee. The discrepancy in our years would assuredly lead to domestic bickerings, and I confess I look upon the suggested nuptials as a mere matter of form—in short, a *mariage de convenance*."

The Champion still wavered and, observing this, Kalyb continued:

"Listen once more, George; for I fear I may not have sufficiently explained matters; and of course one

generally likes to know the sort of family he is marrying into. I am the youngest and loveliest of seven sisters."

"Phew!" whistled George under his breath.

"We were always a very 'spooky' family, and one night—on my eighty-fourth birthday as I have already informed thee—we decided to barter to the aforesaid Demon all that remained of us——"

"Which was a trifle 'off colour,' I should fancy," interrupted George, smiling—"a sort of remnant at a cheap sale of drapery stock."

"Dearest!" said Kalyb crossly, "I can assure you this flippancy is unworthy of an English gentleman. But to resume. We sisters decided to dispose of all that was left of us for a renewal of life. The best bargain we could make was the ninety-nine years' contract. I was the first to sign the contract, and each succeeding seven days one of my sisters signed it, until the whole seven of us were duly hypothecated. I had given up all hope and indeed all desire of getting a renewal of my lease, for I must confess I thought it useless to expect that any good young man would wed with me; but a short time ago I was on a visit to my sister Anastasia, and I was informed that she and my remaining sisters had all but arranged a wedding, each with a separate Champion, and that the matter only wanted pressing home to bear fruit in my own case. Still I hesitated! But last night I came to the resolution—especially as it is leap-year—to throw myself at

thy tender feet. Now, George, if thou consentest to be promptly mine thou wilt in all probability be the first Champion who will have married a witch, and thou wilt have precedence of the other Champions who are most likely still wavering."

"What sort of magical power shall I have after the marriage ceremony?" asked George.

"Thou wilt have equal magical power with me while I live, without the risk or expense of disposing of thyself to a Demon," answered Kalyb.

"Come, I'll tell you what I'll do," said George. "Make a deed of gift of all your treasures, magical and otherwise, to me, and I will consent to leap the broomstick with you!"

"Done!" exclaimed Kalyb. "But as the broomstick has been burned we shall have to fall back on the ordinary special licence."

"What shall we do for a witness to the deed of gift?" asked George.

"I can summon mine own familiar Fiend," said Kalyb.

"Very well," said the youthful Champion. "Draw up the deed and sign it then right away!"

So Kalyb wrote out the deed of gift, and then striking the ground thrice with her wand she summoned her familiar Fiend, who instantly was shot up through the trap-door of the cavern in a blaze of sulphurous flame.

"Demon!" said George, "we want you to witness a deed made by my *fiancée* here," pointing to the witch.

The Fiend leered, and George sneezed.

"Fumes rather strong for you?" smiled the Demon, interrogatively.

"Yes," answered the Champion. "Sign your name like a good chap and clear out, and get yourself disinfected if you'll take my advice."

The Fiend grinned, took the pen proffered by the witch, and again leering at George he put his name to the deed. Then with a noise and blaze like that of an eighteen-inch rocket the Familiar disappeared.

"That chap is a little *too* familiar for my taste," said George when the smoke had cleared away. "When I have power over him he'll have to smell a little less sulphurous or I'll certainly try the effect of a kick at him with my seven-league sea-boots, which I noticed were pretty heavy articles of furniture."

"Ah! he's not such a bad sort, dear," said Kalyb. "He's very punctual, and he has *such* a long way to come, you know, that one can hardly blame him for being a little queer when he does arrive."

"I'd rather he was a little less punctual and a little more fragrant," grumbled George, rising and sitting down on the japanned trunk, as if by accident. "How about this licence?" said he. "Have we to go to a Registrar's office or a church——"

"Ssh!" said the witch, holding up her hands in horror. "No! All thou hast got to do is to sign thy name to the marriage contract—the licence is a special one—from *below*," she said, pointing mystically to the trap-door—"and to let me sign mine then, dear."

"I hope no witnesses are required?" said George.

"None," smiled the witch, taking a sheepskin scroll from the bosom of her dress.

"Shapira?" he inquired, pointing to the scroll.

"No, dearest," answered the witch. "The real Simon Pure—Brian O'Lynn had a breeches made out of the same skin. Just you put your autograph there," pointing to the bottom of the scroll.

So George stood up and wrote his name with a flourish.

"Very nice indeed," said Kalyb, taking the pen from her affianced and dipping it into the ink-bottle.

"Let me hold your wand, dear," said he, placing one foot on the japanned trunk.

"Thank you!" said Kalyb, handing him her wand. "I feel so nervous, George, dearest. You know I have never signed a marriage contract before, and after a hundred and eighty-three years of spinsterhood it is hard to string one's nerves up to make a sudden jump into matrimony."

"Go on!" said the noble Champion callously. "The sun will be setting in about half a tick."

At this ominous intelligence the witch, trembling violently, signed her name—"Hortensia Kalyb"—to the marriage contract, and the Champion of England was fully the equal of his foster-mother both in the eyes of the law and in the magical sphere, and of course he knew he was considerably more than her equal, combatively, in case she might attempt to regain the

magical wand which George determined he was not going to part with in a hurry.

He tapped the wand thrice on the floor of the cavern and up came the Familiar once more. He did not smell so badly this time as he had only got about half way home when George's summons recalled him, and he hadn't either the time or the opportunity to renew his stock of sulphur.

"Demon!" said the Champion in a voice of thunder, which startled from sleep the enchanted Donkey in the stable outside and caused him to bray loudly. "Demon!" said the Champion, "in future recollect, please, that I am your master, and that I am completely out of your power or the power of your employer. Mademoiselle Kalyb——"

"That was," interrupted the familiar Fiend with a leer.

"As I have already observed to the missus," said the noble Champion, throwing himself into the witch's arm-chair, "you are a good deal *too* Familiar, and if you do not desire me to apply the toe of my seven-league sea-boots to various portions of your anatomy you will adopt a more respectful tone and manner in my presence. I was about to say, Madame, my wife can, if necessary, confirm what I now state. Furthermore, Demon," added George, "I would take it as a personal favour if you exhaled your superfluous sulphur before appearing in my presence."

"Well I'm blowed!" cried the Demon. "Perhaps

you object to my tail and my hoofs and the other hall-marks of my profession ? ”

“ To tell you the truth,” said the Champion, “ I was about to suggest that you should wear some sort of covering for your tail, and I want to offer you this old umbrella case,” handing it with a mocking bow to the Fiend, who savagely ran his tail through it.

“ ’Pon honour,” laughed George, “ you look positively comical ! ”

The Demon scowled, but he felt he wasn’t dealing with an old woman now, so he said nothing nasty. “ Any further orders, please ? ” he inquired in a meek and servile tone.

“ Several,” said George, who seemed to take a delight in degrading the unfortunate Fiend. “ Stick your stumps into these old goloshes of mine,”—throwing them at him—“ and come and help me on with my seven-league sea-boots ! ”

The Familiar unostentatiously put his hoofs into the goloshes, and very awkward indeed were his movements in them. Then he threw back the lid of the trunk and took out the boots.

Madame George (*née* Kalyb) was all this time sitting on a three-legged stool by the fire, her head buried in her hands. She did not like the manner of her husband by any means, but she was aware that she had put herself completely in his power. When she saw the Demon opening the trunk—*her* trunk, that had cost her so much money and trouble to fill with magical odds

and ends—she broke down utterly and burst into tears.

The noble George was too much occupied in watching the Demon to take any notice of the bride. When the Familiar took out the boots the Champion negligently stretched out his feet and said: "Mind my corns, you rascal, whatever you do!"

The Fiend chuckled to himself at the words, "for," said he, "if he cuts slits in these boots their magical power fades away."

"What are you muttering?" asked George angrily.

"Nothing, sir," said the Fiend.

"Then bring me my boots at once!" thundered George.

"Yes, sir. D'rectly, sir," answered the Fiend, shaking the dust from them viciously.

Then came the tug of war. The boots were big enough in all conscience, but the leather was so hard and unyielding that, drag and wrestle with it as he might, the unfortunate Familiar could not get the Champion's foot half-way down the boot.

"Rub a little Golden Ointment on them," sobbed Kalyb, who had been watching the frantic movements of the Familiar with great anxiety.

Thus addressed the Demon took from his pocket a small but inexhaustible wooden box and rubbed the ointment well into the boots, George scowling at him all the time as he sat with one boot half on.

When the boots had been softened they slipped on

easily enough; and then the Champion stood up and stamped on the floor noisily, again awakening the enchanted Donkey, who began to bray even louder than before.

"Watchful animal that, sir," remarked the Familiar, a trace of a smile, which he quickly obliterated, curling his upper lip.

"Lie down, you brute! Lie down!" roared George going to the door of the cavern. Our Hero, as if in response, gave vent to an unearthly and inhuman heehaw and then became silent once more.

"There's something wrong with that beast this evening," reflected George. "How are the boots worked?" he asked, addressing his bride.

"You must wish three times that they should start, and they will carry you seven leagues in less than seven seconds, dear," sobbed the disconsolate witch, who now knew that the Champion was about to start out on his travels immediately.

"Thank you, dear," said the noble George, gallantly. "Now, Fiend," said he, "can you fix me up a neatly-mounted donkey's saddle and bridle, including a pair of gilt spurs? And then I'll dismiss you for the night."

The Fiend shouted down the hole in the floor of the cavern, and immediately he was handed up a beautiful saddle and bridle, and an elegantly Dutch-metalled pair of spurs.

"You can saddle the animal, minion," said George,

“while I fix my spurs and don my sword and hat-band.”

“Yes, sir. D’rectly, sir,” said the Fiend, touching his forelock and disappearing through the door.

“And art thou going right away, George?” asked the witch.

“Yes, my dear,” he replied, fixing in a spur. “And I’ll tell you what you can do for me. Let me have the addresses of your sisters while I fix in the other spur.”

“Certainly,” said Kalyb meekly, taking her address-book from her pocket and handing it to her husband. “Thou wilt see other addresses in it which may be useful to thee in thy travels. Thou wilt find all my sisters’ addresses under K—Kalyb.”

“Thank you, dear,” said the bridegroom. “Now help me on with my sword, and don’t forget to put the latch-key—I mean the skeleton key—in my pocket and fix the hat-band on my best top hat; and you may as well fill your reticule with diamonds and gold pieces.”

The witch fixed on his sword, put the skeleton key into his pocket, and tied a well-filled reticule to his waist with a string. Then, with a great sob, she handed him his best silk hat with the band around it.

“Of course thou art not invisible to me, George,” said she, playfully, as he placed his hat on his head, “for I am now practically a widow.”

“Donkey waits, sir!” said the Demon, appearing in the doorway.

“Oh, by the way,” said George, “how about the seven-league boots and the Donkey? Do they carry *him* seven leagues too?”



“Certainly, sir,” replied the Fiend. “In our world we regard the Donkey and yourself as one.”

“Ta-ta, then,” said the noble Champion, backing

himself to the doorway, and blowing a kiss to the witch.

And as he got to the outer door of Kalyb Cavern he cried, "Heaven guard you all until I return!"

At these words the Fiend shrieked and exploded like a new ninety-ton gun; the thunder crashed and the lightning flashed; and the roof of the cavern fell in with a terrific crash, burying the unfortunate though erring Kalyb in the ruins.

CHAPTER II.

Tiff between our Hero and Champion George—Brayhard Expresses his Indignation—Astonishment of George at Hearing the Articulate Voice of the Magical Donkey—Relaxed Condition of our Hero's Uvula—George's Hatred of Maxims—Our Hero Explains—Curious Effect of Involuntary Prayer—The Witch's Address-Book—Consultation at the Cross Roads—George Makes his Primary Experiment with the Seven-League Sea-Boots.

"THAT'S a pretty close shave!" said George, brushing some of the dust of the ruins off his great-coat. "I wonder what has happened?" he ruminated, as he threw his right leg over the Donkey's back and straightened himself up in the saddle. "My old woman will be having nightmare if she goes to sleep with that load of rubbish on her chest. But perhaps it is the usual mode of bidding farewell to a bridegroom in witch-land; and after all it isn't much more dangerous than a well-directed shower of slippers and rice. Gee-up!" he cried, striking the Donkey on the flank with Kalyb's wand.

The Ass made a plunge forward, braying loudly, and

very nearly caused the noble Champion to bite the dust. "You infernal imp of darkness!" cried his rider, striking him viciously with the wand, and digging his gilt spurs into him. "Stop that fog-horn of yours, or I'll dispose of you to the nearest knacker!"

"Gratitude! Gratitude!" sighed the Donkey.

"What!" cried the Champion in amazement. "Did I hear you say 'gratitude'?"

"You did," replied the Donkey, hoarsely.

"I did not know you could speak, Brayhard," laughed George.

"The spell that sealed my articulatory throat was taken off only a few minutes ago, when the cavern fell in."

"Talking of throats," said George, "it seems to me you suffer from some form of hoarseness. What is it?"

"Relaxed uvula," replied the Donkey.

"I thought so," said George. "Perhaps you would suck a handful of these potash lozenges. I find them useful myself occasionally."

"Thank you," coughed the Donkey, turning his head round and licking a few dozen of the lozenges off the Champion's outstretched hand. "Yes, they are first rate," he said in a much clearer voice. "Thanks again, Champion; and always remember to scorn not the least."

"Oh, please don't," groaned George. "I know a lot of that sort of thing by heart. 'A rose by any other

name would smell as sweet ; ' ' a man's a man for a' that.' Now look here, Brayhard, understand me



plainly ; I don't live by maxims—I positively abominate them."

" Ah ! " sighed Brayhard sadly. " Did you ever, noble Champion, read the fable of The Lion, the Net, and the Mouse ? "

"It is an advertisement of pills, or soap, or balsam, is it not?" said George. "You need not answer me, Brayhard," hearing the Donkey clearing his throat by a few vigorous ahems. "I never read advertisements, or fables, or any other rubbish of that sort."

"Sad! Sad!" groaned Brayhard.

"Oh come! Knock off that lachrymose business, and tell me, if you can: is your late Mistress dead or alive?"

"Alas!" moaned the Donkey, "she is no more."

"That's odd," said the Champion. "She assured me she would get a renewal of her life policy—I mean life lease—if she married a good young man like me."

"So she would," said the Donkey; "but you settled her hash properly."

"How?" inquired the Champion.

"You see," said Brayhard; "the appointment with the head demon of darkness was for midnight. Madame, your widow—I should say Madame, your late wife—would have got the renewal right enough had nothing unusual happened between the sinking to rest of the golden Phœbus and the witching hour of night when churchyards—"

"Oh, blow your poetry!" cried the Champion. "I suppose you mean between sunset and twelve o'clock midnight?"

"Yes," sighed the Donkey; "that is what I do mean. I fear, noble Champion, you are a bit of a Philistine."

"If you don't mind yourself you'll slay me with your jawbone, then," chuckled George. "Go on. What about Kalyb—or Hortensia, I should say?"

"Yes; it would be more becoming in you as a widower to speak more affectionately of the departed," murmured the Donkey, sententiously.

"Get along with your yarn, old man!" said George



digging his spurs a little viciously into the didactic animal's flanks.

Brayhard from mere force of habit now stretched out his forelegs, threw his hind legs into the air, and brayed loudly, pitching his rider head foremost to the ground.

"Noble Champion, forgive me!" roared our hero, as George sprang to his feet again and commenced to whack the devoted animal with the wand. "I quite forgot myself, I give you my word of honour. The

touch of your knightly spurs roused the demon that is ever latent in me. Get up again, like a decent fellow, and I will finish the recital of my narrative."

"Well, please remember yourself a little better in future," fumed George, jumping into the saddle. "What was the unusual thing you referred to that happened to the old woman between sunset and midnight?"

"Your involuntary prayer," said the Donkey.

"My what?" asked the Champion.

"Your final salutation in which you prayed the higher powers to guard her. She was mercifully taken from the grasp of the demon of darkness by your words. At the moment—that is between the sinking to rest—I beg pardon—between sunset and midnight—my late mistress was in a transition state. Her only chance of deliverance was an involuntary prayer from you."

"How pathetic!" murmured the Champion, melted to tears. "I must often pray involuntarily."

"You weep!" said Brayhard, feeling the salt tears trickling down his shaggy mane. "Weep on! weep ever!"

"Oh, go to Bath, you old fool!" cried the Champion, straightening himself in the saddle. "Well, what next?"

"When," resumed the Donkey, with a sigh, "the cavern fell, the spell upon me was broken and my articulate voice was returned to me."

"You mentioned that already," said George; "but what about *my* magical powers, though?"

"Gone! All gone—like the old familiar faces!" said Brayhard, sadly and drearily.

"What a sell!" muttered George with a savage snort. "Can't I summon up that familiar Fiend with my wand?"

"No," replied the Donkey. "He must have suffered a deal from his explosion, I fear."

"I'm not much interested in his explosions," said George. "What about my sword and key, and boots and hat-band, Brayhard?"

"Oh, they're all right," replied the Donkey, cheerfully. "You see they are strictly transferable goods, like railway stock or family pictures."

"Then," said George, "we had better test the virtues of the boots. How many leagues is it, do you know, to the house of the nearest of the old woman's sisters?"

"I cannot answer, noble Champion," said the Donkey; "but no doubt you will find full particulars in the address-book which your late lamented wife handed to you."

"Of course," said the Champion. "I never thought of the book. Only it is so dreadfully dark I don't know how I am to read the aforesaid particulars."

"There is no wind," said our hero; "and has not the noble Champion a box of waxlights?"

"Admirable Brayhard!" exclaimed George, cheerily. "Thou art indeed a treasure. May thy life be long

and thy uvula short! How do you find the throat now?"

"Better. Much better," said the Donkey, dodging with his tongue the last of the potash lozenges.

"Stand steady, old boy, then!" said the Champion, taking his match box and his address-book from his pocket and striking a light.

"'Anastasia Kalyb: seventeen leagues and a half due north from the post at the cross roads on the edge of the forest.' That's plain enough anyhow," said the Champion blowing out the light. "How far are we now from the cross roads?"

"Just round the corner," replied the Donkey. "I know the place well. In childhood's happy days I have often browsed peacefully on the short but sweet grass which surrounds the finger post."

"Then lead on to the post, good Brayhard," said the Champion. "Gee hup, old boy," encouragingly.

"How are we to tell the 'due north'?" asked George, "for I haven't got a compass."

"Witches always steer by the north, or polar, star," said the Donkey. "Cast your eye over yon sky until you find the star."

"Marvellously magical moke!" said George, enthusiastically, as they stood alongside the post. "Perhaps you'd like a nip of something short—I mean the grass here—before you start?"

"Thanks, no," said Brayhard. "I had a good feed before starting from Kalyb Cavern."

“Very well,” said the Champion. “Now hold your head due north, and I’ll wish three times.”

And in a moment Ass and Champion were whirling through the well-nigh midnight air.

CHAPTER III.

Our Hero Expands his Lungs—Braying in a Minor Key—Music hath Charms to Soothe the Magical Beast—Inutility of Seven-Leagued Boots for Travelling Purposes—Our Hero in the Pound—Brilliant Idea of the Donkey—Champion George Wounds our Hero's Feelings—One Man, one Boot—The Licensed Cavern of Sister-in-Law Anastasia—The Champion of England becomes Temporarily Invisible—First Experiment with the Skeleton Key—Brayhard Contemplates a Series of Revolutions—"Whistle and I'll come to You, my Lad."

"THAT'S quick work, good Brayhard!" said Champion George, as himself and the Donkey landed in the middle of a ploughed field.

"Yes," said Brayhard, "but it takes one's breath away so. If you do not object, I will indulge in a brief bray just to inflate and expand my lungs."

"Well, cut it as short as you possibly can," said the Champion, "for it shakes every bone in my body when you get up to C sharp, or whatever your top note is."

"I always warble in a minor key," said the Donkey, proudly; and then he started such a row that poor

George had to cram his fingers into his ears, fearing his tympanum might give way.

"Oh ! I *do* feel so much better," gasped Brayhard, after a few moments.

"I am glad to hear your articulate voice again, I assure you," said the Champion, taking his fingers from his ears.

"Do you know, I am passionately fond of music," said our hero. "I could listen for ever, and with equal pleasure, to the sweet harmony of a German band, to the merry tinkle of the muffin bell, or to the fine bracing melody of a steam fog-horn."

"Your tastes are peculiar, certainly," said George. "But we had better be on the move again. Stop !" said he, suddenly. "It never occurred to me until this minute. Can you work these boots down under the seven leagues ?"

"No," replied Brayhard. "They go seven leagues to the inch. I never believed very much in their utility, I must confess. I tried to warn old Mother Kalyb against them, but my articulate voice was under the spell when I carried her to the magical Mock Auction Rooms where she picked them up. You see, noble Champion, you may start right enough, but you may come down in the flue of a chimney, or find yourself up to your armpits in a bog-hole or a lime-kiln. Madame once lent them to a gentleman who was flying from his wife, and they landed him slap into the Divorce Courts."

"Dear me !" sighed the Champion, pensively. "How

awkward to be sure ! But we can't stop all night in the middle of a ploughed field. Hadn't we better chance another seven leagues ? ”

“ As you wish,” said the Donkey. “ Personally I have no objection to lying down under a hedge hereabouts all night.”

“ I'm not thinking of you personally,” said the Champion.

“ Did you ever read the fable of The Wood-cutter and the Viper ? ” asked Brayhard, sarcastically.

“ Did *you* ever read the fable of the Old Man and his Ass ? ” inquired George, in a vexed tone of voice.

“ I hope you don't mean to be personal, sir,” said the Donkey, highly indignant.

“ What I *don't* mean,” observed the Champion, “ is to remain in a field or under a hedge all night : so here goes for another seven leagues ! ”

And before the Donkey had time to draw another breath George had tugged the bridle and pointed his nose to the north star, and Brayhard was again whirling through the air with the Champion on his back.

In a moment donkey and rider were landed in an enclosed yard.

“ Where on earth are we now ? ” inquired George.

“ I shall never get over the disgrace of this,” groaned poor Brayhard. “ It is the first time I was ever inside a pound.”

“ Inside a pound ! ” exclaimed George. “ Then for goodness' sake, dear Brayhard, don't attempt to inflate

or expand your lungs in the ordinary manner, or we shall have all the accursed impecunious donkeys here joining you in a concerted piece!"

"I think I know my place, sir," said Brayhard, proudly, struggling with his breath.

"Well, let us get out of this as quickly as we can. We have just three leagues and a half more to go. We must do another flying jump and hope for better luck next time in our landing-place; and I can trot you three leagues and a half back to Anastasia's Cavern."

"Trot me three and a half leagues at this hour of the night!" exclaimed Brayhard. "Do you think I have a cast-iron constitution? Stop!" he cried suddenly. "A brilliant thought strikes me."

"Don't bray it, for the love of all that's peaceable," interrupted George. "You are so excited, I know you will, and I'm still in terror of your brethren here awakening."

"I will be calm," said the Donkey, who in moments of elation contrived to mingle his braying voice with his speaking voice. "My brilliant idea is that as the *two* boots do seven leagues, *one* of them ought to do three and a half. What do you think of that for a donkey?" he inquired excitedly, and with mock humility.

"By Jove, a capital notion!" said George. "But you *are* so excited, I fear you will break into a bray. Now a capital thought strikes me too," he murmured to himself, dismounting. "I will take off one boot and

tie it to my companion's tail. Even if the other boot fails to do the three leagues and a half, it will prevent old Brayhard from making an ass of himself here, as I feel almost sure he will."

And suiting the action to the word, the wily Champion divested himself of his left boot and fastened it to our



hero's tail with a stout piece of string which he found in his great-coat pocket.

Brayhard was deeply insulted at this proceeding on the part of the Champion, for the magical Donkey well knew his master's object in fastening a weight to his tail.

"There, old chap!" said George, soothingly, vaulting

into the saddle ; “ I couldn’t find any place to make the odd boot fast to except your tail—you’ll excuse the liberty, I hope ? ”

“ Men were deceivers ever,” sighed Brayhard. “ Well do I know your chief object, noble Champion, in fastening a weight to my tail.”

“ Now then, cut your grumbling short, governor ; and fix your snout on the north star, for I’m going to try if the ‘ one man, one boot ’ idea has anything in it,” said the Champion, affecting to ignore the Donkey’s despondent mood.

Then he wished three times, and in an instant Brayhard and himself were whirling once more through the air ; and in less than no time they came plump down at the mouth of a cavern.

“ Splendid ! ” exclaimed the Champion, hurriedly dismounting. “ This is no doubt the abode of my elderly sister-in-law.”

“ My eye catches something like a signboard over the entrance,” whispered the Donkey. “ Strike a light and see ! ”

So the Champion struck a light, and holding it up towards the board read :—

“ ANASTASIA KALYB

“ Licensed to deal wholesale or retail in spirits, hobgoblins, ogres, giants, monsters, &c.

“ Hell-broth and fire-water for sale, to be consumed only on the premises.”

"This must be *She!*" said George.

"Not a doubt of it," said the Donkey. "It is now after ordinary closing hours, but there are more ways than one of dodging the law."

"I wonder if the old dame is asleep?" asked George.

"Asleep!" smiled Brayhard. "Why, my *dear* sir, this is the very witching time of night, and, as you ought to know well, witches never sleep after sundown."

"Of course," said George. "I never thought of that. I wonder if I shall go in."

"Certainly," said the Donkey; "but first see that your invisible hat-band and your sword of Damocles are securely fastened in their proper places. You can easily open the door with the skeleton key."

"Dear me!" said George. "I had almost forgotten these things," feeling the scabbard of his sword and running his fingers round the hat-band. "I suppose we are completely invisible now?"

"No," replied the Donkey. "We were before you dismounted. Of course *you* are still invisible to every one but me."

"Of course," said George. "You are an ass."

Brayhard bit his lips at the words but remained silent.

"I wonder is Madame Anastasia a widow?"

"Not yet, at any rate," said the Donkey. "And while you are about it, you might as well put on your other boot, as I have no desire to be anchored here."

"Certainly," said George. "I might want to make a seven-league jump perhaps in a hurry. What a brilliant ass it is!" he murmured, cutting the string which secured the boot to Brayhard's tail. "Steady, old man!" he cried, suddenly. "I know you are going to bray—you really mustn't do that here, you know, in the enemy's country."

"Excuse me," said the Donkey, gently. "The motion of my tail was purely involuntary. I will, however, restrain the promptings of nature and refrain from braying until a more suitable opportunity offers itself."

"What a grandiloquent donkey it is, to be sure!" said George, good-humouredly, as he pulled on the boot. "Thou must have had at least a school-board education!"

"No," said Brayhard, "I am purely self-taught. Before my enchantment I was a promising member of our Local Government Board."

"That accounts for it," said the Champion. "And now for Madame Anastasia!" taking the skeleton key from his pocket and inserting it cautiously into the keyhole of the witch's door.

"Just one moment!" said Brayhard. "If you will relieve me of the saddle I should like, as braying is prohibited, to roll on my back while you explore the cavern; and should I observe anything during my rotatory exercise which I think may presage danger or promise adventure, I will bray my very loudest as a signal."

"Thanks, faithful donkey," said the good George, taking the saddle off and laying it on the ground. "Gambol while you may, and if possible refrain from any violent exercise of your hee-hawing or braying organs."

Brayhard shook his ears sadly, for the Champion's gaiety was distasteful to him. Then uttering a loud



sigh he picked up the saddle with his teeth, and in a very indistinct mumbling voice said, "I will trot off, good Champion, to a respectful distance and find a suitable rolling spot, and when you require me, whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad."

And shaking the dust off his hind-legs with a few healthy kicks in the air, the worthy and intelligent animal trotted noiselessly away.

CHAPTER IV.

Bonâ fide Travellers in the Witch's Kitchen—Anastasia "At Home"—Brewing of Hell-Broth—What Champion George Saw in the Licensed Cavern—Sister-in-Law Anastasia proposes a Health—Rudeness of David of Wales—The Pre-Nuptial Feast—Champion George's Opinion of the Personal Attractions of the Six Weird Sisters—He Listens invisibly to an interesting Conversation—Weird-Sisterly Bickerings—How Witches Live—Suggested Sweeper of Cobwebs out of the Sky—Duplicity of Sister-in-Law Mariana—George is fearfully Indignant and invisibly Slays his Six Weird Sisters-in-Law at one Fell Swoop—Further Familiar Fiends—A Warning Note from our Hero—"Good Old Brayhard!"

THE lock of Anastasia's front door was easily opened with the magic key; and then George found himself standing in a dark and narrow passage-way.

"I'm so glad I'm invisible," said he, "for unless my ears deceive me I hear the hum of many voices. These must indeed be *bonâ fide* travellers," he mused.

Secure in his invisibility, he walked boldly up the passage-way until he came to another door. "Fortunately," said the Champion, as he fumbled for the keyhole, "this door is not ajar, or my further progress would be effectually barred."

The voices were now clear and distinct—the voices of many men and many women.

“I suppose the old girl is indulging in an ‘at-home’ this evening,” thought the Champion. “Well, I guess I’ll astonish herself and her merry visitors. They do seem to be enjoying themselves!”

The second door was now open; and the Champion entered a large low-ceilinged apartment noiselessly and invisibly, closing the door behind him.

“Hallo! Anastasia,” he heard a shrill female voice say: “there is a mighty strong draught here. I thought your door was closed.”

“So it is, and doubly fast too with one of those magical Hobb-goblin locks which I took out a patent for recently.”

“I’ll swear I saw it open itself and close itself again, my dear,” said the lady, tartly; “and I am also sure I heard the bray of an ass.”

“You have evidently been indulging too freely in hell-broth, Wilhelmina,” said Madame Anastasia, “and you must have been listening to the echo of your own sweet voice, dearest.”

“Can’t you women talk without fighting?” asked a man who was busy brewing a bowl of fire-water, “or fight without talking?—I don’t care which. Here, who calls for hot pun—I mean sweet fire-water?”

“Is there plenty lemon-peel and nutmeg in it, Denis, dear?” asked Madame Anastasia, parrying a blow of Wilhelmina’s broomstick.

"Lots," answered Denis, ladling out a mugful from a witch's cauldron shaped like a huge bowl, which stood on a small table at his elbow.

Champion George was all this time gazing in silent and invisible wonderment at the strange scene before him.

In the centre of the earthen floor was a circular log-fire, and on this a cauldron with a spout like a kettle was simmering. Around the fire, on three-legged stools, were seated six fearful-looking hags and six handsome, stalwart young men, the man addressed as Denis, with the small table alongside him and the ladle in his hand being evidently the Master of the Revels. Denis filled twelve mugs with the ladle from the bowl-shaped vessel and handed a measure round to each of the company, reserving the last and largest mug for himself.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, standing up and nodding to each of his five male friends, "I have a toast to propose: 'Health, wealth, and increase of magical power to our fair friends'" (George thought he noticed him winking at one of the men as he said this), "'and may they each and all of them secure the renewal of their life leases and the extension of their licences on equitable terms!' To your feet, Champions!"

The other five men rose, and holding their mugs high over their heads, cried, "Hip, hip, hurrah!" and then they tossed off the boiling-hot fire-water as if it were so much gruel, and resumed their seats.



“Denis, and fellow Champions,” said Madame Anastasia Kalyb, rising: “on behalf of my sisters, Wilhelmina, Carolina, Adelina, Mariana, and Johanna, allow me to thank you most sincerely for your kind wishes, and for the sincere and inspiring manner in which you have swallowed the toast. I am sorry I cannot respond also in the name of our dear sister Hortensia, and I own I feel alarmed at her absence. I know she burnt her broomstick a long while ago, but she always had the seven-league sea-boots handy, and I think if she were in her ordinary health and spirits, if no unforeseen or untoward accident had happened to her, she would, though she is *such* a stay-at-home, be present on this memorable occasion. It is of course her wedding-day, but I am confident her worthy husband—a Champion like yourselves—would not prevent her from paying us a friendly visit, and in fact would accompany her here on this, as I have said before, momentous occasion, and if——”

“Cut it short, old girl!” said one of the young men. “Your fire-water will grow cold.”

“David,” said Madame Anastasia, severely, “you are extremely rude. You have neither the all-round politeness of Denis, the gallant bearing of James, the marvellous calves of Andrew, the agility of Anthony, nor” (her hard features softened by a wreathed smile) “the sweet tongue of Patrick.”

“Blarney!” laughed David. “Cut it short, old girl.”

“I do not know what will become of you; but, believe me, David, if you do not learn to keep your passion for fire-water in check you will never wear the belt.”

Seeing that hot words were likely to ensue between Anastasia and the Champion of Wales, the Master of the Revels proposed that the men should retire to the chimney-corner and smoke their pipes, and leave the ladies, as he politely said, to enjoy a confab and their hell-broth, or fire-water, round the declining embers—a proposal which seemed to meet with the unanimous approval of the company.

George now understood the meaning of the strange scene. It was, indeed, the cavern of his sister-in-law, Anastasia; and he had no doubt this was a family gathering summoned to celebrate the approaching nuptials of the six old Witches with the six young Champions. “And little do they know,” he reflected, “that the first and greatest Champion of all is here in the flesh as well as in the spirit!”

He could not help thinking how fearfully ugly the six hags round the fire were. “Hortensia was hideous enough, in all conscience,” said he to himself, “but she certainly was a professional beauty in comparison with her sisters. Can such ‘things’ be?” he groaned inwardly, gazing at the six witches tossing off their steaming magical drinks.

The valiant Champion thought of trying the effect of an involuntary prayer; but on reflection he remembered

that if he deliberately uttered an involuntary prayer it would cease to be involuntary, and therefore might do no harm. "My sword!" he thought, as he gazed at the Witches, now huddled closely together and wrangling as to the terms on which they would sign the renewal of the life leases. "But," he hesitated, "perhaps they are poor. They are certainly relations, and if poor, naturally poor relations"—for George was slow to think or argue, but quick to act—"upon whom my sword would have no effect. I will approach nearer and listen to their conversation. Perhaps I may gather from it the state of their finances."

And holding his scabbard short to prevent it from tripping him up, the wily Champion advanced to the fire and stood alongside the Witches, gazing invisibly down upon them and straining his ears to catch every word that fell from their preternaturally ugly mouths.

"Do you mean to show your husband where your hard earnings—the result of so much thought and labour, and of difficulty about getting the licence renewed—are buried?" asked Wilhelmina of Anastasia.

"I do," answered Anastasia. "I am very fond of Denis. Besides, what's mine is legally his."

"Bosh!" sneered Wilhelmina. "The Married Women's Property Act extends to Witches, my Familiar tells me. For my part I have induced my Familiar—such an obliging fellow, dear girls—to get up a Brandy-and-Soda 'boom,' and I have already made a tremendous

fortune out of my B and S shares which you all scoffed at me for investing in."

"What about the Jemima Mine?" asked Johanna, with a fearful grin which almost beautified her diabolical countenance. "Yah! You and your shares!" she screamed. "Only for that lot of jerry-built houses I ran up some years ago I'd have been broke horse and foot listening to your advice, Willie, my pet."

"And have the houses tumbled about your ears yet, my sweet one?" asked Wilhelmina.

"Tumble or not, it's all the same to me," said Johanna. "The moment they wanted a coat of paint I turned them into 'The Adamantine Fire-and-Water-proof Residential Mansions Company, Limited' and sold out at a fine profit, I can tell you."

"You were always a keen one, Joey," murmured Adelina demurely; "but I don't think I've done so badly, either. I sold the patent of my Female Rejuvenator Washing Fluid to a speculative chemist. It was a lovely composition, but he spent all his accumulated savings on the patent and had nothing left to advertise with, so he was compelled to make another lovely composition—"

"With his creditors?" interrupted Caroline with a smile.

"Yes. How did you know, Carry, dear?"

"I was one of the chemist's creditors, Addy, my love."

"Then have you lost everything, darling?"

"Not at all, my angel. I made a snug little sum out

of the transaction. The failure was a very heavy one. I had lent him money—or rather my agent, the money-lender, had—at a hundred and fifty per cent.—awfully cheap you know—and his affairs paid ten shillings in the pound. Besides I was secured to the extent of one half the advance—a bill of sale on his sticks—a mere matter of form,” she smiled.

“Clever darling!” said Anastasia. “And what about you, Mariana? You were also such a quiet little body and so precise.”

“I have always confined myself to what I consider to be a Witch’s mission in life : frightening children—”

“That doesn’t pay, darling,” interrupted Anastasia.

“No, my beautiful. I am aware of that. I merely mentioned it as one of the *duties* of our state of life. I also have stuck to the good old custom of having a daily ride on my broomstick—a custom sadly neglected nowadays.”

“I suppose it is you who sweep the cobwebs out of the sky, darling?” jeered Wilhelmina.

“Pray do not allow Willie’s manner to annoy you, sweetest,” said Anastasia. “Your mode of life is, no doubt, a right and proper one; but how have you made money, or have you made money at all?”

“Heaps!” answered Mariana; “by attending to what as I have said I consider my regular profession. The frightening of children and the broomstick exercise I look upon as my pastime proper. The business part of my life has been devoted to making sovereigns of

mystery gold and jewels of paste, but paste of such a quality that a blacksmith has failed to shatter my diamonds on an anvil. As for the sovereigns, they are perfect, but worthless. Out of our absent sister alone—Hortensia, I mean—I made a small fortune, selling her for her cherished Consols a large stock of coin and jewels not worth five shillings a hundredweight.”

This was too much altogether for Champion George. Great drops of perspiration started out upon his forehead and (as he stooped over the witches) trickled down into the fire, causing a succession of hissing sounds. The Witches huddled themselves so closely together at the mysterious noises that their heads lay almost cheek by jowl like a bouquet of faded cabbage-roses.

Champion George could not possibly resist the temptation, and drawing his sword, silently and invisibly, from its scabbard he severed the heads of the six sisters at one fell swoop.

Immediately the vault of the cavern opened with a crash and a blaze of fire, and six familiar Fiends dropped hurriedly to the ground trampling out the Witches' fire as they descended, and with lightning speed they shot up through the roof again, bearing with them the six heads and six bodies of the weird sisters.

The cavern was filled to suffocation with sulphur and other fumes. The visible Champions in the chimney-corner stood transfixed with awe, horror, and smell; and the invisible Champion was just about to wish himself



(three times) seven leagues away when a terrible bray was heard which made the vault of the already damaged cavern tremble like an aspen.

“Good old Brayhard !” murmured George silently and invisibly.

CHAPTER V.

The Champion of England invisibly quotes Shakespeare--Grandiloquence of Champion James—Champion George reveals Himself to his Brother Champions—The Champions not on Strike—An Ominous Sound—Alarm of the Seven Champions—Appearance of a Giant Boot—*Bonâ fide* Giant kicks the Cavern to Pieces—The Giant sees the Champions—George Challenges him to Combat—"I Don't want to Fight, but by Jingo if I Did"—Laughter of the Giant shakes loose the False Teeth of Champion Anthony—The Giant seizes Hold of the Champion of England—The Mission of Champions—Simplicity of Giant-Life—Measurements of the Giant—Gigantic "Kids"—The Giant's Weak Spot: his Feet—A Bond of Sympathy—The Long-looked-for Distressed Female—Two Tons (and Upwards) of Solid Flesh—The Calculating Boy—Invitation to the Giant's Castle accepted by the Seven Champions.

AT the sound of the Donkey's voice George stood stock still.

"Old Brayhard would not sound his fog-horn," he reflected, "unless something is about to happen which it would be better not to be seven leagues away from. Anyhow I am invisible, and if it is danger which threatens from outside I am protected by my hat-band.

So terror avault !” he cried aloud. “ George is himself again ! ”

By this time the fiendish smoke had cleared away, the hole in the roof creating a draught and carrying it off quickly ; and the six Champions were now advancing to the centre of the floor in order to examine the rent in the ceiling. When they heard the exclamation incautiously uttered by George, the six visible Champions fell back a few paces in alarm.

“ Some one has been quoting Shakespeare,” said Champion Denis, “ if my ears do not deceive me.”

“ It may have been that ass whose bray so rudely assailed our auricular organs a few moments since,” said Champion James, who indeed was himself in the habit of indulging occasionally in a phraseology akin to that of Brayhard.

“ Now,” thought George, remembering Hortensia’s assurance that he would have power over the other and unwedded champions, “ is the time to reveal myself ! ”

And tearing off his hat-band—a proceeding which rendered him instantly visible to the other Champions—he bowed and (putting the band into his pocket) said :

“ Gentlemen of France, Spain, Scotland, Italy, Ireland, and Wales ! Good afternoon ! Have you used—”

“ Who are *you*, sir ? ” interrupted Denis, frowning fiercely as he folded his arms, stroked his imperial, and assumed a general air of armed neutrality.

"If it comes to that, who are *you*, sir?" asked George his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Oh, we don't want quotations from your Franco-British farces here, sir!" said Denis snappishly. "This intrusion of yours on our desolate but domestic hearth is distinctly actionable."

"Know then, varlets," said George, throwing his head back and expanding his chest until the top button of his great-coat flew off and struck Antony in the eye, "that I wear the belt—that in fact I am *George Che-ampion of England!*"

Denis and his companions fell back at the awful intelligence; and drawing his sword, George negligently presented the hilt to each of them in turn and duly received their vows, on bended knees, of allegiance.

"So far so good," said the mighty George. "And now, gentlemen of France, Spain——"

"Oh, cut it short, governor!" interrupted David. "We have all read Walt Whitman."

"Very well," said George. "In future I will simply say, gentleman all. And now, gentleman all," he went on, "have you—" here he hesitated and coughed—"have you, in fact, anything to suggest?"

"We've got no work to do!" moaned Denis.

"You're not on strike, I hope?" inquired George eagerly.

"Oh dear, no," answered Denis.

"Then your complaint is easily remedied," said George. "But what is this?" he cried in alarm, as a

sound as if of the tramp of a battery of artillery saluted the ears of the assembled and now trembling confederates. George, fearful lest the sound was caused by a company of mounted champion Roberts, was about to wish himself seven leagues away when again the sonorous bray of the Donkey was heard high above every sound.

"Brayhard would not play me false!" reflected George. "I am here: I will remain here."

As this noble sentiment rushed through his brain the cracked vault of the cavern seemed again to tremble as if the hammers of a pile-driver were falling on it regularly. In a moment something that seemed like a hobnailed boot—but of preposterous dimensions—was observed coming awkwardly down through the hole in the roof. The boot was followed by a leg, and the leg by another boot and leg, all of which stretched themselves over most of the cavern floor, compelling the Seven Champions to huddle themselves together in the chimney corner.

"Bless my soul!" a voice up aloft was heard saying—a voice like muffled thunder—"I must have stepped into a pit or something."

Then with a stupendous kick the Giant (for of course this was a real Giant) knocked the entire cavern to pieces, and it was as much as the Seven Champions could do to struggle alive out of the *débris*.

Exhausted by his efforts, the unfortunate Giant, whose shin was badly "barked," sat himself on the

ruins of the cavern, and as he did so the light of a newly-risen moon revealed to him the struggling and dust-coated forms of the Champions.

"Now for an adventure!" whispered George to his confederates. "We must challenge this chap to combat—single combat on his part of course."

"Hallo!" cried the Giant. "Do my eyes deceive me, or do I see men?"

"Yes," shouted George; "you see more than men: you behold the Seven Champions, who forthwith challenge you to combat."

"My dear fellows," chuckled the Giant, pulling up the leg of his trousers to examine his damaged shin, "I assure you I don't want to fight—but by jingo if I did," he continued with a roar—at least it seemed a roar to the Champions, but it may have been only a gigantic whisper.

"That's all very fine," yelled the Champion of England at the top of his voice; "but fight you must!"

And making a bundle of the six gloves of his companions rolled into his own big riding glove he attempted to strike the Giant in the face with it, but the bundle only hit the chest of the Giant and fell harmlessly into his lap.

"A poultice!" he exclaimed picking up the gloves and proceeding to bandage his shin with them. "Thanks very much, dear boys."

George was in an awful rage now. "It is no use

my attempting to reach the fellow's head," he whispered to the other Champions, "for as near as I can guess his neck is at present about thirty feet from the ground. It is no use either to hack at his toes or his legs or the small of his back, for a Giant is vulnerable nowhere but in or about the head, it being the only soft part of him. Besides, if a Giant declines to fight he places you in a very awkward position. I wish I had old Brayhard here to consult in this emergency."

"Who's he?" asked Denis.

"My steed," replied George.

"Now little people," said the Giant (who had finished poulticing his shin), bending his head as low as it was possible for him to bend it without inducing a fit of apoplexy, "who or what are you—*really*, you know?"

"As we have already informed you, base, brutal, and sanguinary Giant," replied George, "we are the Seven Champions."

"And what do you do for a living?" asked the Giant.

"Our duties are to rescue females in distress—"

"Oh, I know," interrupted the Giant. "Kind of sort of policemen at a crossing. Anything else?"

George curled his lip disdainfully, and turning to his companions whispered: "What an ignorant snob!" Then lifting his eyes again in the direction of the Giant's head he bawled out: "One of our chief duties is to decapitate and generally exterminate monsters;

such as fiery dragons, ogres, centaurs, two-headed peacocks, pig-footed ladies, and *Giants*," he added, with a defiant shout.

The Giant burst into a roar of laughter which made the ground tremble and shook loose a couple of beautiful false teeth which graced the front of Anthony's mouth just under his moustache.

"You annoy me very much," exclaimed George, "by your supercilious tone."

"Why cut their heads off?" asked the Giant, still chuckling a little. "Wouldn't it be better to exhibit those monsters? At the same time, master Champion, I have one bit of advice to give you, and that is—First catch your monster!"

"We have caught one in you at any rate, and a very cowardly one, I must confess," sneered George.

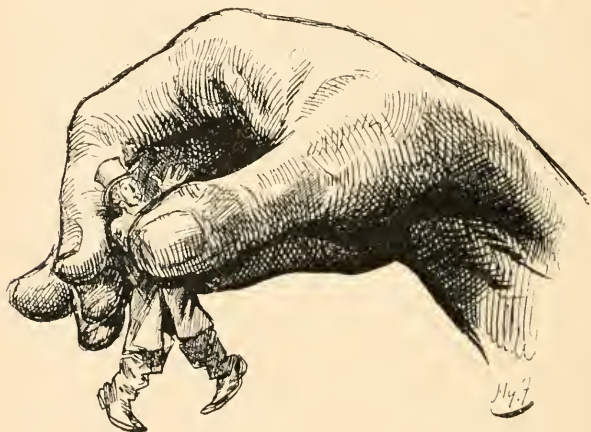
"Well, you *are* a cheeky little beggar," chuckled the Giant. "I can't help liking you for your pluck, misplaced as it is."

Then suddenly stretching forth his hand he seized hold of George, not more roughly than he could help, and with a gigantic "heigh-ho" he scrambled to his feet. The other Champions rushed behind a neighbouring tree, where they considered it would be more prudent to watch the movements of the monstrous creature.

The Giant now held the Champion of England between his forefinger and thumb, and lifting his hand high in the air examined him critically by the increasing light of the moon. Poor George felt quite sick and

giddy, for it seemed to him that he was at least a hundred feet from the ground, and the Giant's thumb was a very awkward-looking affair.

"Pretty little creature!" murmured the Giant, bringing his hand closer to his eyes. "I must not hold you too near my mouth or I fear my rough voice would damage your hearing apparatus. Come, what is the



meaning of this thirst for Giants' blood?" he asked with a short chuckle. "What injury have I done to you or yours that you should endeavour my quietus to make with your little bodkin?"

At the playful reference to the great Sword of Damocles the Champion positively trembled with passion.

"We Champions," said he, with renewed courage,

"are not supposed to enquire into the rights or wrongs of things. Our mission is to kill somebody or something out of the common."

"Poor me!" sighed the Giant. "And why seek to kill me personally? I am a perfectly simple, harmless creature—a respectable married Giant with a wife and a small family. I am a teetotaller, a vegetarian, and a member of my own anti-tobacco league. I am neither a vivisector, nor a politician, an emperor, nor a personal paragraph writer. Why seek to exterminate me?"

Champion George was unable to decide whether the Giant was laughing at him or not, but he could not help feeling very small when he caught sight of the white handkerchief which the big creature took from his pocket to brush away a tear.

"What is the measurement of that piece of canvas?" he asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

"Twenty-three feet six inches square. I order all my own clothes and things," said the Giant, "so I know the correct measurements, and will be quite happy to give you any further information about my unworthy self."

"How high are you exactly?" asked George.

"Sixty-three feet three inches—I run to sixty-four feet when my hair hasn't been cut for a month," answered the Giant briskly. "I like to be asked these questions, little man," he added gently. "Anything else you'd wish to know?"

"Your calf and chest measurement?"

"Sixteen feet five inches, and forty-six feet two inches respectively. I am in rather poor condition now. When I used to do my 154 lb. dumb bells and walk my two hundred and twenty miles a day I used to measure a lot more," sighed the monster; "but an attack of measles and whooping-cough combined, which"—

"Good gracious!" yelled George. "Those are fearfully catching complaints, and an attack of giant whooping-cough would tear the chest off an elephant, not to talk of a mere man!"

"Oh, you are quite safe," smiled the Giant. "The attack I referred to occurred more than a year ago—it pulled me down dreadfully, I must say. I haven't felt the same person since. But I am only eager to satisfy your curiosity about my dimensions," he went on, brightening up, "so pursue your inquiries and you will find a willing answerer in me."

"What do you take in gloves?" asked George, gazing askance at the thumb which surrounded him.

"Ninety and a quarter in kids. It is a pretty tight squeeze too, I can tell you, for my hand is rather long—nearly eight feet and a half, and very broad in—or rather out of—proportion."

"Your boots seemed a pretty tidy size," said the Champion, "as they came down through the hole in the roof."

"Ah!" sighed the Giant. "Now you touch me on my weak spot—my feet. They are fearfully large. Fifteen feet by five. What do you think of that?"

"Bad for beetles, I should say," smiled the Champion.

"And rough on rats too, I can tell you," laughed the Giant—"but, seriously, I am greatly upset about the size of my feet. When I was young I used to try and make my feet fit my boots and failed; now I try to make my boots fit my feet, and I also fail. I have a pet bunion which measures one foot four inches across."

"This is most interesting," said the Champion. "Moreover, it establishes a bond of sympathy between us, for I suffer dreadfully from corns. It will, perhaps, ease your mind to inform you I have decided not to carry out my war of extermination against you personally; but, tell me, have you got any distressed females at your castle? for it certainly behoves me to rescue them, if there be such persons in your keeping."

"Well, to be candid with you, we have a distressed female at our castle," replied the Giant. "You see, being frugal people, we employ but one slavey, and as we do our washing at home she frequently complains of being most distressed."

"Then she must be rescued at any cost," said the Champion, gallantly.

"You'd better learn her dimensions before you make up your mind for the task," said the Giant. "She is forty-one feet three inches round the narrowest part of her waist; and she weighs two ton, one cwt., three quarters, fourteen scruples, and one drachm, by mixed avoirdupois and apothecaries weight."

"Rather a large order, certainly!" said the Champion reflectively.

"I do not in the least object to you rescuing her," said the Giant. "In fact I'd give a lot to get quietly rid of her; but when I offer her a month's notice she works herself into a fit, and then lays about frantically with a rolling-pin, seventeen feet five inches in length by six and a half feet in girth."

"You seem to be a regular whale at dimensions," observed the Champion of England.

"Yes, indeed!" sighed the Giant, "*I am* rather given to figures. In my youth I was held up to scorn as the Calculating Boy. But don't let us forget the distressed female, little man."

"How am I to get to your castle?" asked George.

"Oh, I can take you to it in a very short time. Let me see," said the Giant; "I calculate I can get from here to the ferry—"

"What ferry?" inquired George, interrupting him.

"I live on a small island in the neighbourhood," said the Giant; "and I keep a private ferry boat to convey me backwards and forwards. But to return to a calculation of the distance: it will take me two minutes and a half to reach the ferry steps, walking briskly. If you follow me, immediately, you ought to be at the ferry, walking briskly, in less than twenty-five minutes after me. The rest of the journey you will perform in the boat and in my tax cart, which will be in readiness at the other side."



“Does the invitation extend to my confederate Champions?” asked George.

"Certainly," replied the Giant. "Bring them all along. The more the merrier."

"Would a little donkey be much in the way?" asked the Champion, persuasively.

"A human donkey—I mean one like yourself?" inquired the Giant.

"Oh, yes," said George. "He is my private steed, and I may tell you in confidence, a worthy though a conceited quadruped."

"Fetch him along by all means! You will easily be able to find your road by keeping my figure in view. Ta, ta! little man," he said, laying George down gently on the ground.—"Eph!" he cried, as he started, "it will take me a good *three* minutes and *forty* seconds to get to the ferry. My shin is as stiff as buckram."

George now beckoned his companions to come from behind the tree, and hurriedly told them all about the Giant and the arrangement for inspecting the castle and the distressed female before finally deciding on her rescue. Then putting two fingers into his mouth, he whistled loudly.

His whistle was answered by a sonorous bray; and in a few moments the faithful Donkey was by his side, holding the saddle in his teeth and looking by the light of the moon much better after his rotatory exercise.

CHAPTER VI.

Our Hero Disapproves of the Accepted Invitation—March to the Giant's Ferry—Punctuality of the Giant—Brayhard not a Marine Steeple-Chaser—All on Board!—A Furlong at a Stroke—Landing on Giant Island—The Giant pooh-pooh's Champion George's Corns—The Giant's Trap—The Tiger—Our Hero's Pedigree—Giant Always Home with the Milk in the Morning—Starting for the Giant's Castle—The Bolting of the Mare—One Hundred and Sixty-five Miles an Hour—Careering through Imaginary Cemetery—The Seven Champions 'Terror-stricken—"The Pace is Killing"—Our Hero Brays.

A PROCESSION was soon under way to the Giant's ferry. George rode at the head on his Donkey, and was followed on foot by the other Champions in single file. The night was now almost as bright as a dull afternoon, and the figure of the Giant was easily distinguishable in the distance as he tramped briskly on towards his ferry.

"This is rather a rum go, Champion," said Brayhard, after George had told him all about the six Witches, the six Champions, and the Giant. "You know the moment I saw the big fellow plunging along heavily in

the darkness—for the moon wasn't over the edge of the horizon when I first signalled to you—I thought you would rush out from the cavern and instantly slay him. Now you tell me that he and you have a sympathetic bond in your corns or bunions, and that you are going on a friendly visit to his castle. I can only repeat, Champion, it is a rum go."

"You see, he wouldn't fight," explained George. "I challenged him: I threw all our gloves at him. I insulted him grossly. I think my conduct in the matter leaves nothing to be desired. Besides, I couldn't get at his soft spot—his head—because it was out of my reach, except when he held me up in his hand. And then I was completely surrounded by his forefinger and thumb, and could not draw my sword."

"Oh, I quite acquit you of anything like cowardice," said the Donkey; "but I cannot look with satisfaction upon this friendly visit to his castle. He may have man-traps and donkey-traps all over his grounds."

"I have perfect confidence in the monster," said George. "He is a most amiable creature, and thinks of nothing but figures and calculations. And remember, I have to rescue this distressed female, in which task I shall count upon your aid."

"I hope you don't expect me to draw over two tons of distressed female, for I tell you honestly, beforehand, I could not possibly draw more than a third of that weight," grumbled Brayhard.

"I can plainly see you are dissatisfied with this

expedition," said George. "Now, whatever may happen to the other Champions we—I speak in the first person plural, deliberately—have our seven-league boots and our invisible band (which I have stowed away in my pocket for the present), and the other paraphernalia. To be candid with you, Brayhard, I would part with you willingly here, but my corns ache so dreadfully that walk I cannot. So pluck up courage, for here we are at the ferry steps."

"Just as I expected," cried the Giant, who was standing in the stern of the boat, holding his watch in his right hand. "You have arrived exactly twenty-three minutes and twenty seconds after me. I'm glad it is high water, little people, for you can now step straight on board. If you had to walk down my steps a ladder would have to be found, and even with a ladder we couldn't make much of a hand of the dear little donkey. Get on board, gentlemen, if you please," said he, holding the boat tight alongside the steps.

"How am I to jump over the gunwale?" asked Brayhard of his master. "I am not accustomed to marine steeple-chasing. It is easy enough for you Champions to climb over, but what about poor me?"

Brayhard spoke in such a high key that the Giant heard him plainly, and at once caught him by the nape of the neck and lifted him into the ferry-boat, depositing him carefully in the bottom of the boat. Then the Champions clambered over the side, and huddled themselves together on one of the thwarts.



"Ready, all?" asked the Giant, looking around and picking up one of the oars.

"Yes, thanks," answered George.

"Here goes then!" cried the Giant, shoving off the boat with the oar. Then he stepped back to the middle thwart, and dexterously shipped his oars in the rowlocks.

"Your voices can scarcely reach me here, little men," he said, making a stroke which shot the boat a tremendous distance, it seemed to the Champions, across the stream. "I do exactly a furlong at a stroke—eight of them to a mile, you know. It is just ten miles across this bit of a river, and I do it in exactly eighty strokes. Perhaps you would like to know the dimensions of this little tub," he continued, after a pause. "She is two hundred feet over all, and just carries myself and my little family. The oars are a hundred and seventy-six feet in length, but I have a pair of long sweeps which run to two hundred and nine feet. We're getting pretty close to the other side, now, young people. I count automatically, and this is my fifty-fifth stroke, so I know we have broken the heart of our water journey."

And beguiling the time with this pleasant but instructive chatter, the Giant at last said, "seventy-eight, seventy-nine, eighty!" and shot the boat alongside an enormous pier.

At least it seemed to be an enormous pier to the Champions when they scrambled over the gunwale and

dropped on the landing-place, but it was really only a very tiny landing-slip, which the Giant had built in a few afternoons with his own hands.

The Giant made the boat fast with a chain cable, and then he lifted Brayhard out of the bottom of the boat, and dropped him ashore, following the Ass himself immediately.

"My trap is just at the top of the landing-slip," said he, stooping and addressing George, who was about to mount the Donkey. "It can't hurt your corns very much to walk the distance. It is only a little over six hundred yards. I do it in half a minute, walking only forty-four miles an hour."

George was growing bewildered with the calculating Giant's figures. "But I can't walk at the rate of a 'Flying Dutchman,'" expostulated the Champion. "I'm not built that way."

"No," said the Giant; "but surely you can do six hundred yards without putting yourself across a donkey's back? If you had my sixteen-inch bunion to contend with I suppose you'd never walk a step."

"I expect not," observed George, with a smile.

"Why when I was in training," said the Giant, "I used to do the whole distance easily in ten running jumps."

George felt somewhat shamefaced at hearing this, and taking Brayhard by the bridle he followed the Giant up the landing-place, the six Champions trudging sturdily behind.

When the Seven Champions and the Donkey reached the top of the landing-place, they found the Giant standing alongside his trap, watch in hand.

"You didn't do quite four miles an hour, little people," said he. "The journey has occupied you six minutes and forty-three seconds. I will calculate your exact speed by and by. Jump up in front," he exclaimed, "you Champions! My Tiger will look after the Donkey behind."

At these words Brayhard set up an ear-piercing bray. "I knew it would come to this," he bellowed. "I will *not* be taken care of by a giant tiger, nor even by an ordinary tiger." And again he burst forth into an unearthly peal of brays.

"Shut up, you old fool!" roared George. "The gentleman—I should say the Giant—only means his boy in buttons—that elderly-looking youth who is now at the horse's head."

The Giant seemed to enjoy Brayhard's discomfiture immensely. "What a suspicious creature your friend is!" he said to George.

"You see, he is not accustomed to Giants," said the Champion. "And you can't expect a mere donkey to know the manners and tone of polite society. I fear he is badly bred, Giant."

"I'm as well bred as the best of you," exclaimed the Donkey, highly indignant, at George's words. "My mother had fourteen electro-plated medals, and my father once drew fifteen hundredweight of coal up a steep hill

without taking the two sides of the road for it; and both of them," he went on excitedly, "could trace their pedigree back in a direct line to the zebra, and that's better than a monkey any day in the week."

"What a little evolutionist it is, to be sure!" said the Giant with a smile. "But jump in, Champions!" he cried. "I have forgotten my latchkey, and I don't want to keep the missus waiting up for me. I am always home with the milk in the morning, and it must be pretty well advanced on the small hours now. What o'clock is it, Tim?" he inquired of the Tiger, for though he was in the habit of consulting his watch frequently, he seldom knew the hour, using the watch chiefly for the purpose of calculation.

"Four fifteen A.M." answered the Tiger, touching his cap respectfully.

"Oh, we can easily get home by five o'clock," observed the Giant in a cheerful tone. "Our milk is delivered punctually at five," he explained, stooping to George.

"It is no use in saying 'jump in,'" growled George, "for your trap is altogether too high, and I wasn't brought up to the trapeze business."

"Of course," said the Giant. "I had almost forgotten. I will lift you all in as tenderly as if you were kittens."

And very tenderly did the great creature pick up the Champions, depositing them one by one on the front seat of the trap. "It seems like moving pawns in a game we call chess," said he, stepping briskly into the cart after he had lifted David (who was fast asleep)—

the last and the smallest of the Champions. "Poor little man!" said he. "How he snores! I can hear him quite distinctly."

"I think he had too much fire-water at the Witches' party," observed George, but in so low a tone that his voice did not reach the Giant's ears.

"Now, Tim," cried the Giant to his Tiger; "let go her head, and jump up behind with the Donkey!"

So Tim the Tiger let go the mare's head, caught the trap behind with one hand, and made a grab at the Donkey with his other hand, and jumped up into his place with an air of smug self-satisfaction.

But this air was soon changed to one of alarm, for he had missed Brayhard's head, and had lifted him by the tail: and the Donkey not being accustomed to such treatment, put all his powers of utterance into one desperate bray. The sound was so loud and vibrating that it very nearly shook the Champions off their seat, and the giant mare, hearing it, bolted down the road.

"She's going a hundred and sixty-five miles an hour now," said the Giant enthusiastically, consulting his watch, and timing the speed by the gigantic white mile-stones, which they flew past at such a rate that the Seven Champions thought they were careering madly through a cemetery.

"I can calculate our speed to a nicety by the mile-stones," explained the Giant, quite unaware of the fact that the Champions were now holding on to each other

and to various parts of the seat in abject terror, the eyes almost dazzled out of their heads by the constant flashes of the white tombstone-like mile-stones.

The Donkey was completely exhausted by the awful bray of which he had recently delivered himself, and



was now lying across the knees of the Tiger (who had suddenly folded his arms and fallen fast asleep) in a dead faint.

"I must check her a bit," said the Giant, still holding his watch in his right hand. "That's it! I have got

her down to a hundred and thirty-two miles an hour now. Easy, easy, old girl!" he cried, for he was getting tired of holding his watch. "Easy, easy! You're better at a hundred and ten miles an hour, my girl. That's it!" he observed, after a few moments. "A hundred and ten, to the inch. Keep at that, my beauty!"

Then stooping down, and still keeping his eye on the mare, he said: "Nice trotter, George, my boy. Just lost her head a bit at the start, but she's going beautifully now. We'll be home in good time—at four minutes to five exactly at this pace; and, by the way, it just occurs to me, that you're in luck, for to-morrow, or rather," he corrected himself, with a smile, "I should say, to-day, is washing day, and you will no doubt have the opportunity of inspecting our distressed female in one of her tantrums.—Good gracious me!" he cried in alarm, as he stooped lower to pick up his whip. "Why, what ails you fellows?"

"The pace—the pace is killing!" moaned George.

"It strikes me that's a quotation," said the Giant. "And pray," he asked a little ill-humouredly, for he was fond and proud of his mare, "do you want me to walk the animal? She is a disgustingly slow walker, and she's a bit fresh to-night, and wants a trot badly. Why, man alive, she walks only twenty-seven and a half miles an hour! The pace would freeze us all in the chill of the early morning."

"Well, fasten us somehow," moaned George, piteously.

So the Giant stooped down and passed a leather

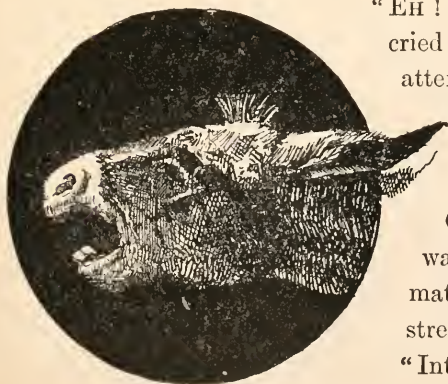
band, about the size of the endless large band of a machine, round the Seven Champions. Then he bored a hole in each end of the band with a gimlet as big as a small poker, which was concealed in the back of his pocket knife, and securely fastened each end of the band with a small hawser which he pulled out of his waistcoat pocket.

“Now you ought to be pretty comfortable, little men,” he said. “We shall sight the castle in a few minutes. The sun will soon be up, for the light of the moon is waning visibly.”

Here the Donkey gave a loud bray.

CHAPTER VII.

Automatic Salutation of the Dawn—The Giant's Castle in Sight—Champion George asks Giant for his Name as a Guarantee of Good Faith—Tom Smith!—Particulars of the Smith Family—The Tiger Sleeps—Arrival at the Giant's Gate—Brayhard Missing—Quarrel between the Giant and the Tiger—Brayhard turns up Unexpectedly—Ingenious Lie told by the Magical Donkey—A Challenge—Six Hundred and Thirty Miles an hour—The Milkman has a Miraculous Escape—The Giant a Grammarian—First Appearance of the Distressed Female—Bridget Fancies the Seven Champions are Leprechauns—Champion Patrick Nearly Smothered—The Giant makes a Joke—"Welcome to Castle Smith."



"EH! what's that?"
cried the Giant, his
attention taken off
the mare.

"Only the Donkey," answered
George. "He al-
ways crows auto-
matically at the first
streak of dawn."

"Intelligent animal!"

observed the Giant. "But see, Master Champions, our castle is heaving in sight! Would any of you like to have a look at it?"

"They are all fast asleep, except myself," answered George. "Poor chaps were quite worn out; it was only the excitement of the ride that kept them awake so long."

"Well, perhaps *you* would like a peep?" said the Giant, politely.

"Certainly," answered the Champion. "But I can see nothing from where I am, except the top of the leather band."

"That's easily remedied," said the Giant, shifting the reins to his right hand and holding George up with his left.

"It seems a pretty tall building," said the Champion, as the Giant held him in his hand about on a level with his breast. "Looks like a very fat lighthouse. How high is it?"

"Eleven hundred feet, to the inch," answered the owner. "We'll be there in a quarter of an hour now—just short of twenty-eight miles from this."

"By the way," said the Champion, "it is rather awkward my not knowing your name. Do you mind mentioning it to me as a guarantee of good faith?"

"Not at all," smiled the Giant. "It is very simple, though not an ordinary name in these parts—Tom Smith."

"Short and sweet, certainly," said the Champion. "I suppose it is your wife's name too?"

"Oh, yes," replied the Giant—"the latter portion of it. Though perhaps it is not my place to say it, I am, as I have already hinted, a very respectable sort of person, so the lady's name is Mrs. Smith."

"Your children—I think you said you had a small family," observed the Champion—"your children are, I suppose, called after you?"

"Of course," said the Giant. "I have but one son. His name is Bill Smith, and my only daughter is Mary Smith—we call her Daisy for short."

"You will excuse my curiosity in seeking to pry into your private affairs, but when one is paying a visit, it is well to be acquainted with the names of the family."

"Don't mention it," said the Giant. "I know I omitted to hand you my card when I invited you here, but the fact is I seldom carry a card case, as my circle of acquaintances is extremely limited."

"Is the distressed female a Smith too?" asked the Champion.

"Oh, no," replied the Giant. "Her name is Bridget! 'Pon my word, I couldn't tell you what her other name is. She came to us without a reference or a character in the beginning, and I have never calculated—I mean inquired" he corrected himself—"what her second name is or ought to be."

"Perhaps she hasn't got one?" suggested George.

"Very likely not," said the Giant.

"Has she any followers?" inquired the Champion.

"None," answered Mr. Smith. "We do not allow them."

"That may have something to do with her distressed condition," hazarded George.

"Very like, very like," replied the Giant in an absent-minded way. Then suddenly brightening up, he exclaimed. "Hallo! here we are at the gate! Jump down, Tim!" he cried, turning his head round to address the giant Tiger.—"Jump down, you sleepy rascal!" he roared in so loud a voice that the six champion sleepers were rudely startled from their slumber.

The giant Tiger rubbed his eyes, and then hurriedly jumped to the ground, letting poor Brayhard fall to the road from his knees. The unfortunate Donkey felt sadly discomfited by the Tiger's rude treatment of him, but he thought there was no use in crying over a spilt ass, so he very sensibly rolled himself over and over on his back, hee-hawing very gently the while.

The Tiger opened the gates and Mr. Smith drove the trap through.

"We have no lodge, and no gate-keeper," he explained to George. "Giant servants are so scarce and so expensive! Ready, Tim?" he inquired, turning round again."

"Yes, sir," said the Tiger, touching his cap with one hand and fastening the gate with the other.

"Donkey pretty comfortable?"

"Bless my soul, sir!" cried the Tiger, "I had quite

forgotten the animal. Must have lost him on the road, sir."

"You ass!" roared the Giant. "Go back and find him then. I heard him bray fifteen minutes ago, so you have one hour and one minute to get from here to where he brayed last and back. That's at the rate of about fifty-five miles an hour, so you'll have to run pretty sharp."

"But think, sir, of the weight of him coming back!" expostulated the Tiger.

"I haven't time to calculate that," said the Giant. "Your carelessness must be punished, so start at once when I say 'Off!'"

And pulling out his watch he was just about to give the starting word when Brayhard, who had been listening outside, was observed coolly walking in through the iron bars of the gate.

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Smith. "Why here is the animal, and not a feather turned on him. How did you manage to keep up with the mare, my worthy fellow?"

"Oh, that's nothing," answered the Donkey evasively: "I'd build a fire under her occasionally if I were you. I had a good feed of thistles after falling out of the trap, and I had no difficulty at all in overtaking you."

Of course this was a distinct equivocation, but Brayhard lied so unblushingly that George and the Giant were equally puzzled.

The ingenious Donkey had reflected that with the aid

of the Champion's seven-league boots he could knock spots out of the Giant's mare, and he had a project in his mind, to suggest later on a "go-as-you-please" across the country for a heavy wager.

"It ought not to take Champion George more than a



minute to wish three times, and a minute to get his breath again on landing, so we can do twenty-one miles in about two minutes—that is," he had calculated, "ten miles and a half in a minute, or six hundred and thirty miles an hour."

The Giant was almost speechless from astonishment

and vexation, and George (who was still in the hand of Mr. Smith) could not possibly make out what was the meaning or object of the Donkey's brag.

"This will completely upset all my calculations," said the Giant, half to himself. "That is," he added, "if Master Brayhard can prove his words, and if he can't I'll cram him (as they cram human aldermen) with thistles until he becomes a bloated and useless member of society. Get up, 'Tim," he cried to the Tiger, "and keep a firm grip of that marvel in ass-flesh!"

"Oh, you may jeer at me as much as you like," chuckled the Donkey with a loud and contemptuous hee-haw: "but if I can't show your mare her paces I'll return into private life, and draw a milk-cart for the remainder of my natural days."

Tiger Tim caught the braggart Donkey by the nape of the neck and jumped up behind. The Giant then gave the mare a vicious flick and in about a minute and a quarter the trap (very nearly running over the milkman) had reached the hall door of Castle Smith just as five o'clock was boomed out by the stable chronometer.

"This will never do," roared Mr. Smith to the approaching milkman. "You are," depositing George on the seat, taking out his watch, and waiting until the man had laid his can on the front door-step—"You are exactly forty-three seconds late."

"Sha'n't occur again, sir," said the milkman. "I'd have been up to the second, only for running out of the mare's way."

"A paltry excuse," said the Giant, who was in a very bad humour, owing to the taunts of the Donkey. "Send in your bill."

"Oh, don't ask me to do that, sir, please," sobbed the milkman. "I have a wife and three cows depending on me for their support. Think of the helpless condition of those orphan cows, sir, if anything were to happen between you and I."

"Between you and me, if you please, milkman," said Mr. Smith.

"Whatever your honour likes, sir," said the milkman. "It sha'n't occur again, sir. Even if you run me clean down another time, I'll take care to be up to the second."

"Oh, give the poor fellow a chance," said George. "Forty-three seconds can't make much difference, surely!"

"It makes all the difference in the world," said the Giant. "Everything in the castle is calculated to the second. I have invented a system which is almost perfect, and I mean to make it work at any risk or cost."

"What is the system?" asked George.

"The Undecimal System," answered the Giant, proudly.

"I see," said George, who did not in the least comprehend what the Undecimal System meant.

It was now five minutes after five, and happening to look at his watch again, Mr. Smith's face was distorted with pain.

"Good gracious!" he cried. "Five five A.M.! Why, this upsets my whole system for the day. It is *most* provoking."

"I'm very sorry indeed," said George.

"And I am *quite* upset. Tim," he said languidly addressing the Tiger, who was now standing at the horse's head: "you can do pretty well as you like with yourself to-day. Nothing can go right now. You can spend the whole morning putting up the mare; you can stand on your head or turn cartwheels until bedtime: you can frighten the mare from her oats: you can grease her teeth with a tallow candle: you can make a pincushion of Bridget: you can give all the corn and fodder to the milkman, and look upon it as your perks. Oh, deary me!" he sighed, "why was I ever born to invent a system which goes to pieces every second day or thereabouts?"

"Awful sorry, sir, to see you take on so," said the Tiger, touching his cap. "And if you mean to convey by your remarks, sir, that I do the likes of what you kindly advises me to do, sir, I think the sooner we parts the better for all parties concerned, including the mare and Bridget."

At this moment the hall door was opened by the distressed female, at the mere sight of whom the heart of the Champion of England descended to the sole of one of his seven-league boots.

"What are yez wranglin' for there?" asked Bridget. "I'm sure the missus is heart-broke waitin' up for you,"

addressing the Giant in a most impertinent manner. "She couldn't howld out a minute longer than five four o'clock. A nice punctulous man you are, wud yer comin' home wud the milk in the mornin'!" she exclaimed in a contemptuous tone. Then turning to the Tiger. "G'long wud you now, you blagard," said she, "an' put the mare up at wance; and come into your stir-about before the clock runs over the quarther, or I'll give you gruel!"

By this time the Giant had jumped from the trap and was busy handing down the Seven Champions and placing them on the front door-step.

Turning round after shaking her gigantic fist at the Tiger, Bridget's eye caught sight of the Champions, who were all stamping their feet to get up their circulation.

"O Mother of Moses!" she screamed, "what's them? Leprechauns, by all that's wonderful!"

And stooping suddenly down she caught one of the Champions by the waist, and lifted him up in her horny fist.

"Where's your money? Out wud your money, you scamp of a fairy miser!" she screamed in a wildly excited tone. "D'ye hear me? Where's your crock of goold, you dirty little thief?" squeezing the unfortunate man (who happened to be Patrick, Champion of Ireland) until the breath was nearly out of his body.

"You'll suffocate him, Bridget," cried the Giant in alarm. "Hold the man properly, you lubberly virago!"

‘Man!’ she cried. “What’s a Man. *That!* is it? Don’t I tell you ’tis a Leprechaun; and his money or his life I’ll have.”

“You vicious demon!” roared the Giant seizing her by the wrist and extricating the unfortunate Champion



just in the nick of time. “That is Patrick, the Champion of Ireland.”

“*What!*” cried Bridget. “*That!*”

“Yes,” said the Giant. “*That!*”

“Oh, you don’t mane it?” said she dropping her voice. “The darlin’ craychur! Forgive me, Pathrick, me jewel!

Sure I ought to have known you by the green coat—amore you're wearin', and the bunch of four-leaved shamrock in your battonhole. Oh, the darlint little man!" she went on clasping her hands. "An' is that himself, Misther Smith? An' to think I tuk him for a fairy man. Forgive me avic, forgive me!" she wept, going down on her knees. "Sure 'tis my own self that wouldn't let a hair of your precious head be parted the wrong way wud a sprig of shilelagh."

"Get up, woman!" cried the Giant. "And let me have my breakfast at once: and cook something delicate for the seven little men. They must be dying of hunger."

So Bridget got up from her knees, and seeing there was an angry look stealing into Mr. Smith's eyes, she disappeared quickly from the doorway, muttering: "Oh, the darlint little craychur! Well, I'm blessed!"

"Hallo, George!" cried the Giant, stooping down and depositing the trembling Champion of Ireland on the door-step: "Where's your lightning charger?"

"Browsing quietly on your lawn, sir," answered George, pointing to old Brayhard, who, regardless of a notice to trespassers, was struggling hard with the gigantic grass.

"Call him in," said the Giant, "for he'll want to lie somewhere."

"Oh, he can lie anywhere," said his master.

"So I think myself," said the Giant smiling. "He is a patent liar, if I'm not awfully mistaken."

"I didn't mean what you mean, sir," explained George.

"I know that," chuckled Mr. Smith. "Bridget might tread on him when she goes to hang up the clothes to dry; and I have a nice little dog box in the kennel, that used to belong to a poodle of mine: it will answer him admirably."

So George whistled with his fingers, and Brayhard came trotting up in fine style.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Giant, cheerily, as he strode into the hall, "follow me; and welcome to Castle Smith!"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Giant's Breakfast-Parlour—A Feast of Porridge—Bridget Scalds the Champion of Ireland and then Falls Over the Magical Donkey—Timely Appearance of Bill Smith—Seven Champions Insulted by Heedless Young Giant—Unseemly Levity of Bill Smith—Every Champion to his Taste—The Giant Apologizes for his Son—The Great Undecimal System Expounded—Slang and its Consequences—An Awful Threat—Division of the Champions—"We are Seven"—Arithmetical Ingenuity of Bill Smith.

THE Champions and the magical Donkey followed the Giant through the hall and into an octagon-shaped room, very scantily furnished.

"Good high ceiling," said Mr. Smith—"One hundred and ninety-eight feet. I could tell you the cubical contents of the room by referring to my calculation ledger, but I expect you'd rather have a little food and some refreshing sleep before I produce the book."

"Yes indeed, thank you," said George, unable to repress a yawn. "I think we are all pretty tired and pretty hungry."

So the Giant took up a small hand-bell and rang it

gently—but to the Champion it sounded as if some demoniacal railway porters were “ringing in the new year.”

Then he placed a chair at the table and seated the Seven Champions on it.

In a few moments Bridget entered bearing a huge dish which she laid down on the centre of the only table in the room—a small octagon table.

“I hope you do not object to porridge?” enquired the Giant.

“Oh, I dote on it,” answered Andrew, Champion of Scotland.

“Bravo, little Andy!” said the Giant. “Let Pat alone, Bridget,” he cried in an angry voice, seeing that the distressed female had surreptitiously raised the cover of the dish, and was now endeavouring to force some porridge down Patrick’s throat with a spoon about nine feet in length.

Bridget was so alarmed at being found out that she spilt the porridge all over the not-wisely-but-too-well-loved Champion of Ireland, scalding him badly, if one were to judge by his cries.

“Oh, the craychur!” she moaned, heedless of her master’s scowls. “Sure it’s spoilt him completely I have!” And taking him up she wiped him as carefully as she could with her apron.

“Lay down the gentleman, you awkward impudent hussy,” cried the Giant. “Don’t attempt to interfere with my guests again. Place this dish nearer to me,” he

went on, drawing his chair to the table, "and leave the room instantly."

Bridget wiped a tear from her eye with her porridgy apron, and stepping back she fell right over the Donkey, who had been standing behind her lost in contemplation.

The distressed female kicked and roared as she lay prone on the floor, and the Donkey (who was saved from annihilation only by his magical agility) rolled over and over on his back, hee-hawing almost loud enough to drown the sounds of Bridget's hysterical screams.

The unfortunate Mr. Smith was the picture of gigantic helplessness as he ran his fingers through his hair despairingly. The Champions sat terror stricken, and were nearly deafened by the awful noises which came from the throats of the distressed female and the magical Donkey: and goodness knows what would have happened had not Master Bill Smith rushed into the room, and lifted Bridget to her feet.

Young Bill, who was a fine type of an eighteen-year-old giant, hustled Bridget out of the room, and then turning to salute his father, his eyes lit on the Seven Champions. (Brayhard had managed to scramble to his feet when he saw the rough handling Bridget was receiving, and had crawled quietly under the table.)

"Good gracious, governor," exclaimed young Bill, "what are these?"

"In the first place, William, they are my guests," answered the parent Giant sternly: "And the words

'*What*' and '*these*' are scarcely fit terms to apply to your father's visitors."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the youthful Giant, going over to the Champions and patting them on their septenary heads with his hand.

"Can they speak yet?" he asked.

"Try it by subtracting forty-four from your dividend," answered Mr. Smith, who had evidently made a sudden plunge into mental arithmetic.

"I say, little chaps," said William, "can you say 'Pa' or 'Ma' yet?"

The Champions were all so indignant at the question that none of them opened his mouth.

"Hum!" said young Smith to himself in a puzzled sort of way.

"Puppy!" at last blurted out George.

"Eh!" cried young Smith. "Did I hear one of you say 'puppy'? Got into words of two syllables then, have you? Poor little mites!" he sighed. "I suppose you are hungry and so far away from your mamma. Have you got your feeders with you? I'll try to help you on with them."

This was too much for the Champion of England. Rising up and standing on his chair, he roared out at the top of his voice:

"Know, young whipper-snapper, that when we first met your good father, me and my mates were on an expedition for the massacre of giants. We decided against the slaughter of your parent personally, and

while we are his guests your miserable life is safe : but we shall go away one day and return, and then, *beware !*”

“He will return. I know he will,” roared young Smith, his sides shaking with laughter. “Oh, dear me, this is positively too good—real jam, in fact.”

“Eh, what’s this ? What’s this ?” cried Mr. Smith, awaking from his calculating reverie. “I suppose you have been poking your fun at my little friends, William. Excuse him, gentlemen,” he said suavely. “Boys will be boys, you know. Sit down, Champion George.”

“*Champion George !*” roared young Smith. “A human prize-fighter, I’ll be bound ! Lead on, Macduff, and cursed be he who bolts with the gate money.”

“This is most unseemly levity, William,” said the Giant. “Draw your chair to the table and give me the result of your calculations about the eleventh root.”

The jaw of young Smith fell at his father’s words, and he drew his chair to the table, a very “long face” replacing the broad grins he had a few moments ago indulged in.

“Well, sir,” he said addressing his gigantic parent, “I must confess I am completely stumped.”

“William,” said the Giant sharply, “I cannot allow these slang words. If you spent as much time at your calculations as you do over that unfortunate Slang Lexicon, my undecimal system would have been perfected by this. Fie, fie ! sir. It is my firm belief you

will completely forget your calculations when I am gone, and then," he sighed, "the great Undecimal Project which I have lived and laboured for will be lost to the giant world for ever. But bless my soul! I am forgetting my guests. Pray excuse me, Champions, but what would you like with your porridge?"

"A little milk and sugar for me," said George.

"Garlic for me," said Denis.

"Salt for me," said Andrew.

"Olive oil for me," said James.

"Ditto for me," said Anthony.

"What is that?" asked the Giant.

"Ditto is the same repeated," answered Anthony.

"The same repeated," echoed the Giant. "I do not quite understand."

"I mean olive oil," said Anthony.

"I never heard it called the 'same repeated' before," said the Giant. "Well, Patrick, my son, what for you?"

"Milk, and a small lump of butter in the centre of it—if it's all the same to you, sir," said Patrick.

"And you, David?" asked the Giant.

"I'd like the taste of a spring onion with it," answered the Champion of Wales.

"Touch the bell, William," said the Giant to his son, "and order in what our guests require. Or, better still," he added, as young Smith rose to his feet, "go out yourself to the kitchen and tell Bridget, for the sight of that hysterical virago upsets all my calculations."

"Yes, father," said William crossing the room, and

disappearing in the direction of the distressed female's quarters.

"You must excuse my son, gentlemen," said Mr. Smith. "He is a wild and playful young fellow, but there is no real harm in him. I do wish he would settle down to a steady calculating career, but at eighteen it is of course hard to expect a youth to lead an undecimal life."

"Pray what is this system of yours, sir?" asked George.

"Ah," sighed the Giant, "it is too intricate to explain at a frugal morning meal: but the mainspring of it is number Eleven. By adopting this number you abolish the noughts and the points, and the recurring dots of the decimal system, and therefore you have no useless or extraneous figures or symbols to deal with. For instance, if you were asked to write down in decimals the vulgar fraction $\frac{1}{20}$, you would be obliged to waste one dot or decimal point and two noughts. Now, on the other hand, if you were asked to express in undecimals $\frac{1}{2}$, which is about the nearest vulgar fraction I can think of at the moment to the former example, the answer would be one half an undecimal. Now eleven times two are twenty-two, and eleven times three are thirty-three—"

"Cut it short, governor," interrupted David, who was very hungry and tired. "We all know our multiplication tables by heart."

"I was about to say," said the Giant, pretending to

ignore the unseemly interruption of the Champion of Wales: "that eleven times four are forty-four, and eleven times five are fifty-five, and eleven times——"

There is no knowing to what extent the Giant's calculations might have reached, but the timely arrival of his son William with seven dolls' saucers and a tray (on which were ranged the requirements of the guests) put an end to his undecimal observations for the moment.

"Select your savouries, gentlemen," said young Smith, laying down the tray in front of the Champions, "and wire in!"

"William, William!" cried the Giant. "This is a terrible drop from the intensely intellectual conversation we have had during your absence. It almost takes my appetite away. How I do regret the purchase of that Slang Lexicon!" And removing the cover of the dish he helped his guests each with a salt spoon to a tiny portion of the porridge.

"Oh, thanks!" cried all the Champions. "You will completely overload our stomachs."

The Giant could not help smiling. Then he ladled out his son a plateful of porridge, and helped himself to another plateful.

"Those dolls' saucers were a good idea, father," laughed young Smith. "I stole them out of the nursery. Won't Daisy be in a wax when she finds I have been burgling her dolls' house!"

"By the living Jingo!" exclaimed the Giant in a highly-pitched voice. "If you make use of another

slang expression at this meal, William, I'll give you the herring-and-a-half-at-three-ha'pence calculation to do by undecimals during your recreation hours."

At this awful threat young Smith became serious, and during the rest of the meal the conversation was of an eminently calculating nature, and of course was confined entirely to Mr. Smith and his son. The Champions were so tired of the bewildering nature of the Giants' talk, that they all fell fast asleep in their chairs.

Young Smith silently drew his father's attention to this as soon as he had finished his breakfast.

"Poor little chaps!" said he kindly. "They must be sadly tired. Perhaps I shall be able to instruct them in our undecimal system of living on another occasion."

"The best thing now to do," said young Smith, "is to divide them between us and carry them up to bed."

"Divide them!" said the Giant, biting his thumb contemplatively. "That is a rather difficult problem. In undecimals they represent seventy-seven. Divide that by twenty-two, which is *our* undecimal figure, and the answer is three and a half, which, as Euclid learnedly observes, 'is absurd'!"

"I'll tell you how we'll manage, father," said young Smith. "I'll carry four of them up stairs, and you can carry three."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Giant. "Why, William, it would not surprise me after all if you turned out to be another 'Calculating Boy.'"

CHAPTER IX.

Champions Retire at an Early Hour—Extreme Unevenness of the Seven Sleepers—Bridget Mistakes the Magical Donkey for a Terrier—Our Hero's Life in Imminent Peril—Bill Smith to the Rescue!—Hysterical Condition of the Distressed Female—Bridget's Uncertainty as to her Geometrical Value—The Giant in Despair—Consultation about "the Washing"—Early Career of the Giant—Invention of the Undecimal System—Rule of Life—Bridget and the Water-Bucket—*Undecimelia victrix!*

IT was exactly six o'clock in the morning when the Champions were put to bed. The heads of four of them were placed one way by the son, and the heads of the other three a different way by the father.

"They look extremely uneven," said the Giant as he laid his three across the bed; "but I can't see how we are to remedy this. I must try and work it out another time."

Then young Smith placed a rug over the seven sleepers, and father and son stole out of the room with gigantically noiseless steps.

Bridget, hearing her master go up stairs, had entered the breakfast-room; and when she had cleared the

table and taken the cloth off, she espied the magical Donkey under the table.

"Be good to me!" said she, "but I never heard a tarrier snore like that before. Get out, out of that," she cried, giving the unfortunate Brayhard a kick which startled him from a deep sleep. "There can't be luck in a house when such onnatural craychurs of dogs as the likes of you is allowed to threspas wudout a muzzle!"

"You vicious, ignorant, hulking *person*!" roared Brayhard. "I am no terrier; I am a magical Donkey—the last of my noble race."

At first the distressed female was terror-stricken at hearing the articulate voice of Brayhard; but when he foolishly began to hee-haw she gained courage and screamed at him: "Faith then, 'tis the *last* of your noble race I'll make you. I'll knock some of the magic out of you with the toe of my boot, you schamer of a dwarfed donkey of darkness. The saints above us," she cried, lifting her foot, "come between me and all harm!"

Fortified by her prayer she certainly did make a healthy attempt to let Brayhard feel the effect of her not over symmetrical slipper. She missed him at the first kick, but the poor animal was so terrified at the sight of her slipper—which was dotted with gigantic holes—that he ran from under the table, and made a flying jump to the other side of the room. Bridget darted after him, all terror of his supposed demoniacal power



swallowed up in the excitement of the chase. The Donkey, with his usual magical agility, afforded fine sport, but would probably have been spifflicated had not the Giant and his son turned up in the nick of time. Both instantly saw what was the matter, and seizing Bridget roughly by the wrist, Bill Smith wrenched her to one side.

“Take your month’s notice this minute,” roared the enraged *paterfamilias*.

“For what?” puffed the distressed female.

“Don’t answer me, but go, madam!” said Mr. Smith.

“Who are you ‘madaming’?” said she, placing her hands on her hips, her face ablaze with anger and excitement. “I’m no madam, but a dacent unmarried girl who’s heart-broke wud your calculatin’ ways! ’Tis often I don’t know whether it’s an undecimal I am, or a conundhrum, or a rhombus—Oh, I remember the word well—as you was ignorant enough to call me wance. Between yourself and your magical donkeys, an’ your champion fairy men, ’tis a nice name you’ll give the house. A month’s notice, *inagh*! If ’tis a month’s money you’re meanin’ to offer me, pay me on your eleventeenth system, an’ then I’ll go right enough.”

Here her voice broke, and she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter which made the Giant put his fingers in his ears.

“Take her away, William. Take her away, in the name of all that’s peaceable,” moaned the unfortunate Mr. Smith. “Oh! if those little chaps were only big

enough to rescue me from her what would I not part with?"

Bridget was in dread of no one in the castle save William Smith. The young Giant was so powerfully built that he could lift twenty half-hundred weights with his teeth, and as the distressed female had frequently seen him careering about the grounds playfully with this half ton strain on his lower jaw, she knew that there was no use in offering any resistance when he wished to expel her from the room.

"Sure, if he can play wud half tons wud only his teeth," she had reflected, "he could half murder me wud a box of his shut fist;" for Bridget, having been brought up in a calculating house, was prone to amuse herself occasionally with sums in proportion.

When Bridget had been duly expelled, the Giant said to his son: "William, this strain is becoming too much for me. It occurs regularly every seventh day—washing-day."

"Couldn't you give the washing out?" suggested young Smith.

"To whom, pray?" asked the Giant.

"Oh—let me see—the milkman's wife," stammered young Smith.

"The temptation to supererogatory adulteration of the milk would be too much for him if he were to be allowed an extra supply of water for washing purposes."

"I'm afraid, then, you must only try and keep out of Bridget's way on washing-day," said the son; "for

so far as we know, there are no other Giants, outside our own little circle, who are capable of doing menial work."

"If I could arrange the matter undecimally I would not so much mind," said Mr. Smith. "But seven is a figure with which you can for domestic purposes do nothing, except multiply it by eleven."

"Couldn't you have washing only every eleventh day?" suggested young Bill, who was eager to get out to his half-hundred weights, and would have suggested every seventy-seventh day only he knew his mother would not stand that.

"Capital idea!" said the Giant. "You really *are* a calculating boy, if you would only acknowledge it to yourself. You had better go and put up that ridiculously-pedantic braggart of a Donkey in the dog-box for safety, and give him some fresh thistles; and then you can go and amuse yourself, William, while I retire to the solitude of my calculating chamber to think this washing matter out. I will awake the Seven Champions myself at 3.30, though I do not approve of more than the regulation eight hours' slumber."

It may perhaps be well to explain here some of the rules which the current Giant had established in his household, and the causes which led to his system.

Tom Smith's father and mother had been very simple people. They could neither read nor write, and of figures they had no conception whatever. In fact, as

the present Giant used to say, "I am the first of my race who ever knew that two and two made four."

Young Tom had been brought up in the same old-fashioned, ignorant way which had been good enough for his ancestors, and had never been two hundred miles from home before his fifteenth birthday. He had frequently walked to the edge of the island, but he was not aware that at the other side of the water existed a world peopled by a pigmy race called Man, who read police-court reports, wrote sensation novels, and could calculate how many sovereigns placed on edge would be required to effect a junction between the bottom of an exploded coal mine and the rim of the farthest fixed star.

One day as he stood on the shore a log of wood (as *he* thought) was washed ashore. On examination he found it was hollowed out inside, and when placed (as *he* thought) bottom upwards, would float on the water.

Something prompted him to step into the hollowed-out portion—it was really a capsized barge, but of course Tom Smith couldn't be expected to know that—and it delighted him to find that it would bear him up, for the water had been all shaken out of it by the young Giant.

Heedless of what he was doing, he allowed the island to slip away from him. He put one leg out of the barge, but as there were about seven fathoms of water under him, his leg did not nearly touch the bottom—

indeed, he would have been drowned had he attempted to stand on the bottom.

Tom was now greatly alarmed, but he resolved to make the best of a bad job, and to stick to his timber refuge. The barge drifted along for the best part of a day, and at last touched a point of land. The young Giant immediately got out and fastened the barge to the stump of a tree with a chain which he found in the bow. Then he resolved to explore the new island, and he had not walked nearly a hundred miles when he saw a lot of little houses huddled together; and as he came near the houses he saw a lot of little people who fled into the houses as he approached them.

This collection of houses was, it is almost needless to state, a human village; and it was many hours before young Smith could convince the foolish villagers that he meant no harm.

Eventually he became very friendly with the little people; and the village Schoolmaster taught him how to read, write, and calculate. This Schoolmaster had at that time one special craze, the decimal system; and when the giant decided to go home, he brought him an arithmetic largely devoted to decimals as opposed to mere vulgar fractions.

Tom got across the stream which intervened between the Man and the Giant Islands by means of a raft and a long scaffolding pole which the village carpenter made for him, and which a retired seafaring villager showed him how to use.

The old Smiths eagerly welcomed the prodigal youth, but were alarmed to find that he had lost interest in everything save the books he had brought with him ; and eventually they died almost of a broken heart at



being constantly invited by their intellectual son to learn "two times."

Thenceforth the Giant devoted himself solely to calculations, and, growing tired of the decimal system, he determined to invent another and a better one—the undecimal system.

On a few occasions he had revisited the village to

seek further instruction from the Schoolmaster; and when his son, young Bill Smith, was about ten years of age, the current Giant asked the Schoolmaster what would be the best book to give a juvenile Giant to read for the purpose of making him thoroughly acquainted with the conversation of the existing race of Young Men.

The Schoolmaster, who was a vicious old rascal, and who now hated the Giant for having discovered the un-decimal system, suggested "The Slang Lexicon" and some back numbers of a sporting newspaper.

Absolute punctuality, from such close contact with figures, became also a craze with Tom Smith, and the loss of a second in the day caused him as much irritation as the loss of the whole twenty-four hours caused a certain French king (whose name we forget, but it was probably Louis).

He portioned out the day for his household into three equal parts: eight hours for sleep, eight hours for study, and eight hours for meals and other recreation.

Giving priority to the mistress of Castle Smith, he arranged the time of each member of his household in the following manner. He had a card with the hours legibly set forth placed over the couch of each member of his household:—

RULE OF LIFE.

(Specially Compiled for the Members and Retainers
of the Smith Family.)

	RETIRING HOUR.	WAKING HOUR.
MRS. SMITH - - -		
(By which retiring time the Milkman is sup- posed to have punctually deposited his cans on the door-step.)	5.0 a.m.	1.0 p.m.
TOM (or THOMAS) SMITH -	7.15 a.m.	3.15 p.m.
BILL (or WILLIAM) SMITH -	9.30 a.m.	5.30 p.m.
MARY (or DAISY) SMITH -	11.45 a.m.	7.45 p.m.
BRIDGET - - - -	2.0 p.m.	10.0 p.m.
TIGER (or TINY) TIM -	4.15 p.m.	12.15 a.m.

*N.B.—This Time Table is subject to alterations,
which will be duly announced.*

The gardener and his wife, who dwelt in an off-building, were allowed to go to sleep when they liked, so long as they did eight hours' work; and over the milkman and his wife he sought to exercise no control.

At first he had gigantic difficulty in enforcing his Rule of Life on Bridget. She did not at all mind going to bed at 2.0 p.m., but she used in the beginning to rebel fearfully against getting up at 10 p.m.

When the Giant threw a bucket of cold water over her punctually at 10 p.m. (during his recreation hours), she used to rouse the whole house with her screams.

“I’m dhrownnded !
I’m fairly dhrownnded !
—Nice time, by me word, to ax a dacent girl to get out of her bed, wud yourself an’ your undecimal wather-bucket !”

But the Giant persisted in his water-bucket exercise in so marvellously punctual a manner that in the course of a twelve-month Bridget used to awake from slumber at two minutes to ten, and at ten o’clock, for a short time, her voice could be heard over the entire building, shouting—

“How dar’ you attempt to come into me apartment at this hour ?—I’ll be down undecimally, sir.”



CHAPTER X.

The Sleepers Awakened—Champions Introduced to the Giantess—Simplicity of Undecimal Life—The Champion of England Desires a Consultation with our Hero—Strong-minded Giantess—Brayhard and George Arrange a Little Plot—Impossibility of Reconciling Giant Life with Champion Life—Suggested Racing Contest between Giant Mare and Magical Donkey—Tantalizing Ignorance of Mr. Smith—What is Money?—The Diamond Quarry!—Change, and its Variability—Depositing the Stakes—Gigantic Gooseberries—George declares his intention of Bolting—Patrick appointed Deputy-Champion—The Coming Race—A very strange thing happens.

WHEN the Giant aroused the Seven Champions at 3.30 p.m., of course there was no one awake in the castle except himself, his wife, and the Tiger. He brought the little men (as he would, much to their annoyance, persist in calling them) into the drawing-room and introduced them to Mrs. Smith, a fine, handsome, florid Giantess of about forty years of age.

“I am glad you will be awake for dinner,” said Mrs. Smith. “We dine at 8.15 precisely. Indeed it is breakfast, I might say, for my daughter; but we are

such frugal people that there isn't much difference between one meal and another, except that Papa and William sit down with us at dinner."

"You will, I hope, excuse our clothes," said the Champion of England. "We came here rather hurriedly and none of us has, I fear, a dress suit."

"Oh, we never dress," said Mrs. Smith. "Papa says it would spoil the simplicity of our undecimal life if we adopted fashionable customs."

"By the way," said the Giant, "will you excuse us, my dear, for diverging into sporting matters?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Smith, who had read her son's newspapers and who gloried in her son's emancipation from undecimals.

"The Champion of England, Mr. George, has a Donkey who offered to race my mare. Now what do you think of deciding the contest this afternoon?" asked the Giant, addressing George.

The Giantess laughed, a benign and self-satisfying laugh, and poor George looked very foolish indeed.

"I must first consult Brayhard," he said, after a few moments' reflection.

"Of course," smiled the Giant.

"Where is the Donkey?" asked George.

"In the kennel," answered the Giant. "Bill put him into our late poodle's box at my request."

"If Mrs. Smith will excuse me?" said Champion George, "I will retire for a brief period and hear what the animal says."

"Does your Donkey speak?" asked the Giantess in astonishment.

"Oh, yes," replied George, "fluently."

"How interesting!" exclaimed the Giantess. "Of course I will excuse you, Mr. George."

And bowing very politely, the Champion of England allowed the Giant to lift him from the ground and carry him out of the room and down to the kennel.

"Strong-minded woman, my wife!" whispered Mr. Smith to George as they descended the stairs. "Doesn't care a curse for the undecimal system."

"You don't say so?" said George. "But, by the by, do you mind leaving me alone with Brayhard when we get to the kennel, for he is sometimes very shy of speaking in the presence of strangers."

"Why, certainly," said the Giant. So he deposited George in the kennel, and then walked away, audibly humming an air founded on the multiplication tables.

"Brayhard," said George, "we are quite alone. What on earth did you mean by that challenge of yours? Was it the boots?"

"Of course," said the Donkey in an undertone.

"I'm awfully glad, old man," said George, "for I'm fearfully hard up, as you are aware, my late wife's treasure not being"—here he smiled grimly—"worth five shillings a hundredweight."

"Don't look so upset," said the Donkey, soothingly.

"Oh, I had my revenge, I must confess," said George; "but what a fool I was not to have discovered where

those six sisters-in-law of mine had their treasure concealed."

"It would only have enriched your companions, and perhaps made them haughty," said the Donkey.

"But I'd have nobbled the lot, my boy," said George, "for I have them completely under my thumb. They're afraid even to sneeze in my presence. Do you know, Brayhard," he went on, "I'm dead sick of giants. I feel a regular little dwarf in this place. And as for exterminating them, I know now it is all only tall-talk and moonshine."

"What about the distressed female?" asked Brayhard, grinning from ear to ear.

"I'm not in good joking humour," grunted George.

"She is so gentle and lovely and lean," laughed the Donkey, unable to control his risible muscles, "and *so* distressed. Oh, Champion! at any cost she must be delivered from this noisome den."

"If you don't want a taste of the toe of my seven-league boots," said George, "you'll defer that sort of irony to a more suitable occasion, and talk of something worth listening to."

"Oh, you may bet your seven-league boots I don't regard Bridget as a joke—not even as a gigantic joke," said the Donkey; "a little of her goes a long way."

"Look here, old man," said George, "your jests are too heavy for me just now. I want to consult you about this race. My idea is to get out of this place at once, for we are only a laughing-stock for young

Smith and the Tiger. They positively treat *me* as a joke," said the Champion.

"They treat me as if I was something lower than a joke," said Brayhard. "I shall never forget having been called a 'tarrier.'"

"But to resume," said George; "we must get out of this; we must get out of this with money; we must get clear of Giant Island altogether and go in for monsters of our own build. Now, how is all this to be done?"

"I am sure I can hardly say right off," murmured Brayhard, stooping and scratching one of his ears with one of his forepaws. "Have you no plan in your head, Champion?"

"I have all sorts of plans," said George; "but none of them seems to be altogether satisfactory. It is of course perfectly easy to get the Giant to let me, as the challenger, hold the stakes. I could put the money in the saddle-bags."

"Don't you think I have enough to carry in yourself?" groaned Brayhard.

"Certainly not," said George. "In fact I was about to suggest that the whole seven of us should manage in some fashion to mount you or cling on to you."

"Perhaps you'd like to do a little kite-flying," sneered the Donkey, "and fasten the Champions on to my tail at intervals to keep me steady?"

"Not a bad notion at all, Brayhard!" smiled George. "But that was *not* my idea. In fact I was puzzled to

know how we could find room on that back of yours, and I must confess it would be absurd. Another thing is the uncertainty of these locomotives," he went on playfully, tapping his sea-boots with the defunct witch's wand. "We may land in a giant factory chimney or in a giant reservoir."

"A giant horse-trough would be quite good enough for me," interrupted Brayhard.

"Listen to me, old man," said George, "and be good enough to abstain from frivolous interruptions. The first thing to do is of course to get the money; next thing to ascertain the lie of the country exactly; and lastly to make some arrangements with our comrades here for meeting us at the other side of the ferry. The first two problems are easy enough, the last is a puzzler."

"Wouldn't the old Giant ferry them over if they put it to him undecimally?"

"But recollect, my dear fellow, I shall be bolting with his money; and it is only fair to suppose he'll be in a deuce of a rage, though he is such a soft-hearted slob."

"I'll tell you what," said the Donkey. "Leave one of the Champions in command here and when we don't come back your deputy can beg to have the whole blessed lot bundled back to their native parishes *in formâ pauperis*."

"I'm afraid young Smith would smell a rat. The young beggar has been reading sporting papers, and

you heard him at breakfast saying ‘Cursed be he who bolts with the gate money!’”

“Perhaps Patrick could work on the feelings of the distressed virago in the kitchen? She seemed to take a great fancy to him.”

“A capital idea, Brayhard. What a magical ass thou art! For goodness’ sake don’t start braying with exultation,” said George, noticing the Donkey taking a long inspiration.

Brayhard’s tail fell limp by his flanks at George’s words, and with a great sigh he observed, “’Twas ever thus!”

“That’s a good chap now,” said George. “Restrain your asinine proclivities until a more suitable occasion—in short don’t hee-haw until you are out of the wood. Ta, ta! for the present,” said the Champion, retiring from the kennel and advancing to the Giant, who was now walking up and down moodily.

“Ah! my little man, is your interview with your steed over?” he enquired, stooping and picking up George. “I am greatly puzzled about the extraction of this eleventh root. If I could only do it my system would be perfected at last.”

“By the way,” said George, “talking of calculations, how far is it from here to your landing stage exactly?”

“Seventy-three miles, two furlongs and three-quarters, due north from the gate,” answered the Giant.

“Thanks very much,” said the Champion. “Now, Mr. Smith, about this wager?”

“Ha!” said the Giant smilingly. “What about it? Does the animal cry off?”

“Not at all,” replied George. “He says he can beat your mare; and when he says a thing he often does it. What sum shall we wager, Giant, for a go-as-you-please across country: say a spin of a hundred miles—fifty out and fifty home?”

“Are you well up in figures?” asked Mr. Smith.

“Well, I’m not exactly a business man,” said the Champion (adopting a formula which the keenest human calculators invariably adopt when occasion requires), “but I can do the usual addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.”

“That is quite sufficient,” said the Giant. “I was about to wager you a sum in simple addition against a sum in simple subtraction.”

“But a money wager was what *I* meant,” exclaimed George, eagerly.

“Money!” murmured Mr. Smith slowly. “What is money? Oh, yes, I know,” he said suddenly. “Pounds, shillings, and pence, of course; but that means compound addition and compound subtraction, and I don’t think I could honestly make a wager in compound sums.”

“Dear me!” said George to himself. “This is very painful. I suppose the colossal old idiot hasn’t a copper in the castle.”

“Don’t you use money to buy things with?” he asked. “Surely I heard you ordering the milkman to send in his bill?”

"Such expressions are mere formulas," said the Giant, "which I learned in your country. To me 'send in your bill,' 'take a month's notice,' and similar remarks convey no meaning whatever, and unfortunately Bridget and the milkman are aware of that. Still, Champion, it does occur to me that I know what you mean. Money is also coin—gold, silver, and copper coin, used by your people."

"Exactly," said George, brightening up.

"To me it only represents so much figures," said the Giant. "What does it represent to you, Champion?"

"Meat, drink, everything," answered George enthusiastically.

"And do you really swallow these coins? It must be very bad for your digestion."

"Oh, dear no," said George. "We use them to buy things—horses, champagne, pedigrees, canvas-back ducks, blackmailers, scarf-pins, titles, books——"

"Stop," said the Giant. "Now you remind me, the Schoolmaster who educated me and who gave me books, from time to time, also gave me coins, and I remember (though I did not understand him in the least) he said, 'I am stopping the price of your education out of that big diamond.' These were the words, for I tried hard to understand them, and kept repeating them all the way from the Schoolmaster's hut to my own castle."

"You mention a big diamond," said George. "Might I ask if such things are plentiful here?"

"Oh, very," said the Giant, "but they are useless, I

find, for anything but glazing purposes. We have a quarry not far from here, but we never work it. Indeed the diamond he called a big one was a miserable little thing about the size of a hen's egg, and," with a smile, "not nearly so succulent. But to go back to our Schoolmaster. Can those words of his have anything to do with what you call money?"

"Oh, yes, a lot," said the Champion, who was eager to know more about the diamonds, but more eager to find out what the Giant had done with the coins he referred to—a bird in the hand being always more to George than two birds in the bush. "Have you kept the Schoolmaster's change?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Giant. "How you puzzle me! Change of what?"

"The coins," said George.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Smith. "I have them in a bag up stairs."

"Are they gold, or silver, or copper?"

"Gold."

"Well," said the Champion, "if you wager me the coins, I will wager you a sum in subtraction that my ass beats your mare."

"Done!" said the Giant.

"It is usual in wagers of this kind," observed George, "to deposit the stakes with the challenger."

"Very well," said the Giant. "And now don't you think we had better join Mrs. Smith again?"

"As you please," said the Champion, "but I want to

have a private interview with my comrades first. It is one of *our* rules of life to assemble in private once a day."

"I can easily arrange that," answered the Giant, mounting the stairs. "I will ask the missus to come out for a stroll in the garden. By the way, you have never seen our fruit garden. We have some marvellous big gooseberries just now."

"Thank you," said George, "I will have much pleasure in admiring them to-morrow, and perhaps, later on, I could paragraph various conflicting accounts of them in our leading newspapers."

The Giant had now reached the drawing-room. Depositing George on a cushion on the floor he asked Mrs. Smith to accompany him to the gooseberry beds, and George and his fellow Champions were then left to themselves.

"Patrick," said George to the Champion of Ireland, "I am going to attempt a hazardous ride on the Donkey's back this afternoon, and I appoint you to be Deputy Champion in my absence."

There was some growling among the other Champions at the appointment, but George quickly silenced the dissentients with an angry frown.

"If I do not turn up to-night, or in the morning, you will know that something has gone wrong; and in that case, Patrick, you will have to try to make a forced march to the landing stage where the boat is moored. You must manage to work your passage across the river

and join me in the neighbourhood of the ferry steps, where I shall probably lie in ambush."

The Champions looked very disconsolate at George's speech.

"It is all very well for you, sir," said Denis, "with your seven-league boots; but forcing a march through an unknown and giant land, and trying to unmoor a giant boat is really a task which I do not think we are, as a body, competent to undertake."

"You'd better try, believe me," said George, "for the Giant will make short work of you if I don't happen to return this evening. To tell you the honest truth, I'm going to bolt."

The Champions seemed dreadfully alarmed at hearing this, and begged their boss not to get them into trouble by his hazardous flight. The Champion of France declared he would inform the Giant of George's intention to bolt, at which threat the Champion of England drew his sword of Damocles, and threatened to make an experiment with it on the jugular vein of Denis. The French champion, aware of the deadly qualities of the sword, and being unable to claim poor relationship with George, apologized abjectly, and the matter then dropped.

"Now I have, or rather Brayhard has, invented a capital plan for getting you conveyed to a trysting-place," said George; "and it is that as our dearly beloved brother the Champion of Ireland has evidently made an impression on the heart of the distressed

female (whom of course we shall on no account attempt to rescue), he should prevail upon her to smuggle you all back in the Giant's trap."

The Champions, including Patrick, seemed to think this was not a bad idea; and they were a good deal relieved in their minds by the time George declared the meeting was dissolved.

At 5.30 P.M. young Smith was awake, and by 6.15 he was in the saddle, for the Giant had decided that his son was the most suitable person to ride the mare. Brayhard was trotted out of his kennel, full to bursting of giant corn, thistles, and other things; and in very bad condition indeed for locomotion of any sort.

"Now, gentlemen jocks," said the Giant, leading the way down to the gate and holding a canvas bag in his hand, the six Champions following on foot at the top of their speed, and the two horsemen bringing up the rear, the Donkey of course very much in the rear. "Now gentlemen jocks, I have calculated that you cannot do exactly a hundred miles by undecimals without a good deal of inconvenience; but let the race be the nearest thing to it, that will be to the forty-fourth milestone and back. The rules of go-as-you-please racing, according to the Champion of England, compel me to deposit the stakes with him." Here he handed George the canvas bag (which the Champion securely fastened to the front of the saddle) and a slip of paper on which the challenger had written his problem in subtraction.

Brayhard was nearly crushed to earth with the

weight of the sovereigns and the Champion, but the valiant rider managed to soothe the overburdened animal by patting him affectionately on the neck.

"Ready now?" asked the Giant.



"All ready," said the Champion.

"Really," laughed young Smith, "this is too much of a joke. You know it is preposterous, father."

"I know nothing of the kind, sir," said the Giant,

taking out his watch. "Now, when I count eleven you can start!"

So the Giant counted up to eleven, and at the word the giant mare flew forward at the rate of about two hundred miles an hour.

And then a very strange thing happened to the Champion and the Donkey.

CHAPTER XI.

Our Hero ignominiously Fails to Follow his Nose—Consternation and Indignation of Champion George at the backward aerial Flight—Due North—How do Crows fly?—George proposes to cut Slits in his Seven-Leagued Boots—Brilliant Suggestion of the Magical Donkey—One-Boot Travelling—Brayhard puts his Foot in it—Full Speed astern!—Soused in the Stream—The Ferry re-crossed—Refined Tastes of Brayhard's Grandmother—The Donkey explains—Maritime Derangement—Disastrous Effects of Nautical Novel Reading—Flights of Rhetoric—Brayhard strikes an Attitude—Poetry and Prostration.

THE moment George had wished three times our hero rose in the air, but instead of following his nose and flying forward he followed his tail and flew backwards, landing on the roadway seven leagues from the gate of Castle Smith.

It was really a comical sight to see the magical Ass flying through the air backwards, his tail standing out like the jib-boom of a racing yacht.

“What on earth is the meaning of this?” puffed George as the Donkey touched the ground. “I shall never get over the disgrace of being seen in such an

absurd position. Something must have gone wrong with the works of these rascally boots."

"I'll tell you what it must be," said Brayhard. "Witches always steer due north. Now, those boots being manufactured for a witch were made to travel only in a northerly direction, and so, no matter what way my nose may be turned, the boots go due north as the crow flies."

"I have no doubt you are right, Brayhard," said the Champion, "though I don't think crows invariably fly due north. They are an accursed pair of boots. And as my corns are hurting me I will at once proceed to cut slits in the confounded propellers, and so destroy their magical properties."

"Don't do anything rash," said Brayhard. "The only way for us to get out of this ridiculous island is to stick to the boots. Now, what is the exact distance to the water's edge from where we started in the small hours of the morning?"

"Just over seventy-three miles," answered George.

"A most awkward sort of distance," murmured the Donkey. "Three jumps make sixty-three miles, and a jump with one boot ten and a half. That would just land us in the river."

"I have it!" said George. "Trot forward a half mile, or better make it a mile to be on the safe side, and that will put us down on the landing slip in the three jumps and a half."

"Capital idea!" brayed the Donkey. "Methought

it was an ass who spoke when I heard such a brilliant suggestion fall from thy lips, O Champion."

"My dear fellow," said George testily, "I assure you I am quite as capable of brilliancy as the biggest ass in Europe."

"Don't let us quarrel over the matter," said Brayhard. "But how am I to trot a mile with such a weight on my poor back? It does ache so."

"Perhaps I had better get off and endeavour to walk by your side for a mile," observed George.

"Champion," brayed the Donkey loudly, "thou art indeed an——"

"Oh, hold your row!" interrupted George. "I assure you I do not consider it a very high compliment to be compared ever so favourably with your kindred. Trot along now," he cried, dismounting, "and I'll give you an odd flick of old mother Kalyb—I mean the late Mrs. George's wand, just to remind you of old times."

And, discoursing pleasantly, George and the Donkey trotted along the road until they had covered a good honest mile of ground.

"Now mount," said Brayhard, "and once more wish the regulation three times. I will stand sideways on the road on this journey, for I have often heard that is the best way to take quick travelling."

"You must have been connected with tram cars formerly," laughed George, jumping into the saddle. Then he "wished" thrice, and in a moment the Donkey and he were flying sideways through the air.



“Good business that!” said Brayhard, as they landed. “I’ll start with the other side in front this time,” turning his body right round; “and let you, good master, mount the wrong way up for a change. Now, wish again!”

And for the third time the Donkey and the Champion travelled along the road, or rather high above the road, leading to the Giant’s pier.

“That’s sixty-three miles now—or rather sixty-two,” said George, dismounting. “I will now relieve myself of one of my boots and tie it to your tail, old man.”

“I object on principle to tying things to my tail,” murmured the Donkey.

“Well, shall I string it round your neck, or will you put one of your hoofs into it?” asked George.

“I will put my *foot* into it,” said the Donkey; “it will look more respectable.”

“All right, old boy!” said George, as Brayhard lifted one of his hind legs. “Now then,” putting the Donkey’s leg into the boot, “you look positively lovely—something like a picture of Puss in Boots, only more so.”

Then the Champion of England vaulted lightly into the saddle. “How will you travel this time?” he asked.

“Snout foremost, just to vary the monotony,” replied the eccentric animal.

“Now we’re off, full speed astern!” cried the Champion; and having wished again the Donkey and he were

flying once more over the Giant's road, and over his river too, and down they came splash into the water.

Fortunately they had landed almost on the edge of a river bank, so they got only a good sousing in the river, and a good coating of mud as they scrambled ashore.

"This comes of your calculations, you stupid creature," fumed George.

"Of *yours*," said the Donkey indignantly, as he struggled shorewards weighed down with his golden burden. "I took your word for the distances."

"But where on earth are we?" asked the Champion. "I don't see the Giant's landing slip."

Of course the passage through the air had been so rapid they were not aware they had crossed the river.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the Donkey, giving vent to a loud and triumphant hee-haw. "We have crossed the ferry in safety."

"What do you mean?" cried George.

"*We have crossed the river!* Don't you remember the old familiar Fiend said that in his world they looked upon me and you as one. Now when I put the boot on the other leg—"

"On what other leg, you idiot?" asked George.

"For purposes of illustration, there are but two legs between us: your two reckon as one, and my four as one. Don't you see now?"

"Egad! I believe you have hit it."

"I am sure of it," said the Donkey proudly.

"I am so glad you put your foot in it," said George,

pointing to the boot which still clung to the hind leg of the ass. "Yes, you must be right. Ten miles across the river makes the whole distance, eighty-three miles. The four jumps make eighty-four and we subtracted one by my stratagem."

"*My stratagem, if you please,*" said the Donkey.



"I think the idea was mine; but are we not one for travelling purposes?" asked George.

"Oh, of course, I had forgotten that, for the moment," replied the conceited animal.

"I feel quite exhausted," groaned George, "and my boot is a ton weight."

"You exaggerate, worthy Champion," said the Donkey. "My boot too is heavy and full of mud and water, but it does not weigh, I calculate—"

“Look here, Brayhard,” interrupted George, angrily, “if I ever hear the words ‘calculate’ or ‘figures’ pass your lips, or if you ever make any allusion to the undecimal system, we shall part—perhaps more in sorrow than in anger, but part we shall.”



“Parting is such *sweet* sorrow,” murmured our hero, a poetic gleam stealing into his expressionless eyes.

“Or sentiments, or fables, or maxims, either, mark you,” said George. “They are all equally hateful to me.—But I had almost forgotten I was completely worn out.”

“Better wear out than rust out,” exclaimed the Donkey. “I beg your pardon, forgive me, noble Champion,” he roared as George’s wand came whack ! whack !

on his hide like a shower of hailstones. "I quite forgot myself. Please, oh, please, knock it off."

George's rage had now exhausted itself and him, and he threw himself down on the grass while poor Brayhard rolled over and over again on his back trying to obliterate the effects of the wand. He succeeded in kicking off his boot during the performance of some remarkable catherine-wheel-like evolutions; and seeing this, the imitative Champion pulled off his wet boot, a great sigh of relief bursting from him as he caught it by the sole and allowed the muddy water to pour itself out.

"I wonder where we are, Brayhard?" he cried, still holding his boot upside down.

"Ask me another," moaned the Donkey.

"We are not at the ferry steps, certainly," continued the Champion. "Can you make any sort of a guess as to our position?"

"We are somewhere about eighty-three miles due north of Castle Smith," replied the Donkey.

"Oh, go teach your grandmother to suck eggs," cried George.

"My grandmother never had the least desire to suck an egg," exclaimed Brayhard, indignantly.

"More fool she!" said George, smiling at the snobbery of the Donkey. "But the main thing is to discover where we are, and then to try and hit upon some plan for effecting a juncture with our rear-guard. It rather puzzles me to account for the extraordinary position of the alleged north star."

"I don't quite understand you," said Brayhard.

"You see," explained George, "we first travelled due north seventeen and a half leagues, then we walked a couple of miles, then we crossed a stream ten miles wide, then we went a distance of about seventy-three miles to Castle Smith. Now what I cannot understand is how or where we came to turn our back on the north pole."

"Oh, dear me," smiled the Donkey, "the matter is as plain as the nose on my face. First you see we go due north, then we shift her head a bit and steer to the westward of nor', then we 'bout ship and lay her course about sou'-west-and-by-west, and then we fill on her again and go due south in the tax-cart."

"Why, you must have been at sea, old man!" exclaimed George, in wonderment. "I never knew you were a seafaring ass. Was your certificate suspended, or what induced you to remain ashore?"

"I never was at sea, my hearty," answered Brayhard, "but I have read a vast quantity of cheap nautical novels."

"To some purpose evidently," observed the Champion. "Come, find our latitude and longitude, my nautical friend."

"Avast there, you lubberly son of a sea-cook!" roared Brayhard, lashing his tail with the true-born nautical fury and enthusiasm of a melodramatic man-o'-war's man behind the footlights. "It's easy to see you're a land-shark that never took a hitch in your trousers, a

splice in your braces, a round turn on a patent winch, or swallowed the fluke of an anchor. To take the sun you'd require a chronometer in your dog-watch, a patent log round your neck, a second hand moonraker and a founder's share in a spanker 'boom,' a handful of be-laying pins in a hen-coop, a reef in your binnacle lamp, some capstan bars, a t'-gallant yard and a half, a damp sheet and a flowing beard, a y'eave ho!—and even then you wouldn't do it, you derelict, water-logged land-lubber!" gasped the exhausted and nautically-deranged Donkey, with a grin which exhibited a double row of long gramminivorous teeth.

"If it were quite clear to me," said George, "that I shouldn't get hydrophobia from the bite of a mad donkey I'd whack you while I could stand over you."

"Excuse me, noble Champion," whined Brayhard, "I am not mad, I give you my word. I am only an Ass—let the truth prevail, though the heavens fall!—and I was carried away by the enthusiasm which the mere mention of true-blue water always stirs up in the breast of the British donkey."

"Oh, give us a rest!" moaned the Champion languidly. "I am dead sick of your rhetorical flights!"

"Talking of flights," said the Donkey, the maritime fever quite burnt out, "do you intend to adventure another seven-league jump this afternoon?"

"I do not," replied George in a weary tone. "No inducement could make me try and cram my corns into those wet boots just now; they are thoroughly shrunk

I suppose by this. Besides, they'd give me no end of an influenza."

"Then I presume you mean to spend the remainder of the afternoon a-sleeping on the cold, cold ground," murmured Brayhard.

"Your presumption is equalled only by your impudence and ignorance," yawned the Champion.

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind," said Brayhard, striking an attitude, "thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude. Pity the sorrows of a poor old ass whose trembling limbs" (here he shivered—a muscular feat which asses can accomplish at will, as the crocodile can shed bogus tears) "have borne him—." At this point, desiring to be duly impressive, he turned round with the intention of indicating the Champion by pointing his fore-paw at him, and much to his surprise and disgust, his long sensitive ears were tickled by a sound which rose like an exhalation from the grass. "Only the sound of a silent snore," he poetically observed, as he gazed at the sleeping form of the Champion.

Then with a great sigh the slighted and saddened animal threw himself on the ground, and for a considerable period a solemn stillness held the air save when the vibrating snores of the damp Donkey and the waterlogged Champion shook the surrounding atmosphere.

CHAPTER XII.

The Vicious Schoolmaster—Professor Hemlock—Bœotia—Autocratic Government—The Debating Society—The Scottish Vice-President—Poetry and Dreams—Do Women Dream?—"The Vision" and "The Song"—Effects of Cold Roast Pork—Not for Publication—The Vision of the Sleeping Ass—The Debating Society on a Nightly Prowl—The Professor's Pun—Our Hero and Champion George Discovered—The Vice-President utters an Exclamation—George becomes Invisible—Consternation of the Bœotian Explorers.

THE Schoolmaster who had instructed Tom Smith, Giant, in the arts of reading, writing, and arithmetic was (as has been already declared) a rascal.

He was old, ignorant, ambitious, and ugly. His name was Jacob Hemlock, but he called himself Professor Hemlock. He had many other vices, but it would serve no good pupose to keep on enumerating them.

Of course there was a virtuous side to his character also. For instance he was rich, a bachelor, exceedingly superstitious, and (though utterly devoid of "ear") he spent most of his spare moments writing poetry of a perfectly harmless kind. As a rule there wasn't

much of the poetry his own, but there were occasions when he could lay claim to absolutely originality.

The village in which the Professor dwelt was a very inconsiderable and useless place. Nobody seemed to do anything but gossip. It had no arts, no manufactures, no polytechnics, no police courts—nothing, indeed, in the shape of public institutions except an almshouse and an alehouse.

The visits of the Giant were the only events which had ever disturbed the genial current of life in Bœotia, as this unhappy village was called.

Professor Hemlock was the autocrat of Bœotia. He was a self-appointed resident magistrate, and all fines inflicted by him were pocketed by him. He was the President of the Bœotian Literary and Scientific Debating Society, and all debates were delivered solely by the President, no other villagers being deemed competent to argue with Professor Hemlock. He owned the lease and license of the alehouse, and the funds of the almshouse were duly misappropriated by him.

Before the Giant's first visit to Bœotia the Professor had lived in a small cottage in Queer Street, but having fraudulently obtained an enormous diamond from Tom Smith he built himself a large house on the outskirts of the village, where he devoted himself chiefly to the manufacture of indigenous poetry and the consumption of imported tobacco.

The same evening which saw the exhausted forms of the Champion of England and the magical Donkey

asleep on the river bank was "debating evening" in Bœotia; and towards dusk the assembled debaters beheld approaching them, as they stood in the porch of the alehouse, their respected Professor and President. Hemlock was smoking a long pipe as he advanced



majestically down the village street, and it was evident he was lost in thought.

"Ha!" he said as he reached the door of the alehouse. "Are we are all assembled?"

"Yes, sir," replied the vice-president, a market

gardener who had emigrated from Scotland to Bœotia with nothing but a snuff-box.

"Prepare the room then for receiving me," said Professor Hemlock, "and let the usual deputation be sent out to invite me to take the chair."

Accordingly the society rushed into the room set apart for the meetings and rushed out again in a deputative body to invite the Professor to take the chair.

"Gentlemen," said the autocratic Hemlock, as, a few minutes later, he lolled back in his chair and scowled at the surrounding row of Bœotians, "the subject for this evening's debate is: 'Does Poetry induce Dreams, or do Dreams induce Poetry?' Now, if this question were sprung upon you without due notice it is most likely you would all answer in the negative."

"We should," shouted the society unanimously.

"I thought so," smiled the Professor. "And you would be wrong," he added viciously.

"We should," shouted the society.

"The true solution of this problem lies neither in the negative nor the affirmative pole of thought, but somewhere between—say at the equator," continued the Professor.

"It does," shouted the society.

"For instance," said the Professor, "if poetry induced dreams then, every poet would dream."

"He would," shouted the society.

"And on the other hand," continued the Professor—

“And I wish, gentlemen, you would not express your private opinions so frequently ; it interrupts the flow of the debate, and though it shows a vast amount of genuine intelligence to hear you endorse my views, still it would be better to be silent until I call specifically for your observations.—But as I was saying—on the other hand, if dreams induced poetry, then every dreamer would be a poet. Now, it has been asserted that dogs, farm labourers, and women dream ; and though it is no part of this present discussion to enter into the truth or falsehood of such an assertion, yet we may take it that there are occasions when even women dream. And surely,” smiled the Professor, “none of you would be bold enough to assert that women are poets ?”

The society tittered audibly and inanely.

“But, as I have observed,” said the Professor, clearing his throat, “the truth of the original theorem lies between the extreme poles of negation and affirmation ; and we may take it that sometimes a dream may induce a poem, and sometimes a poem may induce a dream. In proof of this I may tell you that last night I read two poems in which the word ‘dreams’ occurred. Now mark this : last night, after a heavy supper of cold roast pork, I dreamt. Therefore a poem induced a dream. Again mark me : my dream was a strange one and it induced a poem. Therefore a dream may induce a poem. To spring such an assertion as this upon you is perhaps unfair without offering you tangible proofs, so

with your permission I will read my poem. It concerns the dream and is composed in two stanzas. The first of these, which is written in a somewhat tragic measure, I will take the liberty of calling 'The Vision.' The second and lighter portion I will call 'The Song.'"

Taking a sheet of foolscap from his coat pocket the Professor coughed gently and began—

"The Vision.

'To my sleeping senses a wondrous dream
Came into my head on yester-e'en.'

"I may here observe," explained the Professor, "that in employing the word 'yester-e'en' I make use of a poetic licence, as I did not really dream until after midnight. But to resume—

'I wandered through a noisome grove,
And all of a sudden I fell madly in love
With a donkey which I encountered, who was, I found,
A-sleeping on the damp, damp ground:
I tickled his ears with a thistle which I cut with a knife
And I soothed his slumbers by playing on my pipe.'

"Please understand," explained the Professor, "I do not mean my pipe which I use for tobacco, but again availing myself of a poetic licence, I say '*my pipe*,' meaning the sort of pipe which the ancient shepherds play upon in poems like mine. But to resume—

'Then quickly my spirit did begin to quail,
And he snored so loudly that I very nearly awake.'

"That," said the Professor modestly, "is the end

of stanza the first, which I call 'The Vision,' and it is not my intention to offer it for publication at present."

"Where's your Laureate noo?" exclaimed the Scotch market-gardener.

Professor Hemlock smiled at the spontaneous earnestness of the vice-president's compliment, and again clearing his throat he said—

"The second stanza is, as I have indicated, of a lighter and more rollicking texture, and, as you are aware, it is called 'The Song.' It contains an introductory rhyming couplet, and it runs thus—

'However I plucked up courage ere long
And this was the burden of my Song :

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright.
I arise from dreams of thee, and the spirit in my head
Has led me, I don't exactly know how, to thy feet,
my quadruped !
Methought I also observed, "Of an ass I am enamoured."

"That is the whole poem," said the Professor, putting the foolscap sheet back into his pocket, and waiting for the deafening cheers of applause which he knew would greet him.

When order was restored the erst Schoolmaster, assuming a grave and wearied aspect, continued his debate.

“Now, gentlemen, this matter weighs heavily upon me. Such visions are not granted to mere mortals for nothing, and it is perfectly plain to my poetic senses that somewhere in the neighbourhood sleepeth an ass who is in distress and whose rescue will prove a benefit to me—and, of course,” he added, “to the village in general. And as I am nothing if not practical, it is my intention to propose to this sympathetic and intelligent assembly that we should immediately go forth into the surrounding groves, and with poetry in our hearts, prosecute the search for the donkey of my dreams!”

Having nothing to do with their time and being completely subservient to their self-elected resident-magistrate, the members of the Literary and Scientific Debating Society at once consented, *nem. con.*, to ramble through the country in search of the ass whose whereabouts had been so strangely revealed to Professor Hemlock.

The unworthy Professor of course accompanied the search party and lectured it from time to time on prosody, reciprocity, velocity, zoology, theology, electroplatology, meteorology, phrenology, geology, necrology, phlebotomy, the use of the globes, and various other things about which he knew nothing whatever.

After wandering for many hours through groves, the search party at last emerged from the shadows of the trees and sighted the river, which was now richly, though inexpensively, illuminated by the risen moon.

“Much have we travelled out of our ordinary *grooves*,”

said the Professor, attempting a horrible pun, "so fate must soon prove kind, or it will behove us to return disconsolately to our muttons."

This light and airy badinage had a fearfully depressing effect upon the members of the Debating Society, but they smiled and struggled on.

At last a cry from the vice-president electrified them—

"Where's your Columbus noo?" he shrieked, pointing with one hand to the Professor and with the other to the sleeping forms of Brayhard and the Champion in the near distance.

The cry of the market-gardener awoke the slumbering travellers.

George jumped to his feet at the same moment as Brayhard, and seizing the seven league boots he vaulted with them into the saddle and fixed his hatband on his hat, thus rendering himself and the Donkey completely invisible to the Bœotian Exploration Company.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Dream-Donkey—A Four-footed Figment—A Nightmare on the Chest—New Subject for Debate—Brayhard Kicks invisibly—An Exact Science—The Fly on the Vest—The Bæotians Succour the Wounded—The Midnight March to the Village—Hemlock House—Dejection of the Donkey—Brayhard on the Brink of a Yawning Gulf—Ask a Professor!—The Skeleton Key in Requisition—The Truly Rural Innkeeper—L. S. D.—“Champion Jarge!”—The Debating Society hilarious—Tripe and Onions—Odic Force—Terrible Excitement in the Stables—Flat Burglary—The Thirst for Compensation—Ass *versus* Man.

THE Professor and his friends were almost rooted to the ground with amazement. Each man looked inquiringly at every other man as much as to say, “Did *you* not see something like a man and a beast a moment ago?” and every other man answered the inquiry by a look of blank but affirmative wonderment.

The silence was broken by Professor Hemlock.

“You have all seen with your own eyes the donkey of my dreams, I think?”

“We have, learned Professor!” whispered the Debating Society.

“The dream-creature has vanished like the baseless

fabric of a vision, has he not?" said Hemlock standing out in front of his satellites and triumphantly placing his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

"He has," responded the Debating Society, with a show of animation.

"Did I not often tell you that there was more in my philosophy than you had ever even dared to dream?" asked the Professor grandiloquently.

"You did," chorused the worshipful company of Bæotians.

"That ass was but a figment of the brain," said the Professor—"a mirage, a phantom, a poetical nightmare."

The Champion of England, to give him his due, was no lover of pomposity or hypocrisy, and not being under the spell which Hemlock had weaved around the unhappy villagers, he experienced an intense desire to kick the Professor. This desire however he decided to keep in check owing to the fact that it would be only a bootless kick he could just then direct against the autoerat of Bæotia.

However, George was a man of resources, and his recent experiences in company with the magical Donkey had the effect of producing a quicker flow of thought.

"By Jove!" he reflected as he sat in the saddle, gazing invisibly at the wondering crowd of explorers, "couldn't old Brayhard do the trick splendidly?"

"I say, old chap," he whispered, leaning forward until his mouth was close to the Donkey's ear, "I want you to

confer a favour upon me. Don't speak or bray, whatever you do, but just allow me to back you gently into position and when I give you a pinch let fly with one of your hind legs as hard as ever you can fire your hoof."

"I see," whispered Brayhard gently, a smile distorting his melancholy mouth. "A nod is as good as a wink to an invisible quadruped any day."

"You hear the humbug calling you a mirage, a phantom, a nightmare, don't you?" said George. "Now, let him have a nightmare on the chest that will astonish his weak nerves. Gently, old figment!" chuckled George, backing his steed into position.

"Gentlemen," said the Professor, "a most excellent subject for the next debate at our glorious Literary and Scientific Institution would be: Was this creature of my dreams a mirage or a nightmare?"

Just as he uttered these words Brayhard let fly one of his hind legs full tilt at old Hemlock, and planted his hoof just about the middle of the Professor's chest.

The unfortunate man, uttering a horrible shriek, was shot backwards head over heels a distance of several yards; and for an appreciable space of time the Bœotians were so overwhelmed with this new spiritualistic manifestation that none of them had the courage to run to the assistance of his master. At last the market-gardener took a big pinch of snuff, plucked up courage, and advanced cautiously to where the Professor lay groaning and moaning.

"I fancy that debate will be rather a failure," smiled George, urging the Donkey backwards to a safe distance. "I hope you haven't injured the fellow much, Brayhard?"

"Oh, not at all!" replied the magical Donkey. "Kicking with me has been reduced to an exact science. You see I once had a second-cousin, a mule, who could use his hoofs with most remarkable effect and precision, and many a lesson has he taught me. The gentleman is really more frightened than hurt."

"I hope so," murmured the Champion. "He deserved a lesson in common sense, but I think it would be unfair to smash his ribs, or anything of that kind."

"I give you my word of honour no bones are broken," replied the Donkey reassuringly. "When I was in practice I have for a trifling wager killed a fly on a man's waistcoat without causing the man any inconvenience beyond a severe shock to the whole nervous system."

By this time the Bœotians had plucked up courage one and all, and were standing or kneeling round their discomfited chief magistrate.

Seeing this George observed to his steed: "I say, Brayhard, wouldn't it be a good idea to follow those fellows to their homes? I don't feel particularly dry just yet, and as we shall want a night's lodging somewhere we had better keep this crowd in view. They are sure to belong to some neighbouring town."

"You are quite right," said the Donkey. "I shall

not be at all sorry to get the bag of gold off my unfortunate back—the weight of it very nearly dragged me under when we fell in the river, and it seriously interferes with my revolutionary exercises.”

“Of course,” said George. “I had almost forgotten that you had such a load on your shoulders—I mean on your back. As for these unfortunate boots which I have still a grip of with my right hand, and which my poor wrist aches from holding, I am inclined seriously to chuck them into the next heap of rubbish we meet.”

“I told you before not to be rash, Champion,” said Brayhard. “The boots are no doubt damp and heavy now, but with the aid of a good fire and a nice coating of grease they will suit us admirably, I doubt not, on some future occasion. But see, good master, our friends are on the march. Shall we follow them?”

“Certainly,” replied the Champion. “I was just thinking whether we should follow visibly or invisibly. What do *you* say?”

“Invisibly,” replied the Donkey. “If you were to disclose my presence now perhaps they might wreak vengeance on me, being the only supposititious ass or nightmare in the vicinity.”

“Very well,” said George. “Trot along then invisibly, good Brayhard.”

So the Donkey and the Champion pursued the even tenour of their way at a respectful distance behind the retreating and Hemlock-laden Bœotians.

The Debating Society made straight for "Hemlock House," as the Professor's residence was called, by entering upon a short and narrow path through the woods; and when at length the precious heavy burden was deposited on a couch in the best bedroom, the Bœotians made a rapid descent upon the alehouse.

The Champion and the Donkey had followed the villagers at a leisurely pace, and when the latter had disappeared into the alehouse, George read by the light of the moon the legend on the sign which swung over the doorway :

ENTERTAINMENT FOR MAN AND BEAST.

"This will suit us down to the ground," he whispered to Brayhard. "I think I will now divest myself of the hatband and don once more my damp boots."

And suiting the action to the word he removed the invisible mourning band, placed it in the breast pocket of his overcoat, and then strove mightily with the seven-leagued foot-warmers.

"What ails you, old chap?" he asked, observing that Brayhard's head hung dejectedly. "You'll get a crick in your visible neck if you don't look out."

The Donkey lifted his head with a great sigh and indicated the sign-board with a peculiar motion of his supple ear.

"Oh, I see," smiled the Champion. "You don't like the expression BEAST. Is that it?"

"That's it," replied the Donkey.

"But it is merely a generic term," explained George, dismounting.

"That is why I object to it," said the Donkey. "It instantly places me on a level with the monkey-of-the-



organ-grinder, the lamb-about-to-be-led-to-slaughter, the dog-in-the-manger, the noble-animal-and-very-useful-to-man——"

"I know," interrupted George, with a laugh—"the cow-that-jumped-over-the-moon, the cat-that-ran-after

the-spoon, &c. Beware, Brayhard! thou art approaching perilously near the forbidden land of fables. There, don't be an ass—I mean a professor—like our friend the enemy, whose nervous system I fear you have *completely* shattered.”

“I protest against this badinage, Champion,” said Brayhard. “It seems to me that, like most men I have encountered in my earthly pilgrimage, you regard the members of my, my—.” Here he coughed, as he couldn't think of a suitable substantive.

“Species, let us say,” suggested the Champion. “Cough it up!”

“Well, species,” continued the Donkey. “That you regard a member of my meditative species as a mere synonym for a human fool. Why is this?”

“Oh, ask a policeman!” replied the Champion. “I'm not a debating society, nor a private enquiry office. But I'll tell you what I am—cold and hungry. So here goes!” he cried, advancing to the door of the inn.

“Hi, landlord!” he shouted, knocking loudly at the door with the defunct witch's wand—for the alchouse was now shut up (except of course to *bonâ-fide* travelers), it being after the ordinary closing time.

“Who's there?” asked a thin, shrill voice from within.

“Only a *bonâ-fide* man and be—I beg pardon—ass, replied the gallant Champion.

“Are you both members of the Literary and Scien-

tific Debating Society?" inquired the still, small voice from within.

"We are *not*," replied George, laying special emphasis on the not.

"Then I can't admit you at this hour," said the still, small voice.

"This is a pretty how-do-you-do," muttered George, turning round and addressing Brayhard.

"Has the noble Champion forgotten his picklock—I should say magical key?" interrogated the Donkey in a tone of veiled sarcasm.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed George. "I had indeed quite forgotten it for the moment."

"You'll be forgetting your prayers presently," sneered the Donkey.

"Not my involuntary ones. I sha'n't forget the effect of them in a hurry," smiled George, producing the key from his pocket and turning it in the lock. "Now then, follow your leader, old chap!"

Much to the astonishment of the landlord, a wizened little old man, the door flew open and the Champion and the Donkey entered the alehouse.

"This is an intrusion, sir," said the landlord.

"I wish you wouldn't give way to those self-evident ejaculations," observed George. "They are perfectly hateful to me. We require—me and my ass—first-class entertainment."

"We do not provide such frivolous things as entertainments," squealed the landlord. "This is a truly

rural alehouse, where every customer is supposed to converse in the intellectual and semi-humorous style to be found in rustic novels, *passim* !”

“Gadzooks !” exclaimed George. “Here is, I presume, another professor.”

“Sir !” said the landlord, “I scorn the imputation. The only party of that sort in this neighbourhood is our worthy Professor Hemlock, who is, I hear, suffering from the effects of a severe but invisible application of horse-hoof on the epidermic portion of his chest.”

“Give me to eat and my ass to feed !” said George, haughtily ; “or perhaps you might find old Hemlock’s complaint epidemical as well as epidermical.”

Overcome by the haughty mien of the Champion the wizened old landlord closed the door, sighed and said :

“What will the noble gentleman eat for himself, and what for the Donkey ?”

“I don’t eat for the Donkey,” replied George. “I have got quite enough to do to consume my own victuals. The ordinary fodder of commerce will suit him to a nicety. As for myself, I should not at all mind a taste of a savoury dish, the fumes of which are now tickling my nostrils.”

“That, sir,” said the landlord, “is some tripe and onions—a specialité of ours—provided for the L. S. D.”

“Oh, you need have no fear about the L. S. D.” said George, producing from Kalyb’s reticule a fistful of the bogus sovereigns.

"The gentleman misunderstands me," smiled the landlord. "By L. S. D. I do not mean filthy lucre, but the Literary and Scientific Debating Society. And I must ask their permission before I can allow a stranger to sup with them. What name, please?"

"Oh, tell them, George, Che-ampion of England," answered the Champion, with the air of a true *preux-chevalier*.

"Whaat!" squeaked the landlord. "Champion Jarge?"

"The same," answered George, haughtily. "And when you are mentioning my name please do not pronounce it as if rhymed with Barge."

"I will do anything the exalted Champion asks me," said the landlord.

"Then put my steed up comfortably to begin with. I will myself lead him out to the stables if you show the way."

The landlord bowed and led the way to the stables through a back door.

"I will leave the bag of real sovereigns with you," whispered George to the Donkey. "They will be safer in your charge. And if any one attempts to steal it kindly give him an object lesson in the noble art of kicking."

The Donkey for all answer winked a wink with his left eye.

After Brayhard had been made comfortable the landlord ushered George into the room where the L. S. D. were assembled and introduced him. The Debating

Society were highly flattered at having the great Champion to supper, and insisted on placing him at the head of the table in the chair usually occupied by their president. The worthy landlord then—after the manner of a deputation—withdrew.

The Society seemed in high spirits. When George gravely inquired after Professor Hemlock a roar of laughter greeted him, in which even the sycophantic market-gardener joined.

“Where’s your nightmares noo?” chuckled the Scottish vice-president, at which sally the table was set in a roar, which made the exterior welkin ring.

“I wonder what it could have been that so deliciously tumbled the old scoundrel, sir?” asked one of the L. S. D. of George, after the night’s adventures had been told to the wily Champion. “It looked like the kick of a mule, and we all certainly saw something resembling a man and beast in ordinary human form just before the accident happened.”

“I should fancy it was what is called Odic force,” mumbled George, his mouth full of tripe and onions.

At this moment a fearful yell, followed almost immediately by a triumphant bray, reached the ears of the company and paralyzed them with terror.

“Gentlemen,” said George, rising to his feet and addressing the temporary-deranged members of the L. S. D., “be not afraid! The bray emanates from the throat of my trusty steed. Let us away to the glens—I mean the back-yard.”

And drawing his sword, the noble Champion marched out of the room followed by the more adventurous of the Bœotians.

A pitiful sight awaited them in the stables. Brayhard, in a high state of excitement, was standing up lashing his flanks furiously with his nervous tail, and in a corner of the stable lay the wizened old landlord completely doubled up.

"Where's your phantoms noo?" cried the Scotch market-gardener, pointing threateningly at the Donkey.

"Be calm, gentlemen!" said George. "If my gallant steed has kicked the unfortunate landlord, the kick has been administered in self-defence. Speak, Brayhard!"

"He tried to steal the bag off my back, Champion," explained Brayhard in a tremulous voice.

"Well—I never!" exclaimed one of the Bœotians addressing his companions, who were all quaking with terror and astonishment at hearing the articulate *basso profundo* of the Donkey. "I have often heard of stealing the cross off an ass's back, but I never before heard an ass flatly *accuse* a person of burglary. There is something uncanny about this, vice-president."

"Where's your honest landlords noo?" was all the vice-president could utter.

"Best carry him inside, anyhow," suggested George; "and if you will let me know where the nearest apothecary is to be found, I will hie me to his dwelling."

Encouraged by the Champion's nonchalant manner,

the Bœotians mustered up courage to approach the injured landlord, and four of them carried him into the house by the head and heels, much in the same way they had a short time previously carried home their President.

“Compensation! I want compensation,” groaned the landlord, opening his eyes.

“Take care of the man—the ass will take care of himself,” said George, as he sheathed his sword, prior to starting out in search of the village apothecary.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Apothecary not at Home—Hemlock House Invisibly Invaded—The Patent Folding Thermometer—Strange Chest Depression—The Language of Bumps—Absurdity of the Esoteric Donkey Theory—Tone—Absence of Pills—Soap not Advertised—Commission on Mustard Blisters—Poetry and Patent Medicines—George fancies he is at a Pantomime—A Plethoric Columbine—Comic Business—The Visible Gruel—Abatement of Pantomimic Fever—The intellectual *al fresco* Combat—Dog Latin—Mental Exhaustion and Adjournment to the Truly Rural Ale-house.

WHEN the Champion reached the residence of the apothecary, he was informed that worthy was not at home. On further enquiry he ascertained he was in attendance on the dilapidated Professor, and George at once determined to make a descent on Hemlock House.

When he reached the hall door he found it locked, so, not desiring to disturb or inconvenience anybody, he opened the door with his magic key. Then he put on his invisible hatband, and hearing voices in a room up stairs, he ascended the staircase and invisibly entered the bedchamber of the injured Hemlock.

The apothecary was seated beside the bed, holding the patient's wrist with one hand, and fondling a watch with the other. A flood of giant recollections came over the Champion (as he gazed at the watch) which filled his eyes with tears.

"Hum!" said the doctor, pocketing his watch, and looking particularly knowing. "Ha!" said he a moment later, as he dropped old Hemlock's wrist and ingeniously placed a thermometer under the Professor's arm.

"What is it?" asked the invalid.

"Ssh!" said the apothecary. "You will dislocate the works of my patent folding thermo." Then he drew back his lips in a straight firm line and frowned, most learnedly it must be admitted, at the patient.

In a few minutes he released the thermometer, and gazing at it he shook his head and unconsciously assumed an air of deep surprise and regret (for he hated old Hemlock as much as a certain Unmentionable Personage hates holy-water).

"No, it isn't yellow fever," said the doctor, with a sigh, as he folded his thermometer and sadly laid it by. "Nor it isn't peripneumony or cicatrix. I'm blest if I'm able to construe this strange depression on your chest. It isn't colly-wobbles, nor it ain't a nervous rash, nor it isn't intermittent strangulation with a dash of foreign influenza, and it can't be caused by mumps. Allow me just a moment: I will diagnose your bumps. Ah! a lack of veneration. No benevolence. Great

Scott! here's a bump of strange dimensions. Here's a tiny little dot. Here's a cavity enormous. Shall I tell you what they mean?"

"If you please," groaned Jacob Hemlock, "for I dreamt on yestere'en that an ass would cause me trouble, and my dreams are ever sound."

"Ah! your dream was after supper," said the doctor, "I'll be bound. Now, the bump of strange dimensions is the bump of rank conceit, and it indicates you suffer from a love of whisky neat. Upon close examination I perceive this little dot has no meaning: 'tis a pimple—p'raps your blood's a trifle hot. The—ah—cavity expresses—well, some wants long felt no doubt: you ain't got no eddication, and you'll suffer from the gout. But again, my business proper leads me back unto your chest; and *there* a strange depression is most clearly manifest. As for spiritual nightmare, or poetic kick of mule, or an esoteric donkey (here he smiled), I hope that you'll excuse a doctor's bluntness and permit him to say *Bosh!* I'll prescribe a mustard-plaister and a very cleansing wash. I will also send a bottle which you'll *shake* three times an hour, and a box of healing ointment, and some faded sulphur flow'r, and a nauseating powder which I warrant you'll detest, but believe me it will alter the appearance of your chest. Stick to slops and seidlitz powders, alternating each with each—if you feel you don't get better I will send you up a leech. What I want, of course, Professor, is to give your stomach TONE."

"Stop a moment! Stop a moment!" cried the patient, with a groan.

"What's the matter?" asked the doctor. "Have you got another bump that requires examination?"

"No, I've fairly got the hump at your wondrous diagnoses. *But*, you seek to cure my ills, and I never, learned doctor, heard you mention any PILLS."

"True!" the doctor cried. "I humbly crave your pardon, and I hope you will furthermore forgive me for not advertising Soap. Wash your chest three times each morning, and devour a dozen pills. Should you find them hard to swallow, swish them gently down with squills. Now, my fee is but a guinea. It is marvelously low, but the drugs which I will send you are all patented. You know I'm allowed a small commission by the various patentees. Call me early in the morning if you think you want to sneeze."

Champion George by this was feeling most distinctly ill at ease.

"It reminds me," he reflected, "of a pantomime old Kalyb brought me to when I was quite a youngster. I suppose Hemlock is pantaloon, and the idiotic apothecary the clown. A brilliant idea!" he thought, a moment later. "I will play harlequin, who of course is, or ought to be, strictly invisible."

At this moment the Professor's housekeeper, a somewhat elderly and sour-visaged female, entered the room with a basin of gruel.

"A most excellent columbine!" smiled George to himself, as he gazed on the fat and elderly sprite.

"I hope I don't intrude," said the housekeeper, addressing the apothecary; "but the master's gruel is getting lukewarm, and he likes it strong and hot in the mouth, so I made bold to disturb you; and indeed I must say it's a late hour of the night to be keeping the unfortunate man awake, terrifying him with the notion that you're going to undermine his constitution," for she had for some time been listening at the door.

The true spirit of pantomime had now seized firm hold of the Champion.

Pirouetting invisibly round the room, he swooped down on columbine, seized the flowing bowl of gruel and pirouetted madly round the room with it, the screams of the astonished housekeeper filling the apartment with sweet orchestral music. Suddenly he placed the bowl in the hands of the clownish apothecary, who was infected immediately with the pantomimic fever. The clown dropped on his knees in "double-split" fashion; then he rose swiftly, and crying out, "I am gruel only to be kind," he dashed the contents of the steaming bowl over the semi-recumbent and wholly pantaloonish Hemlock.

The effect was sublime. No words can describe the quaint charm of the "comic business."

Seizing the clown by his hair, which was luckily not a wig, the harlequin (almost deafened by the screaming duet of the pantaloon and the columbine) invisibly



Fig. 2

dragged him out of the room and down the stairs and through the hall and out into the roadway.

Here physical exhaustion set in and the pantomime fever abated.

With a sigh the champion harlequin tore off his hat-band, and by the light of the moon (still shining brightly) he revealed himself to the terrified medicine-man, who naturally thought he was being carried off to an incandescent locality by some tricky imp of darkness.

"Spare me yet a while, noble fiend!" supplicated the apothecary. "Give me time to put my affairs in order, and repent, and your petitioner will ever pray."

George was immensely tickled at the notion of being taken for an evil spirit.

"Now, my dear fellow," said he, "don't you think you would be more likely to appease me by guaranteeing to poison the whole neighbourhood with patent medicines than by your fulsome offer of prayer and repentance?"

"Excuse me, noble fiend, if I have caused you offence or pain by my ill-bred proposal," said the time-serving apothecary; "but think of all the services I have rendered you in the past. "I have," he added, boastfully, "spared neither man in chronic bronchitis nor children in the whooping-cough."

"You're a beautiful wretch, certainly!" smiled George; "but, joking apart, there is nothing supernatural about me. I am simply a good young man endowed with numerous magical powers."

"Are you a thought-reader, then? or a hypnotiser? or a theosophist?" asked the apothecary, relieved to find he was not dealing direct with Pluto.

"No," said George, somewhat annoyed at the growing impertinence of the medical man. "But I'll tell you what I am: the proprietor of a donkey who could kick you into the middle of next week while you'd be preparing a bolus."

"A costermonger, I presume!" said the apothecary, with an impudent leer.

"Look here, my fine fellow," exclaimed George angrily, "if you attempt to treat me to any of your coarse flippancy, I wouldn't hesitate very long about making a sandwich of you with my sword of Damocles," tapping the hilt.

"And look here, my fine fellow," said the apothecary, "there is such a thing as *law* in this country, and it isn't very clear to me that I sha'n't take an action against you for criminal conspiracy."

"That for you, sir!" said George, pulling the apothecary's nose until the unfortunate man shrieked with pain and indignation.

"Let do my dose, you scoundrel!" he cried, struggling to free himself.

"Now, sir!" cried the Champion, flinging the apothecary from him and folding his arms.

"*Nemo me impune lacessit!*" observed the man of boluses, threateningly.

"My dear sir," sneered George, "you do not expect,

I trust, to alarm me with dog-Latin. I have studied the back of the dictionary as well as yourself, and I can assure you, my boy, that you are simply launching a *brutum fulmen* calculated only *ad captandum vulgus*."

"Hold, in mercy's name!" cried the terrified medical man. "*Dulce est desipere in loco*——"

"*Jest* so!" interrupted George; "but as we seem to advance *pari passu* over this *pons asinorum*, would you kindly allow our *al fresco* conversation to be carried on *in statu quo ante bellum*."

"*Nolle prosequi*," answered the apothecary, determined to have the last foreign word, "unless I am assured you do not mean to revert either to this Davenport-Brothers business or give way again to your nose-tweaking propensities."

"You can have my assurance of peace with honour!" exclaimed George eagerly, for he was getting to the end of his quotations. "And now, my dear friend," said he, "I want you to pay a professional visit to the landlord of the local alehouse, who is suffering from the effects of a kick administered to him, purely in self-defence, by the same quadruped that has laid the Professor low."

"What!" cried the apothecary, in almost delirious ecstasy. "Can you introduce me to the noble animal which placed old Hemlock *hors de combat*?"

"It is not a horse, it is a donkey," explained the Champion.

The apothecary laughed a sarcastic laugh into the

sleeve of his jacket (which sleeve by the way he never allowed the daws to alight on). "I am glad it is an ass," said he. "*Similia similibus curantur—a crux medicorum* for one who is opposed to homœopathy."

"Oh, knock that idiotic dictionary business off!" exclaimed George, assuming an air of champion-like dignity, "and hie with me to the bedside of the sufferer!"

And, exhausted with the intense intellectuality of their conversation on the roadway, the Champion and the apothecary in silence pursued their course to the truly rural alchouse.

CHAPTER XV.

Giant Island again—The Deserted Members of the Champion Ring—Inhumanity of the Donkey—Persuasiveness of Patrick—Indignation of Tom Smith—A Plot to Exterminate the Giant and his Helpless Family—The Wickedness of Treachery—The Study of Folk-Lore—Explosion of the Theory of Smell—Taffy innocent of Beef-stealing—The Six Champions Confined in the Giant's Hay-loft—Opportune Appearance of the Distressed Female—Jars and Jars—Local Option on Giant Island—A Plot for the Deliverance of the Champions—A Special Brand of Shamrock—The Giant Child—Daisy and her Dollies—Turkish Delight—The Search for the Green in Champion Pat's Eyes.

WE must now return to Giant Island and the deserted members of the Champion ring.

When the astonished Mr. Smith saw the stern-board the Donkey was making he uttered an exclamation of quick surprise, and then appealed to Champion Pat for an explanation.

"Bedad, sir," shouted the gallant Patrick, "you might as well ask me for the address of the man that mixed the mortar for the Round Towers of Ireland. I never saw or heard of anything so extraordinary since I was told the tale of the cow that jumped over the moon, and even

that highly-trained animal followed his nose by all accounts."

"I always thought there was something inhuman about that Donkey," said the Giant. "In the first place it is most unnatural to hear asses talk, and then there was his insufferable conceit."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish, I should say, sir!" smiled Patrick, eager to placate the Giant.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Smith—"I thought all you little chaps were part of one little whole. Perhaps," he added with a smile, "you are contemplating a revolution."

"No, sir," answered Patrick. "We do not want a revolution; but we are sadly in need of a reformation."

"So it strikes me too," said the Giant. "Of course you are my guests, and as such I feel it my duty to treat you with a certain amount of deference, *but*" (and for the first time the Champion noticed a very dark frown puckering Mr. Smith's forehead), "I have also a duty which I owe to myself, my family, my system, and my race, and that is not to submit tamely to a wanton, and I believe a premeditated outrage on the sacred rights of undecimal hospitality."

"But what have *we* done, sir?" asked Patrick nervously. "If our leader has acted dishonourably in bolting with the stakes, we have been innocent of any intention to aid or abet him."

"I am unable to make up my mind about you," said the Giant. "I took the man George to be an honest if

a somewhat vain little creature. He abuses my trust in him by playing a practical joke upon me ; and if there is one thing I detest more than another it is a practical joke."

"But we, sir, I again submit, are surely innocent," observed the insinuating Champion.

"I don't know what to believe—all you men are, I fear, tarred with the same brush. Now, I will just tell you what occurred yesterday before I came across you, as a proof of the sweeping charge I make against the whole human race. After crossing the ferry I strolled towards a village where I was well known, and where I believed I was respected. It was dusk when I arrived there, and it so happened my approach was unobserved by any of the villagers. I travelled round a back way to the local alehouse, and as I approached the premises I heard the hum of voices. I am not an eavesdropper, but I could not help hearing my name mentioned, and immediately throwing my scruples to the wind I did, I confess, listen to the voices which reached me through an open window. And what did I hear, think you?"

"Oh, I suppose some foolish gossip—people *will* backbite their best friends you know," observed Patrick.

"Gossip, sir!" sneered the Giant. "No ; but a distinct plot to invade next week my island home, to attack and plunder my castle, and to exterminate myself and my innocent family. And the ringleader of this vile conspiracy was a Schoolmaster to whom I had foolishly described my habits, my system—everything. He knew

that from 11.45 A.M. to 1 P.M. there was no one awake in the castle except the Tiger and Bridget; and, if you please, that worthy pair were to be 'got at,' as the Schoolmaster elegantly put it."

"This is very sad indeed, sir," said Patrick; "but of course you could afford to laugh to scorn the idle threats of a party of alehouse loafers."

"Yes, sir," said the Giant; "but oh, the treachery of it! I retired from that village utterly sick at heart, and for hours I must have wandered aimlessly about the country until that accident happened which brought me into contact with you Champions. At first I confess when I met you it was my intention to convey you all willy-nilly to my castle and immure you in a damp cellar, but the outspoken challenge of your chief amused me and I forgot my anger. Then I determined to bring you here, to treat you well, and to discover by degrees if there was any such thing as common gratitude and common honesty—as we regard such things in giant-land—in any set of men. Now, the first experience I have is the dishonourable and ungrateful flight of your chief, who fools me about a wager, sends my son off on a wild-goose chase, and purloins a valuable sum in subtraction. Oh, it is very wicked, very wicked," murmured the Giant in a voice choked with emotion.

The six Champions, knowing that it was their intention to try and undermine the fidelity of the distressed female at the earliest opportunity, felt, it must be confessed, a little shame-stricken. They glanced at each other

under their brows, and by tacit consent they arranged to let Patrick still continue to speak for them.

"You must admit, worthy Giant," shouted Patrick, "that in endeavouring to set up a friendship, based on mutual trust and a firm foundation, with diminutive folk like us you attempt an almost impossible task."

"But why?" interrupted the Giant.

"I will tell you, sir," answered the eloquent Champion of Ireland; "and you must not blame us men altogether; blame yourselves and the immutable but little understood laws of heredity."

"I fail to follow you," observed Mr. Smith moodily.

"Cut it short, governor," whispered the Champion of Wales.

"This is what I mean," continued the Champion of Ireland, ignoring David's whispered interjection. "You see from our earliest days we men have been brought up to believe that all giants are our natural enemies; that they live for nothing but to carry off our most beautiful maidens and feed themselves to repletion on our broiled bones. For my own part, I can never forget the first impression left on my infant mind as to the acuteness of their sense of smell in connection with my fellow countrymen."

"You are talking Greek to me now," observed the puzzled Tom Smith; "but proceed. What do you mean about sense of smell?"

"This, sir," said Patrick. "In all cases when former ancestors of mine went out to deliver captives from

bondage in your land, they got hid away in cellars, or cupboards, or chimney-flues, and when the Giant returned to his castle it was his invariable custom to sniff three times and then exclaim: 'Fee! faw! fum! I smell the blood of an Irishman. Whether he is dead or alive I will have his bones for my supper to-night and his blood for my morning draught!'"

"You positively sicken me," cried the Giant. "And do you mean to tell me that any sane person in your country believes this malicious rubbish?"

"Every child believes it implicitly," replied the Champion of Ireland. "Now I ask you, sir, as an intelligent Giant, can you expect that individuals brought up on this sort of food——"

"Garbage, I should call it," interrupted Tom Smith angrily.

"Well, garbage, if you like," said Patrick; "that any individual so brought up could be expected to establish relations of a friendly character with one of your species? Now, *can* you blame us, worthy sir?"

"I scarcely know what to say," answered the unfortunate Mr. Smith. "What on earth could have possessed your people to invent so preposterous a theory about a vegetarian race is beyond my poor powers of imagination."

"There must have been a time, sir," suggested Patrick—"and I say it with all due respect and deference—when your ancestors went in for anthroplagism."

"For what?" asked the Giant.

"Well, to put it less euphoniously, sir," said Patrick, "for looking upon our bones as a delicate sort of supper-dish; and, as you know, the immutable and but little-studied laws of heredity tell us that the sins of the descendants shall be visited on their ancestors."

"But, I tell *you*, sir," thundered the Giant, "that at no period of our history did any of my race touch a morsel of flesh meat of any sort or kind. Oh, the pity of this!" cried the unhappy Mr. Smith, throwing up his hands despairingly.

"I know it is very sad," sighed the Champion of Ireland; "but a study of folk-lore——"

"Oh, dash your heredity and folk-lore!" cried the Giant. "Both are abominable outrages on decency. But here comes my innocent if somewhat slangy son," he murmured, as he heard the clatter of hoofs in the distance, a sound of course which did not reach the ears of the Champions for some moments later.

"How is this, governor?" cried young Smith breathlessly, as he reined in his fiery steed. "I haven't seen little George on my way back. What's become of him?"

"He has bolted, my boy," replied the Giant, "with the swag."

"Bolted!" exclaimed young Smith. "How? where?"

"I don't know how, and I don't care where," said the parent. "No sooner was the starting word given

than himself and his magical ass rose up in the air and then flew backwards with tremendous velocity."

"What an extraordinary business, to be sure!" said young Smith. "Can't the other little chaps give you any explanation?"

"They *say* not," answered the Giant.

"He must be one of those villainous welshers," said young Smith.

"Villainous Welshman, indeed!" cried David angrily, looking up towards the young Giant, as if he could eat him without a leek. "I'd have you to know, sir, that there isn't such a thing as a villainous Welshman. Our assizes are simply holiday processions interspersed with banners of white gloves."

"I didn't say Welshman, little chap," smiled Bill Smith, jumping from the saddle and advancing towards David good-humouredly. "I said welsher. But if it comes to that, what about Mr. Taffy who stole a piece of beef?"

"A stupid nursery rhyme, sir!" said David defiantly, "possessing just as much historical value, I expect, as the tale of the starving member of your species who ate a church and a steeple and the priest and all the people."

"Further libels on our vegetarian habits," sighed the parent Giant, testily. "Come, let there be a stop to this wrangling! I have not yet made up my mind what I shall do with my hostages."

"Hostages, sir!" exclaimed Patrick nervously. "I

hope you don't regard us as guarantees for the good faith of Champion George."

"Most certainly I do," answered the Giant. "However, I am still undecided what course to pursue. I will later on take a long walk and make up my mind what to do with you; and meantime I will confine you in a loft in the coach-house."

"Sir!" cried Patrick.

"Not another word," said the Giant sharply. "The more I ponder over this trick of the absentee Champion the less I like it. You will not suffer any internal inconvenience, as I shall order a dish of porridge and a milk jug to be left with you while I think out the matter leisurely and undecimally."

Of course the unfortunate Champions knew there was no use in creating a scene. James and Anthony embraced each other and wept copiously; Denis stuck one hand defiantly into the bosom of his jacket and plucked at his imperial with the other hand; Andrew took a pinch of snuff and sneezed inwardly; Patrick winked knowingly and reassuringly at David, who returned the wink and put his tongue in his cheek to heighten the effect.

Then the Giant and his son hustled the six Champions to the stables, and placed them up in the loft in the coach-house through a trap-door which was about seventy feet from the ground.

"They'll be safe enough there," observed Mr. Smith to his son. "Fetch the porridge and the milk to them,

my boy, and when Bridget awakes at 10 P.M., instruct her to see after the hostages."

The Champions were fairly comfortable in the loft. There was plenty of hay there, but being unfortunately giant hay, it was not particularly soft, and each blade seemed about as thick as a good-sized bulrush. However, the six hostages managed to fall asleep very soon after they had satisfied their hunger with the porridge and milk left by Bill Smith.

About eleven o'clock the door of the coach-house was opened and Bridget entered with a candle in her hand.

"Are yez there, little men?" she asked in a voice that startled from slumber the Champion of Ireland, who was the most alert of the six sleepers.

"We are," answered Patrick, peeping down through the hole in the loft—young Smith had left the trap-door open in order that there might be sufficient air in the prison cell.

"Is that Masther Pat?" asked the distressed female.

"The same," replied the Champion of Ireland; "and unless my eyes and ears desave me, 'tis yerself I see, Bridget *mavourneen*." (Patrick unconsciously reverted to his congenital brogue in conversing with the distressed female.)

"Are yez cowl'd up there?" asked Bridget.

"Cowl'd is it?" said Patrick. "Begor, 'twould freeze the top off your nose to shake hands wid me this minute."

This was a distinct falsehood on the part of the Champion, but he wanted to work on the feelings of the distressed female, and did not consider a trifling exaggeration could injure his cause or character under existing circumstances.

"Maybe you'd like a jar to yer feet, Masther Pat?" suggested Bridget.

"No, me darlin'," answered Patrick; "but I wouldn't mind a jar that I could put to my mouth."

"Ah! begor, that's where we're lost here," sighed Bridget. "The mischief a dhrop of the hard stuff the masther will allow us poor craychurs, an' there isn't a private still or a shebeen, not to talk of a licensed house, in the whole island."

"Begor, I don't know how you stands the place at all, Bridget," sighed the palavering Champion.

"Wisha! where's the use in grumblin'?" said Bridget. "Sure there isn't another situation to be had in these parts at all, at all. But what can I do for yez, Masther Pat?"

"I'll tell you, then," answered Patrick. "Are yerself an' the Tiger on good terms?"

"Is it Tim you mane?"

"Ay."

"We are an' we're not. It all depends."

"I see. Would he do you a favour if you axed him on a pinch? I mean, if you made up your mind you wanted him to plaise you."

"Begor! if I made up my mind, the dickens a fear

of Tim howldin' out again' *me*. Yerrah, man! 'tis wallop him wud a pot-stick I would if he said 'no' to me on an emergency."

"All right then, Bridget, me darlin'. Now, when Tim's waking-hour comes round, I want you to induce him wud all yer gentle powers of persuasion to get out the horse an' thrap an' dhrive the whole six of us Champions over to the ferry."

"Begor! that 'ud be as much as his situation 'ud be worth, Masther Pat," sighed Bridget, gloomily.

"Ah! don't talk like that, Bridget, me jewel," said Patrick, persuasively. "Sure the boss need never know anything about it. He's out on a long prow now, I expect, an' he won't be home until the milk in the mornin'.

"I'd do it wud all the veins of my heart, Masther Pat, but neither Tim nor meself 'ud have the life of a dog if the ould man or Masther William ever came to know of it."

"I'll tell you what!" cried Patrick, excitedly. "I can prevent yerself an' Tim from ever gettin' into throuble, not alone about the dhrive, but about anything undher or over the sun."

"How?" asked Bridget, eagerly.

"I'll make each of yez a present of a sprig of special four-leafed shamrock, an' that'll save yez both from all kinds of misfortune aither here or hereafter."

"Done!" cried Bridget. "'Tis well I know the vartues of an ordinary four-leafed shamrock, but of

coorse a special brand of it must have the dickens' own qualities altogether. To tell you the thruth, I had almost cast an evil eye on the bunch you're wearin' in your coatamore, *avic*."

"It's onlucky, you know, to covet the plant," said the Champion of Ireland; "but if I *give* it to you—as I will—wud a heart an' a half, you'll be as right as paint for ever and a day."

"The saints look down on you, Masther Pat, until I sees you again," murmured Bridget, reverentially, as she stole on gigantic tip-toe out of the coach-house, fearful lest young Bill Smith might be lurking in the neighbourhood, although he had informed her (when ordering her to look after the little men) he intended to start out in pursuit of his worthy parent, and ascertain if any tidings of Champion George could be obtained on the island.

Bridget had not been gone for more than half an hour when the quick ear of Champion Pat heard some one opening the stable door.

"Is that yerself, me darlin'?" he whispered, putting his head over the edge of the hole on the loft.

"Ssh!" replied a voice.

"That's not Bridget's contralto," said Patrick to himself, "nor is it the Tiger's baritone. I wonder who or what it can be?" he mused. The visitor had not brought a light, and the stable was in utter darkness.

"Are 'oo one of de champions?" asked the lisping stranger.

"Who on earth is this, I wonder?" mused Patrick. "It sounds like the gigantic lisp of a child.—Yes, my little dear," he replied, making a random shot. "Who are *you*, pray?"

"I'm Daisy," whispered the visitor.

"You're Daisy!" exclaimed Patrick, in wonderment. "What's your other name, my pet?"

"I'm 'ittle Daisy Smith—Bill's 'ittle sister—'oo know."

"Oh, I see," said Patrick. "Mr. Smith's juvenile daughter, I presume?"

"Ess," said the visitor. "Mr. Smith is my pappa. Bill told me 'oo were such 'ittle men, like my dollies; and he took my dollies' spoons and cups and saucers out of their nice cosy house, and my dollies are crying all de day because they have nutting to eat out of, and it's my red dolly's birthday and her party is spoiled. Booh! ooh! ooh!" blubbered the visitor, crying scalding tears of disappointment and sorrow.

"Don't cry like that, my pretty pet," said Patrick, in a kindly voice.

"I want my dollies' spoons and my dollies' cups and saucers!" blubbered Daisy Smith.

"I assure you, my dear," said Patrick, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of his visitor, "that we haven't your dolls' spoons up here. Your brother or the cook—Bridget I mean—must have taken them in their charge after breakfast. Ask Bridget, and I am sure that obliging girl will find them for you."

"Are 'oo very 'ittle?" asked Miss Smith.

"Well, really," replied Patrick, a little bitterly, "I don't know how to answer you. I suppose you would think me quite a nice little toy-soldier."

"And have 'oo a red jacket and a gun, and a wooden lozenge to stand on? Only 'oo mustn't suck it, or de nasty paint would make 'oo sick."

"I really don't quite follow you, my pretty little pet," answered Patrick, whose eyes could now faintly distinguish the outline of Miss Smith's tiny figure. "Judging by the height of the parent giant," he reflected, "this youngster must be nearly thirty feet high. How puny it makes me feel, to be sure!"

"Are 'oo a dood 'ittle man?" asked Daisy.



"Oh, pretty tol-lol, you know," replied Patrick, with a laugh. "I always come home to tea."

"Do 'oo? Pappa never comes home until de milk-man comes with de milk."

"Shocking old scoundrel!" smiled Patrick to himself. "Your papa is a good man, of course, my dear, isn't he?"

"Pappa is a very dood man," said Daisy. "He always brings me sweeties and dollies."

"Where on earth does he buy those infantine articles, I wonder?" mused Patrick. "I'm sure he is a very good man indeed, Daisy."

"Have 'oo a 'ittle Daisy too?" asked the Giant's daughter.

"No, my dear," replied Patrick. "I'm a single man."

"What's dat?" asked the child.

"Oh, a stupid old person," said Patrick, "who hasn't any little girls."

"I see," observed the child, impressively. Then she paused for a moment and whispered, "Broder Bill said 'oo was hungry, so I brought 'oo out dis. I *stole* dem," she added, wickedly, "from my red dolly, because I told her she didn't want 'em if she hadn't a party, and I told her she'd have her birthday two times over when I found her cups and saucers. Stretch down 'oor hand and 'oo won't be hungry for de night."

"My dear little pet," said Patrick, "I couldn't reach you anyhow. Throw up whatever you have, my innocent angel."

The giant child made a few unsuccessful attempts to throw the food up through the trap-door, and at last Patrick succeeded in catching Daisy's parcel, which he found was something very sticky wrapped up in what no doubt was giant tissue paper.

"Thank you very much, my sweet little pet," said the Champion of Ireland. "I sincerely hope that you will find your dolls' spoons and cups and saucers, and I am only sorry I cannot have a romp with you in the nursery."

"Oh, dat would be so nice," exclaimed Miss Daisy, enthusiastically. "I could punish you ever so often and put 'oo in de corner in my dollies' house, and 'oo would cry, wouldn't 'oo?"

"Bitterly," answered Patrick. "I hope you wouldn't slap me."

"Just a 'ittle slap," answered Daisy. "But I wouldn't hurt 'oo much, 'oo know. And den I would give 'oo sweeties when 'oo promised to be dood. Do 'oo like sweeties?"

"Oh, I *love* them," answered Patrick, sucking a piece of giant Turkish delight.

"Den 'oo won't be hungry now, for it is some of my own sweeties—not my dollies', 'oo know—I trew up to 'oo. I do so wish I could see 'oo and all de oder 'ittle live dollies, but mamma says I will be allowed to see 'oo all before I go to bed to-morrow if I'm *very* dood."

At that moment a gruff voice was heard in the dis-

tance, and in a moment Bridget (this time without her candle) put her head in at the stable door and cried, "Are you there, Miss Daisy?"

"'Ess," replied the juvenile giant, in a somewhat frightened tone.

"Wisha! I wouldn't doubt you for bein' where you oughtn't to be. I suppose 'tis thryin' to taise the little craychurs you are. Come out at wance, or your mamma'll be afther you, an' maybe she'd put a crooked sthraw in your bed if she cotched you wandherin' about the horse department at this undecimal hour. Come on now," continued Bridget, stretching out her arm and catching hold of Miss Daisy, whom she led somewhat roughly out of the coach-house.

"'Pon my veracity!" said Patrick to himself, when the distressed female and Miss Smith had disappeared; "between being called a live dolly by one of my visitors, and a little craychur by the other, I feel so mighty small that I wouldn't be at all surprised to find myself buying a microscope to examine in the looking-glass the sprouts on my upper lip or the green in my bonnie blue eye."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Tiger turns up again—Club Law—Only Forty-five Feet in his Vamps—The Distressed Female has a Fit—Champions highly enraged by Tiger's Patronage—The Old Road or the New?—A Funeral Trot—Uphill Work—The First Glimpse of the Diamond Beds—Inutility of Pure Carbon—The Champions' Desire for the Diamonds—A Dazzling Sight—The Valley lay smiling before them—Sinbad Superseded—The Wooden-legged Ogre—How he lost his Leg—Poor Old Uncle Ned—Going the Pace—The Seven Senses knocked out of the Six Champions.

ABOUT a quarter to one o'clock the Tiger entered the coach-house, struck a match, and lit a candle which had a broken bottle for a candlestick.

"Are any of you awake up there?" he asked, standing under the hole in the ceiling.

"Yes," replied the watchful Patrick, who had been keeping himself awake by sucking the monumental slabs of Turkish delight which Daisy Smith had thrown up to him. "I'm on guard, Tim, my boy. Are you going to liberate us?"

"I must, whether I like it or not," grumbled the Tiger; "for Bridget says 'tis to be done, and there is no use in my arguing with *her*."

"I expect it is *argumentum baculinum* with Bridget," observed Patrick.

"If that's French for rolling-pin you're about right, governor," said the Tiger. "But now comes the question, How am I to get you all down safely? I'm only forty-five feet high."

"Stand on a stool or a chair, man," cried Patrick.

"Very well, sir," said Timothy, who was a man of no resources whatever.

So he fetched a broken-down chair from a corner of the coach-house while Patrick was arousing the other Champions; and in a few moments the six little men were standing safely on the ground, smelling very strongly of hay.

The Tiger was not long getting the mare out and harnessing her to the trap. Then Champion Pat showed him how the Giant had fastened them on to the front of the seat, and Tim did his best to imitate his master's proceedings for the safe keeping of the voyagers.

When the horse and trap had been brought down to the gate (with as little noise as possible) the Tiger said, "Now, gents, before jumping in I want the two bunches of four-leaved shamrock. Bridget told me you were to give us a bunch apiece. She would have come down to the gate herself, but she's trying to keep the missus off the scent by having several fits in the kitchen. There, don't you hear that?" he cried, as an ear-piercing shriek burst upon the tympanums of the six little men. "That's a fit, gents," laughed the Tiger.

"She's a marvel at them, and no mistake. But come, let us have the shamrock, whichever of you is to give it. You are all so precious small that I can hardly distinguish one of you from t'other."

"*Sacré bleu!*" murmured Denis indignantly.

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" hissed Anthony through his clenched false teeth.

"'Bacca!" exclaimed the Tiger. "Governor wouldn't allow it on no account, either for burning, eating, or snuffing."

"Oot awa', mon!" observed Andrew, with an impatient gesture.

"Cut it short, governor!" yawned David.

"Arrah, be aisy, boys!" said Patrick. "Isn't the poor creature doing his best for us? Here, my good boy, is the shamrock. Don't show it to any one except Bridget, because the virtue fades from the leaf if a heathen unbeliever looks crooked at it."

"All right, sir," said Tim, touching his cap and stowing the shamrock into the watch-pocket of his waistcoat. Then he jumped into the trap and gave the mare a flick of the whip.

The moon was now rising, and its ruddy light was beginning to reveal glimpses of the broad high road which seemed to stretch itself out like an elongated asphalted skating-rink. The giant trap bowled down the road at the rate of about a hundred and twenty miles an hour, and the six Champions were beginning to feel extremely uneasy at the rapidity of the pace.

"We're in no hurry, Tim," said Patrick. "Pull her in, like a good chap."

"All right, sir," said the Tiger, "but she's a bad 'un to check, and she's as a fresh as a daisy to-night. I've got her down to about seventy odd mile an hour now—a regular funeral trot. Now, gents, what would you think of taking the old road for it to-night?" he inquired. "It's mortal hilly, but it cuts a lot off the journey, and if you're not on for a fast trot, maybe the old road would suit us best."

"I didn't know there was a second road," said Patrick.

"Oh, yes, sir. Of course you're a stranger here; but when I was a youngster—Tiny Tim they used to call me then and I ain't growd much bigger since—there was only the old road. The master got the new road built. It's a much longer way round, but a shorter way home, as it's as flat as a pancake."

"The old road will suit us admirably, Tim," said Patrick. "The mare will *have* to walk up the hills; and for goodness' sake don't run her down a giant hill—I shudder at the bare idea."

"All right, sir," said the Tiger. "This is just where the old road branches off. You can see it if you stand upon the seat, I expect."

"I'll take your word for it, my dear fellow," said Patrick.

"We've turned in on the old road now, sir," observed the Tiger. "There's an awful stiff hill to start with."

"That's right," said Patrick, as he felt the pace slackening—so quickly that it caused the teeth in all the various Champions' little heads to rattle.

"Fine view from the top of the hill, gents!" the Tiger went on. "You can see the diamond beds a-glistening in the valley like one o'clock."

"The diamond beds!" exclaimed all the Champions eagerly.

"Yes, gents," said Tim. "It looks like a heap of coloured glass scattered over the ground. These 'ere diamonds shine at night like a lot of bloomin' glow-worms, they do. Regular take the sight out of your eyes of a dark night."

"Could you gather any of them for us?" asked Patrick.

"Course I could gather 'em," answered the Tiger; "but master says they ain't no use except for cutting panes of glass."

"But we'd all like some of them just for keepsakes," said the Champion of Ireland eagerly.

"As you like, gents," said the Tiger. "Here we are at the top of the hill—whoa, old girl," to the mare—"and such of you as likes can have a peep at the valley which lays smiling before you, while I hold in the mare."

All the Champions shouted their desire to behold the diamond beds, and one by one Tiger Tim lifted them in his horny hand and pointed out to them the deserted valley.

And certainly it was a sight never to be forgotten by any one who took an interest in diamonds.

The valley literally swarmed with the precious stones of all sorts and sizes. Diamonds as big as icebergs and as pellucid and sparkling as aerated water—diamonds the size of a lump of coal—diamonds no bigger than a pat of butter at a first-class restaurant—rose-coloured diamonds—white diamonds—yellow diamonds—blue diamonds—black diamonds—all were scattered in prodigal profusion at the bottom of the valley. The moon had now changed its colour from a deep orange to a pale yellow and its light flooded the sky but wasn't strong enough to create any impression on the flaming constellation of boiled and roast carbon in the valley. The diamonds flashed their many-coloured lights in every direction like a collection of various orders of light-houses, and occasionally a puff of wind caused a vapourish cloud of diamond dust to be wafted over the valley, producing a very startling and transformation-scene-like effect.

The Champions were speechless from a mingled feeling of awe, wonderment, delight, greed, and helplessness; and one by one they sank back into their seats, as they were deposited thereon by the diamond-callous Tiger, and groaned audibly.

David was the last of the Champions to whom Tim showed the marvellous sight, and he was the first to recover his voice, just before the Tiger was going to place him back on the seat.

"Oh, one more look, pray, Tim!" he cried. "This is positively stupendous. Licks old Sindbad's diggings

all to fits—in fact his valley was quite roc-occo compared with it,” he added smiling.

[The pun, it is pleasant to relate, was wholly lost upon the simple-minded Timothy.]

“There’s enough there to set up all the painters and glaziers in Christendom, not to talk of the duchesses and the millionaires’ and publicans’ wives. Oh, Tim!” he cried, enthusiastically, “have you no soul, that you can sit there silent, with that expressionless grin upon your features while this priceless valley is doing its level best in the kaleidoscopic direction? Oh, base and giant Tiger! have you no poetic soul about you?”

“Don’t you ask me no riddles,” replied Tim, crossly, for he thought David was poking fun at him. “Ain’t you got enough of the view yet, master Champion? It strikes a bit chilly standing here in the cool of the early morning.”

“Oh, my eye!” murmured David, “this is too utterly utter, Timothy, for words. But I say,” he added suddenly, as he shifted his gaze for a moment from the dazzling vision in the valley, “is that a castle I see there, over to the left?”

“Well, it ain’t a regular castle,” answered the Tiger. “It is our general provision store. It’s kept by the Wooden-legged Ogre.”

“The Wooden-legged Ogre?” exclaimed David.

“Yes,” said the Tiger. “A sort of poor relation of our governor. He set him up there after the accident to his leg.”

"How did the accident happen?" asked David.

"Well, you see, he was a sort of odd man at the castle and mostly occupied his time in looking after the kids—I mean Master William when he *was* a kid, and Miss Mary. He was awfully fond of the youngsters and used to play with them in the nursery like a bloomin' merry-andrew——"

"Something like *our* merry-Andy," interrupted David, with a sarcastic smile. "*He's* a gay sort of chap if you only know him, but you've got to know him first."

"I know nothing of your Andrew, governor," said the Tiger; "but if he has as much fun in him as our Ogre, he must be a prime favourite with the little folk."

"But what about his leg?" asked David. "It is *so* interesting to hear of a timber-toed Ogre."

"He went out, poor chap, one day with Miss Mary, for a ramble in the country. Master William has of course grown out of the nursery business long ago, and used to a kind of look down on poor old Uncle Ned, as they calls the old buffer. Anyhow, out he goes with Miss Mary. She's a wild young bit of a romp, though maybe I says it as shouldn't, and away she hooks it down a by-road from the uncle—I believe he *is* a sort of relation of the missus's, though she never seemed to like to own up to him. Fancy he got under a cloud somehow in his early days," explained the Tiger. "Anyhow, away the young beggar runs with Uncle Ned after her heels, and knowing there was a sort of a small precipice at the end of the lane the poor old buffer put

on some extra steam, shouting all the while as best he could to the youngster. Away she hooks it, of course, running all the harder out of pure cussedness, and at last she came to the edge of the precipice and over she went with a scream. The old man was nearly in a fit by this, and he worked up the steam so fast that he couldn't stop himself in time, and over he went too, slap-bang."

"Well," asked David, "what then?"

"The young 'un, as *will* happen with young 'uns, got caught by the frock in a furze-bush, but the poor old Uncle Ned got a bad fall and knocked one of his legs all to bits, so the governor made him a sort of general storekeeper for the family, and he spends most of his time boiling almond rock and toffy and sugar-sticks and things for Miss Mary, for he's a kind-hearted old sort and don't bear her any ill-will. But blest if the mare and myself ain't a-perishing of cold," exclaimed the Tiger with a convulsive shiver. "I'll set you down, young man, and we'll pursue our way down the hill."

"Keep her well in hand, an you love me," said David, as the Tiger put him back in his place.

"I'll do my best, governor," said Tim, wickedly giving the mare her head and tickling her flanks with the whip; and down the hill she flew at a rate which was past all human calculation. The very marrow was curdled in the bones of the six Champions, and it is needless to say they were frightened out of their seven senses.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Giant Tiger has the Laugh to himself—In the Diamond Valley—"All a-blowin', all a-growin'"—Diamond Stealing unlucky—Who's to hold the Mare?—Absence of Arboriculture or Milestone-planting—The Fierce Glare of the Diamonds objectionable—Collared!—Tap-tap-tap—The Clang of the Wooden Leg—Only a Giant Cripple—The Echo of a Boot—The Curse of Cromwell—A Torrent of Eloquence—Champion Pat over-reaches himself—A Gigantic Gallop—The Ogre run over—Smashing the Wooden Leg—Sound *versus* Sight—The Rage of the Giant—A Terrible Ride—The Burning of the Axle—"Wait till the Clouds roll by."

TIM enjoyed immensely the Champions' discomfiture, though he pretended not to observe it.

At the foot of the hill he pulled up the mare so suddenly that in addition to the gigantic shaking sustained by the collective fugitives, one of them, Anthony of Italy, had his false front teeth jerked half-way down his throat. However, aided by a sounding slap on the back from James of Spain, he managed to cough up the teeth ere they had sufficient time to choke him.

As soon as he could get his breath Patrick roundly abused the Tiger for his dastardly trick.

"S'help me, governor!" said Tim, "she took the bit in her teeth fair and square, and I might as well have tried to stop a bloomin' treadmill. But about these 'ere diamonds which are lying inside the hedge here?" jerking his thumb contemptuously in that direction.

"Yes! Yes!" chorused the Champions, "the diamonds, Timothy—the diamonds, by all means!"

"There they go glistenin' like a silk hat on a Sunday—all a-growin', all a-blowin'," murmured Tim, standing up in the trap and gazing at the diamond-beds contemplatively. "Seems a pity, gents, to disturb the harmony of the bloomin' landscape."

"How absurd you are!" said Patrick. "Why we only want a few handfuls of the stones."

"My eye, *don't* they shine to-night!" continued the Tiger, who had not heard Patrick's observations. "Just have a peep, Champions! Ain't it fine?"

The travellers were almost covered up with the leather band, but at the Tiger's invitation they all scrambled to their feet, and managed to get their heads over the top of the band. Much to their astonishment their eyes were positively pained by the glare of the diamonds.

"It's like coming out of a coal mine and trying to stare the sun out of countenance," remarked David of Wales rubbing his dazed eyes.

"They *do* blaze fine here!" said Tim; "and you see, gents, the moon has just gone behind a cloud, which

gives 'em a fair chance. Ain't it a pity, I ask you again, master Champions, to disturb this 'ere harmony?"

The fact was that Tim was fearfully superstitious, and Bridget had warned him specially against diamonds, declaring they were most unlucky, and, when abstracted, invariably led the abstractor into trouble.

"Don't talk nonsense, man!" cried Patrick. "Pluck us a few fistfuls of those gems so rich and rare, like a decent fellow!"

"Very well, very well," sighed the Tiger, who was accustomed to obeying orders at any cost or risk to himself. "But who's going to hold the mare, while I fetch the stones?"

This was a poser; and the hearts of the Champions went down into their boots, and their breasts were filled again, in the interval, with condensed feelings of wonderment, greed, and helplessness.

"Couldn't you fasten her to a milestone?" suggested Patrick.

"Ain't no milestones on the old road," replied the Tiger curtly.

"Well, a stump of a giant oak, or something?"

"Ain't a tree on this part of the old road," said the Tiger; "we don't get to no trees until we branches in on the new road again, a matter of about ten mile from here."

"Then push ahead to the spot where you break in on the new road again," said Patrick persuasively. "You'd be no time running back ten miles, Tim, old boy."

"As you like, gents," replied the Tiger. "The only thing I dread is coming across the governor. You see old Uncle Ned's shanty is very handy to where the road forks, and it's as like as not we'll come across the old gentleman or the young 'un if we delays anywhere hereabout, and I take it you're not over-anxious to meet the governor to-night," grinned Timothy.

The mere thought of such an encounter set the half-dozen Champions quaking. But the desire for the diamonds got the upper hand of every other sensation for the moment.

"Push along, Tim," said Patrick, as he and the other Champions again resumed their seats, "and we'll think the matter out. There is no use whatever in our attempting to hold the mare. If she bolted on us our hash would certainly be cooked.

"Besides," added Tim, "this 'ere neighbourhood would be an awful place to meet the old man. The diamonds shine as bright as day, and if he was anywhere hereabouts he or the young 'un would spot the trap in a minute, and then your fat would be in the fire, master Champions."

"For goodness' sake, don't keep the animal standing here, then," exclaimed Patrick. "You are quite right: I suppose the glare of those cursed rocks makes us conspicuous over the whole place hereabouts."

"That it do, gents," said Tim, delighted at the alarmed condition of his passengers. "You can see this spot from the Ogre's shanty as plain as if you were

standing alongside of it. The light from the diamond beds shows us up fine, it do."

"Hang the diamonds!" cried Patrick. "Sit down, Tim, and give the animal her head. I am growing fearfully nervous. Let her rip!"

"All right, gents," said Tim, sitting down and giving the animal a flick of the whip and an encouraging "get along, old gal."

In a few moments the trap was rattling down the road in fine style, when suddenly Tim pulled up short.

"My eye, gents!" he cried in undisguised alarm. "We're collared! fairly collared!"

"How? Where? What do you mean?" asked the terror-stricken Patrick, standing up on the seat.

"Do you hear anything?" asked the Tiger.

"Only the sound of something going tap—tap," answered the Champion. "I suppose it is a woodpecker, or some belated lover tap-tap-tapping at the garden gate."

"Woodpecker, indeed!" exclaimed the Tiger contemptuously. "It's old dot-and-carry-one, as I'm a living sinner."

"Who is he?" asked Patrick.

"Uncle Ned—the wooden-legged Ogre," answered Tim. "You can hear the clang of his wooden stump for miles around."

"What *shall* we do? what *shall* we do?" moaned the Champion of Ireland.

"Blest if I know, governor!" murmured Tim, scratching his cap.

"Ride him down, can't you?" suggested Patrick.

"Oh, come, master Champion!" said Tim, shaking his head. "That's too strong a bit, ain't it?—run down a helpless cripple!"

"But he is only a giant cripple," said Patrick.

"Can't see where that comes in, nohow," observed the Tiger. "Besides, like as not the governor is with him. I think I catch the echo of his seventy-five square feet of a boot."

"*He* could never stop us, Tim, my dear old fellow," said Patrick, "if you made a dash for it. That gigantic bunion of his wouldn't allow him even to walk after us at any sort of a pace, not to talk of running."

"'Tis him right enough," observed the Tiger putting one hand behind his ear. "There's only one crumb of comfort for us, and that is that master Bill ain't with the pair of 'em. If it weren't for the light of those bloomin' diamonds we could manage to hide ourselves somehow behind that clump of trees yonder, as the moon is black out, and likely to be so for a spell," said Tim gazing at the sky, which was gradually getting blotted out with dark, dense clouds.

"The curse of Cromwell light on those idiotic diamonds!" moaned Patrick.

"They always bring bad luck, they do," chimed in Timothy. "However, the boss 'll be round the bend in the road in a few minutes and then we'll be in full view, so I had best make up my mind what to do."

"There is but one thing for you to do," said Patrick

eagerly, "and that is to fly along like mad. No employer in his senses would keep you five minutes if he caught you taking out his trap surreptitiously at night trying to smuggle prisoners of his away. He would, if he has any sort of human nature in him, be letting you off only dirt cheap if he got you whipped at a cart-tail for a month of Sundays."

"Well, I like that!" murmured the Tiger bitterly. "You induces a poor chap to do you a turn on the strength of some special brand of shamrock warranted to keep him from all harm, and then you round on him and thinks he ought to be whipped at a cart-tail. My word, but 'tis a caution!" sighed the unfortunate Tiger.

"My dear fellow," said Patrick, soothingly, seeing he had over-reached himself in his anxiety to alarm poor Tim, "you quite misunderstand me. I do not for one moment mean to suggest that *I* personally, in my capacity as a Champion, consider you are deserving of anything but the highest praise and reward; but I am trying to convince you of the danger of adopting the policy of dilly-dally. When you're in a hole, Timothy, the only way is to get out of it at once. There's an old saying that the Tiger who hesitates is lost. Whip up the mare, old man, and Mr. Smith and the Ogre will naturally rush out of the way of the trap and probably never know what trap it is!"

"But their ain't another on the whole bloomin' island," interrupted Tiny Tim.

"Yes; that's awkward certainly," said Patrick; "but delays as I have already pointed out, are dangerous, and while we are flying down to the ferry at the rate of about two hundred miles an hour I'll think out some plan for getting you out of this scrape, old chap. Believe me you can't go far wrong with a special brand of four-leaved shamrock in your pocket. Now then," pointing to the Tiger's whip, "give her a flick of the telegraph pole."

Poor Tim was quite carried away by the torrent of eloquence which Patrick (metaphorically — for he couldn't reach so high) poured into his ear; and in a sort of devil-may-care way he abandoned himself to Champion Pat and laid the whip heavily across the shoulders of the mare.

The Champion of Ireland had just time enough to fall back in a heap amongst his terrified companions, as



the mare, enraged at the unusually heavy application of the lash, broke into a gallop and went clattering down the road at her top speed raising a perfect simoon of dust. Just at the bend of the road, which the Tiger had previously pointed out to Patrick, they met the Giant and the Ogre. It was a flash-of-lightning sort of meeting, but Mr. Smith guessed at once what the true state of affairs was. He had barely time to step aside and drag his poor relation with him. He was quick enough, fortunately, to save his own skin, but the wheels of the trap caught the wooden leg of the Ogre and smashed the artificial limb into pulp.

Beyond the accident to his leg it is pleasant to be able to relate that the Ogre sustained no further external injuries.

Mr. Smith, his voice choked with dust and rage, succeeded in delivering himself of one mighty roar:—

“Bring back that mare, you scoundrel! Bring back that mare!”

But the mare was out of sight actually before the sound of his voice reached the Tiger and the Champions—a proof, by the way, that sound travels quicker than sight—and Tim never checked her an inch until he was within a few miles of the landing stage.

It took him all his time then to pull the animal up and prevent the momentum of the trap from carrying them all slap into the river, but Tim, though a short bit of a giant, had a wonderful collection of biceps.

“Whoa, old girl!” said he, as the mare, panting and

steaming gigantically, stood at the top of the landing stage. "You never did the journey from Ogre Hall to the landing stage, with a trap behind you, like that before. S'help me! gents," he cried addressing the almost unconscious and wholly bewildered Champions, "that *was* something like a spin.—I wonder if the axle has taken fire?" he exclaimed, jumping to the ground. "I smell something a-burning."

And sure enough the axle was smouldering, the giant cart-grease not being powerful enough to overcome the extraordinary friction.

"This cooks *my* goose anyhow," groaned the Tiger. "I engage in a conspiracy against my employer; I abscond with his trap; I release his prisoners; I knock his mare all to pieces; I nearly bowls himself over, and I fairly runs his poor relation down; and now I burns his axle—and all for the love of a lass. Oh, Bridget! Bridget!" he cried, folding his arms and apostrophizing a portion of the moon, which was just then emerging from behind a cloud, "to what base uses may an unfortunate stable-boy be turned!"

"Wait till the clouds roll by, old chap!" panted Patrick, almost choked in the endeavour to catch his breath.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Intelligent Reader adroitly Flattered—The Truly Rural Landlord more Frightened than Hurt—A Kick at a Tangent—Pharisaical Conduct of the Donkey—The S.P.I.D.—George Suggests some more Invisible Kicking—A Legal Adviser—Renewal of Unuttered Vows of Allegiance—Brayhard's Reminiscences—Brayhard decides upon Life Assurance—An Asylum for Destitute Donkeys—Down the Truly Rural Lane—The Agony Columns—Another Giant on View—Our Hero and his Master again become Invisible—Unmagical Precautions—Tiny Tim Thirsty—Champion Pat *redivivus*—A Breach of the Mutiny Act—Patrick Grasps an Invisible Hoof—Extraordinary Disaster to Champion George and Brayhard.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to remind the extremely intelligent reader who has followed so far the course of this veracious narrative, that the night devoted to the escape of the six Champions and the incontinent flight of the giant Tiger, was the same night which saw the gallant George struggling on the roadway in fiercely intellectual combat with the Bæotian apothecary.

The truly rural landlord proved to be more frightened than damaged by the kick our hero had administered to him. The gentle animal not having had sufficient

elbow-room had been obliged to kick at a tangent, and his hoof had glanced off the burglarious breast of the old man, causing him merely a slight and evanescent shock, for he awoke in the morning suffering only from a rawness of the chest, the result of a powerful mustard blister applied by the apothecary.

Desiring to retain his popularity with the members of the L. S. D., the noble Champion of England decided not to prosecute their landlord for his abortive effort to pick the Donkey's pockets.

Brayhard was at first inclined to resent the lax conduct of his master.

"To be candid with you, Champion," said he, as the pair sat outside the porch of the alehouse after breakfast, "I do not desire to be mixed up with the condonation of a felony. If it were merely a case of house-breaking, I might perhaps pass the matter over in silence, but I object on principle to burglary, and consequently to this contemplated winking at burglars."

"My *dear* fellow," said George, "we can surely afford to be generous in this instance and throw justice to the winds. The old man failed in his nefarious attempt, and sustained injuries and indignities sufficient to atone for his failure. Be content. You had your revenge."

"I do not agree with you," contended the Donkey. "I did not get a fair kick at him. I am, as you are no doubt aware, keenly alive to the poetry of motion, and in all my life I never delivered myself of a more unpoetic

or inartistic kick than the one I abandoned myself to last night."

"It seems to me, Brayhard," said George, "that you are suffering from a sense of wounded vanity and that your high-falutin' about felony-condonation is utterly pharisaical. Besides it is extremely doubtful if any British jury could be got to convict a man of burglary who had merely broken into a portion of his own premises. Come, don't be an ass."

"I would wish you to understand, sir," said our hero, "that I have my feelings; and I consider your manner towards me this morning part and parcel of a deliberate and deep-laid plot to insult me. You are, it is true, my master; but though your ownership extends to my body, it cannot control my spirit. Should you attempt to coerce me, I shall instantly feel it my duty to lay the matter before the Society for the Prevention of Indignities to Donkeys, of which I am a respected though honorary life-member."

"Well, what *do* you want to do?" asked George. "I have no desire to be keeper of your conscience."

"I desire to swear informations against the inn-keeper," declared the honorary member of the S.P.I.D.

"I'll tell you what would be a much better," said George—"have an invisible kick at the old buffer later on, and indulge your artistic faculties then to their uttermost."

"A very good idea indeed," murmured Brayhard, "But stop! Might not the administration of this

suggested kick (which could be accomplished only with your assistance) be regarded as a form of conspiracy? or would you, in the event of my being tempted to turn Queen's evidence, come under the operation of the Employers' Liability Act?"

"'Pon honour!" exclaimed Champion George, "you positively alarm me with the extent of your legal knowledge and acumen. Have you ever been connected with the profession of the law?"

"Only in a perfunctory sort of way. I have never, of course, been actually called to the Bar, but I have been employed as consulting counsel to a newspaper which published what is called a Legal Column."

"What a wonderfully chequered career you *have* had, to be sure!" exclaimed the Champion of England.

"Yes, indeed," sighed the Donkey, shaking his head. "But it is all vanity. As the poet shrewdly observes: *Vanitas vanitatum et*—"

"Shut up, you idiot!" cried George, putting his fingers in his ears. "The mere memory, after last night, of the back of a Dictionary sets my teeth on edge."

"You are *rather* hard on me, noble Champion," expostulated Brayhard, who was in a very rebellious mood this morning—a condition of mind largely brought about by his temporary abstinence from revolutionary exercise. "The moment I attempt to display my knowledge of literary, legal, or linguistic matters, you fly at me, and metaphorically jump down my relaxed throat."

"Brayhard," said George sternly, "I fear we shall have

to dissolve partnership. I am myself—I say it with all humility—a man of very small literary attainments. I know little Latin and less Greek—and you must own that under such circumstances it is positively hateful to me to hear an ass crowing over me because, forsooth, he may be able to conjugate the verb ‘to make money’ in a foreign tongue, or decline à bribe in some hitherto unknown language.”

Brayhard laughed a superior little laugh, and



observed: “I can understand your feelings, noble Champion, and sympathize with you. As for parting company, I think we are admirably suited to each other, and my only desire that the bonds of friendship should grow more tight and”—here his voice became slightly tremulous—“as my untravelled heart fondly turns to the past twenty-one years, I cannot refrain from shedding this tear”—(here the affectionate animal shed the

tear)—“and offering you on the altar of friendship a renewal of my previously unuttered vows of allegiance.”

“Put it there, old man,” said George, stretching out his hand, his voice quivering with suppressed emotion.

The Donkey grasped the extended hand—awkwardly enough—with his forepaw, and for some moments silence reigned supreme. Then George, in order to lighten the spirits of his faithful companion broke the painful silence.

“I say, Brayhard,” he asked, “did you ever think of publishing your reminiscences in two octavo volumes?”

“I have *thought* of it,” said the Donkey; “but the time is not yet ripe, and my literary adviser tells me the market is rather overstocked at present in that direction.”

“I confess I don’t know much about these things,” said George, rising from his seat and yawning. “I feel quite drowsy this morning,” stretching out his arms and yawning again.

“Shouldn’t be surprised at that,” murmured Brayhard, “considering the unholy hour at which yourself and the apothecary retired this morning.”

George smiled at this, and stamped his seven-leagued sea boots on the ground to promote circulation.

“By the way,” inquired Brayhard, “how are your poor sore feet?”

“Rather better this morning,” answered the noble and gallant Champion. “What would you say to a little stroll in the country?”

"In search of nightmares?" inquired the Donkey, with a fatuous smile.

"For goodness' sake, don't try to be funny," said George, testily. "No, Brayhard; but I want to think out some project for a new campaign; and another thing," he added lowering his voice, "I don't want to be pestered, as I feel I shall be if we remain here, with that truly rural old buffer inside. His attempts at serio-comic conversation would positively undermine my constitution. Come along, my trusty friend!"

"I suppose you mean to walk?" inquired Brayhard.

"Indeed, I do not," replied George. "I mean to ride. It is more dignified; and besides we may require to do a seven-league jump or render ourselves invisible."

"Not the former, I sincerely hope," sighed the Donkey. "To be candid with you, if this seven-league jumping is to become a confirmed habit, I will take the earliest opportunity of subscribing to a weekly newspaper, thus insuring myself against accidents."

"For whose benefit?" asked George, getting into the saddle.

"For the benefit of a pet project of mine," answered Brayhard impressively. "I intend to found an Asylum for Destitute Educated Donkeys, if this champion business turns out well."

"My dear fellow," observed George, "there isn't a site in Europe big enough for the purpose. Why not take a hall somewhere and start an Exhibition of Defunct Asses?—'twould draw like a blister."

"Sir!" said Brayhard, indignantly. "You are descending into ribaldry."

"Gee-hup, old boy," cried George, administering a flick of Kalyb's wand which sent the insulted animal clattering down the main street of the village in an involuntary canter.

A short ride took the worthy pair beyond the village bounds and down a country lane. The scent of the new-mown hay acted like a tonic on the Donkey and he trotted along in fine style, braying occasionally but offering no intelligible remarks to his companion.

George had gradually fallen into a reverie. He was thoroughly disgusted with the result of his primary encounter with monsters. "No more giants for me," he reflected. "And yet in what other direction am I to distinguish myself? A stunted and ferocious dwarf now would afford good sport, but then that sort of creature exists only in the Dark Continent, and I don't feel up to burying myself just yet in a dismal swamp. Ah! a good idea! I will advertise in the 'Agony' columns of the leading daily papers."

And as this idea seized him, he lifted his head. "Good gracious!" he cried aloud in sudden alarm. "Why, here is *another* giant!"

"Where?" shrieked the terrified Donkey.

"Right in front of us, man," cried George, "about a mile or so off, I should judge."

"So it is," sighed Brayhard. "My heart is going

pit-pat with fright. Clap on your invisible hatband at once, good Champion, before he espies us !”

“Thanks awfully for the suggestion,” said George. “The sudden glimpse of the monster gave me such a shock that I had quite forgotten the invaluable band.”

“I hope he is not an undertaker,” observed Brayhard.

“I sincerely hope not,” echoed George, putting the band round his hat. “That’s the worst of this magical business. You never know but your adversary may be a widow, an undertaker, or an ass. We must only trust to luck.”

“Let us hide behind the hedge, at any rate,” suggested Brayhard. “Though we are probably invisible it is no harm to adopt unmagical precautions.”

And saying the words the ingenious Donkey made a spring, and with some difficulty crawled over the low flat hedge which bordered the country lane.

Meantime the Giant had been advancing towards our hero and his master.

“Unless my eyes deceive me very considerably,” whispered Brayhard peeping over the hedge, “this monstrous creature is no other than Mr. Smith’s Tiger.”

“Egad, you’re right,” exclaimed George, making a telescope of his hands ; “and as sure as eggs are eggs those diminutive creatures trailing after his heels are our trusty and well-beloved brothers-in-arms.”

"Easy! Easy!" whispered Brayhard. "Don't attempt to expose us just yet. It is probably all right, but we had better be cautious."

Some anxious moments for Brayhard and George went by ere the Tiger—for indeed it was he—reached the spot where they lay in ambush.

"Heigho!" cried Tim, as he halted almost abreast of the invisible pair and sat himself down on the hedge. "It's bloomin' hot, Master Champions, ain't it? Stand up on the hedge, and you'll be able to reach a bit closer to my ears if you've got anything to suggest."

The six Champions scrambled up on the hedge, and Patrick in reply to the Giant observed, "Yes, it is rather hot. Thus far," he added striking an attitude, "into the bowels of the land have we marched on without coming across a spot where we could quench our thirst. I almost 'gin to weary of the sun, and to sigh for a lodge in some vast wilderness where, on a day like this, one could retire into the shade and refresh oneself with a draught from the nearest oasis."

"This is most painful to me, Brayhard," observed George in a whisper, as the champion of Ireland started his oration. "If Master Pat—who with his companions has evidently not observed us—makes use of another quotation I'll certainly try if we can't scramble up the hedge together and try what effect upon his memory an invisible kick would have."

"Don't be rash," whispered the Donkey, who was ever and under all circumstances an admirer of intellect.



"Why not reveal ourselves to our friends? for there is now no doubt that old Smith's factotum is not in a hostile condition of mind or body."

"But perhaps the six Champions are contemplating some sort of a rebellion against my supreme authority," whispered George haughtily. "I do not approve of eavesdropping, but the temptation to listen to what they have got to say about me behind my back is, I confess, too much for me."

"Giant and fellow-champions," continued Patrick; "lend me your ears. I don't want to say anything evil of the boss behind his back, but as he *has* left us in the lurch, I propose we start a Champion Syndicate on the American principle, with power to add to our numbers."

"Talking's dry work, governor," gasped the Tiger; "my mouth is like a lime-kiln this minute. Let's make another start—in search of grub, I mean."

"Now, Brayhard, old figment," whispered George. "I hope you heard that—a Champion Syndicate, if you please!"

"Yes," said Brayhard gravely. "It is unquestionably a breach of the Mutiny Act, and punishable with death or worse punishment."

"Well, let us decide on the latter. Give Patrick an unmerciful and invisible kick. The hedge or bank is wide enough here to allow your portly person to advance along it. I will direct you most carefully, and when I pinch you, let fly at the gay mutineer."

“Very well, master; but be very careful of me. The top of the bank may be sufficiently wide to allow the wild thyme to grow upon it, and the nodding violet—”

“Oh, blow the nodding violet!” whispered George testily. “You will cause me to forget myself and speak out loudly and then our little game will be spoiled. Now then—to action!”

After a few unsuccessful attempts the Donkey managed to mount to the top of the hedge, and George cautiously backed him on to the Tiger and the six mutinous Champions who were now eagerly listening to Patrick’s honeyed words as he stood up on the hedge throwing his arms wildly around.

Just as Brayhard was nicely in position for invisible kicking purposes, Patrick made one wild sweep of his arm, and to his intense surprise his hand caught the uplifted but invisible hoof of the Donkey.

At first the astonished Champion was inclined to scream with terror and to fly, but it suddenly occurred to him that this extraordinary spiritualistic manifestation meant nothing more nor less than the proximity of the magical Donkey in a state of invisibility.

Brayhard was in a condition of abject terror when he felt his hoof clutched by the strong fingers of Champion Pat; and George had just time to turn round and discover that he was in an exceedingly uncomfortable and dangerous position, when the Champion of Ireland, with a dexterous twist of his wrist, tumbled our hero

and his rider right over the hedge and out on the roadway.

In the fall George's hat fell off—an accident which rendered him and Brayhard completely visible to the Tiger and the six semi-revolutionary Champions.

CHAPTER XIX.

An Essay in the Present Tense—Poetical Description of a Bœotian Evening—Jubilation of the L. S. D.—The Set of Seven Champions complete once more—Curative Properties of an Unintentional Poultice—The Tiger drinks Old Ale—Extraordinary Reappearance of the Professor—Brayhard moved to the Chair—"For he's a Jolly Good Fellow"—The Chairman's Speech—The Donkey is called upon for his Song—"In Childhood's Happy Days"—Brutal Interruption of the Professor—Bœotians in the Balance—Space: What is it?—The Professor's Debate—Deserving and Admirable Nature of the Sun—The Marvellous Hole—Boring and Bores—Criminal-Cremation—"Try Brayhard!"—Further Poetical Reminiscences of the Magical Donkey—Relationship relatively Ridiculed—Fierce Onslaught by the Professor against the Donkey—Brayhard blazing with Rage—The Tiger to the Rescue—A Wild Shriek for Liberty.

THE shades of night have descended upon Bœotia. There is silence in the streets, the moon has not yet risen, and the sky is clouded. The atmosphere is muggy. Altogether a very ordinary sort of evening.

Inside the truly rural alehouse all is merriment. The members of the L.S.D. now duly assembled in the committee, or debating, chamber, are in a state of mental intoxication owing to the absence of their oppressive President. They have heard he is better, the unin-

tentional poultice of hot gruel administered by the apothecary having produced a wondrously curative effect—but the members of the L.S.D. are jubilant, buoyed up with the hope that the recovery of the Professor must of necessity be tedious.

Another source of pleasure is the presence of our hero and the only complete set of Seven Champions in the known world. These Champions are in a state of *redintegratio amoris* (as the apothecary, who is present, learnedly puts it). They have patched up their little accidental quarrel in the truly rural lane, and Brayhard has solemnly declared he will in future regard the six extraneous Champions as most favoured nation allies, and will, on no consideration, attempt to bombard them invisibly with any of his various hoofs.

The Tiger is seated outside the window of the L.S.D.'s committee-room, there [being no apartment in Bœotia sufficiently lofty to accommodate him. He has slaked his thirst with many hogsheads of old ale, and is in a highly hilarious condition.

All goes merry as a muffin bell—but hark ! What is this ?

Only a face at the doorway—only a face—nothing more. But the appearance of the face sends a cold shiver through the marrow of the L.S.D.

It is Professor Hemlock !

George takes in the situation at a glance. Gazing in pity on the suddenly silenced and downcast faces of the members of the Bœotian Debating Society, he rises

and advancing towards their President with outstretched hand observes :

“ Professor Hemlock, I presume ? ”

“ At your service, sir,” says the Professor, bowing, and smiling a smile composed of equal parts of mockery and malignity.

“ I hope you will excuse me for having discovered you,” observes the Champion of England.

“ Don’t mention it, sir,” says the Professor, sarcastically.

A cry bursts from the sycophantic market-gardener :
“ Where’s your Mungo Parkses noo ? ”

The apothecary (unaware of the curative properties of his unintentional poultice) looks the picture of amazement. He had been rather puzzled about the indentation of Hemlock’s chest, and was hoping to clear up the doubts which unhinged him by a careful *post mortem*. Nodding to the President with a glance which means to convey, “ I-told-you-my-treatment-would-work-wonders,” he says :

“ Professor Hemlock and gentlemen : I move, now that we are all, from the highest to the lowest, duly assembled, that our worthy visitor, Brayhard, takes the cake—I should say, the chair.”

Professor Hemlock scowls a fearful scowl, but remains silent as the apothecary sinks into his seat.

“ I second that motion,” observes George ; “ and in doing so I hope it will not be out of place to say a few words about the frisky companion of my childhood and

the friendly fellow-traveller of my early championhood. A more intelligent ass I never hope to encounter; and though, gentlemen, we have our little differences of opinion, I must confess I regard old Brayhard as one of whose friendship the best of us might well be proud. I am not an orator [hear, hear!] or a word-painter [hear, hear!], but I can safely state, on the authority of a physician, who examined me with a view to Life Assurance, that my heart is in the right place. Some folk might be inclined to look down upon a donkey because he has four feet instead of two [No, No!]. I can lay my hand upon my breast and conscientiously declare that a stauncher comrade in sunshine or in rain I have never met. In the words of a great poet:

“ He is gentle, he is kind,
And you’ll never, never find
A better friend than old Bray-hard.”

Deafening cheers ring through the room as the Champion of England resumes his seat.

Then a cry rises to the rafters:

“Brayhard! Brayhard!”

The animal rises modestly from his seat, and is greeted with uproarious applause; and when the cheers have subsided the apothecary leads off with, “For he’s a jolly good fellow,”—a chorus which is taken up by every one except the Professor, who is in the sulks, and the Tiger, who is still sitting outside the window and who is temporarily overcome with old ale.

Brayhard is then led to the Chair.

Placing his forepaws on the table in front of the Presidential seat, he coughs nervously, and thus addresses the assembled Bœotians in a voice quivering with emotional pride :

“Gentlemen: unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, it behoves me on this memorable occasion to endeavour to express my deep gratitude both for the honour you have conferred upon me in moving me to the Chair, and for the kindly words which the noble Champion George has uttered in my behalf, and which you have so generously applauded. A deep sense of my own unworthiness [No, No!] suffuses my graminivorous system, from the tips of my ears to the end of my tail. It is, perhaps, the first time an ass has occupied this Chair [No! No!! No!!!], and my only hope is that I shall be able to preserve the dignity of that piece of furniture. The worthy Champion has alluded to the number of my feet. I can assure the noble and gallant Champion, and you, gentlemen, that no foot of mine shall ever be raised in anger against a defenceless woman.” (Tremendous cheering.)

Brayhard sinks back into his seat, and folds his forepaws across his chest. In a moment the sycophantic market-gardener is at his elbow, and whispers something into his long left ear.

The Donkey nods, and unfolding his arms, he seizes the hammer on the table in front of him, and observes in a dignified manner as he taps the table, “Gentle-

mèn, you may smoke." Again a cheer vibrates through the rafters. It is followed by shouts of "Song! song! The Chairman's song."

Brayhard blushes (invisibly), and rising from his seat bows several times.

"Gentlemen," he says, "I fear my voice is rather rough [No, no, no!] but I will do my best to give you a little trifle of my own composition." (Here the Professor scowls most fearfully.) "It is a reminiscence of bygone years, when I was attached to a travelling show, and though it is mere doggerel, it possesses a melancholy interest for me—but I trust the melancholy will not prove infectious." (Hear, hear!) Coughing vigorously to clear his throat, the Donkey sings:—

IN CHILDHOOD'S HAPPY DAYS.

I was chummy with a Camel,
Who was such a haughty mammal,
That I fairly got the hump.

I also knew a Kangaroo,
Who never limited his "loo,"
But thought he couldn't jump.

And a tearful Alligator,
Who frequented the theayter
(Which he called his *alma mater*),
And whose tail was mighty crump.

And then there was a Pelican—
A half-bred Chinese "Mellican"—
Who suffered from a mump.

And a nigh on royal Lion,
Who declared that in the lump
The poor were awful wicked.
(He had lost a leg at cricket,
And was always in a dump.)



He had married an old frump,
Who was most aristocratic.
(*She* was fostered in an attic,
And was partly off her chump.)

I confess I liked a Leopard—
He had once devoured a Shepherd
Who was hiding in a clump.

I also knew a Seal,
Who was caught abreast of Deal.
He was rather fond of drinking,
But he'd saved a ship from sinking
By working at the pump.

Then I pitied a poor Tabby—
Her intellect was flabby,
And her tail was but a stump.

Her old father was a Maux ;
He was full of merry pranks :
You should see him bow his thanks
As he gave his breast a thump !

Later on I met a Parrot,
Who consumed inferior claret—
An irregular old trump !

And an educated Monkey,
A contemptible young flunkey
With a reverential bump.

“Gentlemen !” cries old Hemlock, jumping suddenly to his feet, “I rise to a point of order. We cannot allow fun to be poked at our ancestor—the educated monkey—by a mere donkey. I positively protest against it. The worthy and intelligent Chairman” (here a fearful grin distorts his frame) “calls his own

verses doggerel : he will pardon me if I describe them as unadulterated ass-inanities." (Oh, oh, oh!)

The Professor sits down as suddenly as he had risen, and the Chairman feels as if the lash of a whip had been applied heavily across his flanks.

"Ha, ha!" reflects the Professor, as he glares at Brayhard. "The galled jade winces."

Then George rises to his feet, and in a quiet but impressive tone calls upon the company to support the Chair. "If," observes the noble and gallant Champion "Mr. Hemlock has any motion to make of a non-personal character he is at liberty to make it, but the dignity of the Chair must be upheld."

The Bœotians are trembling in the balance. They would like to heave old Hemlock out of the window, but they daren't. The Professor relieves them of necessity for action by again rising and addressing the insulted Brayhard in a most polite and deferential manner.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," he says, "I came here this evening intending to open a debate on the burning question of SPACE. The vacuum on my chest set me thinking through the watches of the night on this tremendous problem: SPACE: WHAT IS IT?"

"I need not remind you that closely allied with Space is the great, glorious, and unsquareable Cosmic Circle. Some of you, perhaps, are not familiar with the qualities of this Circle, and if you ask me, gentlemen, 'Is it worth anything? Could you make a "corner" in it?'

I must answer you, emphatically No. It pales into insignificance when we compare it with the boundless per-airie of Space—if I may use that explanatory expression.

“Space, gentlemen, is an infinite and inexhaustible vacuum, and is therefore abhorred by Nature. It is dotted here and there with planets, and other things, which so far as we are concerned, are of no commercial value whatever. There is a poem—not by my learned friend the Chairman,” he smiles, “beginning thus :—

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are !

“You might as well waste your intellect with that stupid conundrum : ‘What are the wild waves saying ?’

“Bits of the stars, in the shape of meteors, are seen falling helplessly about the sky now and again, but these star-splinters do not seem to be of the slightest assistance to Space. They go out like the snuff of a candle, proving they possess no real vitality. (Hear, hear.)

“And now, gentlemen,” continues the Professor, after a short fit of coughing, “we come to the Sun, and there I must confess we find something of tangible value. We get light from it and heat—not that these are unmixed blessings, for the former prevents Gas and Electric Lighting Companies from earning enor-

mous dividends, and the latter often produces sunstroke and freckles. But on the whole, Mr. Chairman, I will go so far as to say that the Sun is an admirable and a deserving institution. It rises and sets with the regularity of a machine or a well-behaved public school-boy. Still it *has* its weak points: unlike the leopard—I do not mean the shepherd-eating leopard for whom our worthy Chairman professed a sneaking regard,” grins the Professor parenthetically—“unlike the leopard, it changes its spots; and, unlike the moon, it is never visible during the night in these latitudes.

“This brings me, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, to the principal point in the present discussion, and I would request your special and concentrated attention for some brief moments.

“I know of but one way in which you could arrange to inspect the Sun in the dark, and that is by boring a large Hole right through the centre of the earth. When the Hole would be duly erected, according to my specifications, you would find the Sun right under you at a certain time of the night. You could gaze at it until you had your fill of the wonderful spectacle; or, if your inclination ran in that direction, you could drop pebbles through the Hole or heave half a brick at the distinguished luminary. I don’t know what effect the laws of gravitation would have upon the progress of the half brick, but there is little room for doubt that a well-directed shot would do some damage to the whole solar system.

“The boring of this tubular Hole would be a tedious operation, and could be effected only by the expenditure of a large sum of money. Great care would have to be taken to avoid coming into contact with the axis, or axle, on which the earth revolves—(hear, hear)—as if chips or splinters were knocked off there is a possibility of a cataclysm ensuing.

“I may mention, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, that the boring of this Hole is a matter which has long occupied my serious attention. As a commercial speculation it would, after securing the patent rights, be well worthy of the attention of investors, as it would be certain to pay large and increasing dividends. For sanatory purposes it would also be invaluable. We could shoot all our rubbish into it at a certain hour of the day or night. Then for political and social ameliorations what a boon it would be! We could drop our letters and post cards through it—an official receiver, or receiving sack, being arranged for at the Antipodes. We could erect a lift working on an endless chain, and lower passengers at local tramway fares, lifting them up at an increased tariff arranged on the *ad valorem* system. Correspondence—and even co-respondents,” smiles the Professor, who can never let the opportunity slip of making his little joke—“could come up in the lift, and a parcel post might be established on a fairly remunerative basis.

“Our rubbish, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, would be distributed over the whole of Space, and it could be

arranged that the bulk of it should fall directly into the Sun, which, astronomers assure us, is burning itself out for lack of fuel. The Hole could furthermore be utilized for capital punishment, and would be found more effective than the most expensive form of electricity. A man flung into the tubular vacuum would in a few moments be distributed over a good deal of Space ; or, if he preferred to be cremated, he could be sewn up in a sack like the Count of Monte Christo and hurled at midnight or thereabouts directly into the Sun. Thus the expenses of criminal-cremation—a social problem, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, which we shall have to face in the near future—would be reduced to a minimum.

“And now,” coughs the Professor, “we come back again—by a somewhat circuitous route, perhaps—to the great question of Space ; but as the night is advancing rapidly I shall with your permission adjourn this debate until some other occasion, of which due notice will be given to you.”

The Professor, coughing a good deal, here resumes his seat amidst uproarious applause.

“Where’s your Robbie Stephenson’s noo?” shrieks the sycophantic market-gardener.

The Seven Champions feel they are quite out in the cold. They can see that the eloquence of old Hemlock, combined with his fertility of invention and resources, have again completely enthralled the assembled Bœotians, who with bated breath and awe-struck countenances are

now discussing the merits of the marvellous Hole suggested by their President.

The apothecary, who is now seated alongside George, looks the pictorial embodiment of misery, hate, and envy.

"Can't you cap that ridiculous project of old Hemlock's?" he asks George in a whisper. "Spin the people a yarn of some of your own champion adventures. You can lie like one o'clock to them, and I warrant they'll swallow every word of it."

"Sir," says George, "you evidently mistake your man. I am incapable of spinning yarns. Try Brayhard!"

"Conceited ass!" says the apothecary to himself. Then he rises from his seat (the babble of Bæotian voices almost deafening him) and advances to the Chairman, who is occupied in smoking a cigarette.

"Brayhard," he whispers, "let the L.S.D. have some further personal recollections, and if possible," he adds, knowing that it means gall and wormwood for the poetic Hemlock, "let your recollections be in rhyme as well as in reason."

Brayhard is greatly flattered at the request of the apothecary, and in a moment, an invisible flush suffusing his hirsute cheeks, he is rapping his hammer on the table.

Silence is quickly restored, and the Chairman rises to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he says, "as Chairman of this night's entertainment I feel it my duty to thank our worthy

Professor Hemlock for the beautiful and instructive debate he has given us. I can only say that I hope I shall never fall into the pit the Professor would dig for one and all of us. (Laughter.) I have been asked to inflict upon you some further reminiscences of my early youth—(hear hear),—and I will have much pleasure in reciting another little ass-inanity of my own composition.” (Here Brayhard directs a somewhat scornful glance at old Hemlock, who sits in apparent unconsciousness, twirling his thumbs.) “It is a little problem in relationship somewhat more involved perhaps than the well-known theorem about Dick’s Father and Tom’s Son.”

Brayhard clears his throat, and in a piping falsetto delivers himself of the following poem :—

In Boston, Mass.,
There dwelt an Ass,
An uncle of my mother ;
And late in life
He took a wife,
And then he took—Another.
He had a son
(An only one)
Who married Aunt Johanner ;
They joined the stage,
Became the rage
(*She* played the grand pianner).
Fame turned *her* head,
One night she fled,
Eloping with a cousin,
Who played bassoons
And stole the spoons
(I think there were a dozen).

The husband sued ;
 Divorce accrued ;
 Her cousin wed wi' Auntie.

(' Where's your Bobbie Burns noo ? ' interrupts the market-gardener defiantly.)

I bet you all,
 Both large and small,
 A bottle of Chianti
 You cannot tell
 If *I* am—well,
 My niece, my son, my father ;
 I think I can't
 Be mine own aunt—
 The problem's stiff—eh ? *Rather !*

Brayhard, amidst deafening applause, sinks back into his seat, and almost immediately the Professor opens his eyes, unlocks his twirled thumbs, and rises to his feet.

A sudden hush falls upon the assembly as old Hemlock, a sarcastic smile upon his lips, observes :—

" I have carefully followed our worthy Chairman in his poetic flight, and I cannot see what he has personally got to do with the vagaries of his indirect relatives. He does not tell us who or what his father and mother were, nor when and where his family tree was planted ; whether his ancestors were people engaged in trade, or whether they belonged to those upper circles who have for centuries inherited the divine right of asses. It



seems to me that the moral code employed by our worthy Chairman's uncle's son was, to say the least, a somewhat loose and irregular code ; for, not content with marrying his Aunt Johanna, he joined the stage ; and I take it, gentlemen, that the form of theatrical business adopted by him and his wife was ' music-hally ' to the last degree. Indeed, it would not surprise me to learn there was an element of the circus in it—bassoons being eminently instruments of torture affected by the ring—I mean, gentlemen, the sawdust ring, and not the more respectable prize ring patronized so extensively by our nobility and gentry. (Hear, hear.) Our worthy Chairman seems to think he may possibly be his own father or his own son. Never was a more absurd speculation ventilated on the floor of this house, nor such flimsy evidence brought to bear upon a theory so essentially preposterous——”

“Cut it short, governor !” interrupts David, Champion of Wales, in a loud and melancholy tone.

“Order ! Order ! Chair !” cry many of the members of the L.S.D.

Brayhard is almost speechless from anger. He rises slowly and waves his forepaws up and down to restore order and his own equilibrium. Then pointing sternly at the Professor he roars—

“I move the instant expulsion of Jacob Hemlock, commonly known in Bœotia as Professor Hemlock ; and I order that he be taken to the place from whence he came in custody of my noble and gallant friend, Tiger

Tim.—Are you there, Tim?" roars the Donkey with renewed vigour.

"Ay! ay!" answers the gigantic voice of the Tiger, who has been aroused from slumber by the uproar in the debating chamber.

"Crawl in through the window on your hands and knees," roars Brayhard, lashing his tail furiously, "and chuck out old Hemlock, who has grossly insulted me and mine."

"Ay! ay!" again thunders the Tiger, and in a few moments the Professor (who is rendered speechless and stupid by the daring of the Donkey) sees in the open window the shock head of the giant Ostler.

With a wild shriek of terror he rushes from the room.

CHAPTER XX.

Champion George offers to raise Champion Patrick from the Ranks—Private Meeting of the Champions—The Tiger and the Donkey—The Tiger Perpendicularly Disposed of—George addresses his Companions—Giant Annexation—A Dash for the Diamonds proposed—George loses his Temper and Whacks our Hero—Noble Sentiments of Brayhard—Patrick Perorates—How are Profits to be Divided?—Founder's Shares—Paltry Quibble of Patrick—Journalistic Disposal of the Firstfruits of the Giant Gooseberries—Brayhard appointed Official Referee—The Champion Heptarchy—A Catchy Advertisement—Unlimited Condition of the Champions—Patrick objects to being identified with Seed Potatoes—Natural Deaths to be Rewarded with Legs of Mutton—Patrick is promised a Sea-serpent—Difficulties about the Tiger Commissariat—The Professor in the Gap—Advantages of the Riot Act—The Bullet misses Brayhard and Shatters the Tiger's Button—The Professor invisibly trampled upon—Brayhard assumes a Nasal Twang.

PATRICK had explained to George prior to the assembling of the meeting presided over by the Donkey, how he had managed to effect the unexpected junction with him. Of course Master Pat pretended that the somersaulting of Brayhard was a pure accident.

The Champion of Ireland then told the Champion of England of the marvellous escape from the Giant's hay-

loft, of the diamond beds, of the exciting ride to the landing stage. He next proceeded to relate how the heart-broken Tiger had decided that as his boats—or to put it unmetaphorically—as the axle of the tax-cart had been burned, he would cross the Rubicon. Tim had unharnessed the mare (to whom he was greatly attached) and after having given way to a sort of “Arab’s Farewell to his Steed” he had unmoored the Giant’s boat and rowed the Champions “o’er the ferry.”

The encounter in the truly rural lane-way had been purely coincidental, as the travellers had no idea what neighbourhood they were in, and were simply wandering about in search of something to devour.

George was much pleased with Patrick’s ingenuity in effecting his escape from giant-land, and promised to purchase for him at the earliest opportunity a stripe for the sleeve of his jacket and a real leather medal. At the same time it must be confessed that George was thinking more of the diamond beds than of the hair-breadth ’scapes of his gallant confederates.

The morning after the adjourned debate of the L.S.D. George privately summoned a meeting of the Champions, the Donkey, and the Tiger. The meeting was, at the suggestion of Champion Pat, held in a large field on the outskirts of the village in order that eavesdroppers might be guarded against, and also in order that Tiny Tim might be able to attend, if occasion should require, in an upright posture.

When the procession reached the centre of the field

George, who was mounted on Brayhard (richly caparisoned in a turkey-red curtain purchased from a Bœotian dealer in old clo'), cried "Halt!" and politely suggested to the Tiger—who seemed peculiarly unsteady on his legs—that it would be advantageous to the Champions if he would recline at full length in the lush grass. He explained to Timothy that his burly figure might act as a beacon and induce the advent of reporters and other strangers whose presence would prove irksome. Tim readily consented to the perpendicular disposal of his person, and being in a gigantically drowsy condition he had no sooner lain down than he was fast asleep.

"Now, Champions," said George, standing up in the stirrups, "it must be pretty evident to each and every one of you that we are at present simply wasting our youth and our budding intellect. If a truthful record of our actions up to this—which, may the fates forbid!—should ever be given to the world we should certainly become a laughing stock for posterity. Our adventure in Giant Island has resulted in a complete fiasco. We have killed nothing nor nobody, and our marvellous deliverance from giant bondage and giant badinage—I must say I detest that young Smith—is simply a piece of good luck. It is true we have annexed a small specimen of a giant—" here a loud snore from the slumbering Tiger startled George and he quickly and loudly corrected himself. "I mean to say, we have taken one under our temporary protection, a worthy and intelligent inhabitant of Smith Island." The echo of the snore had now died

away, and gazing at the Tiger again and finding he was really sound asleep, the Champion of England continued : " This specimen, gentlemen, is, I need scarcely remind you, becoming a perfect white elephant. It is a blessing he is a vegetarian ; but even so, it would tax the entire resources of the Prisons Board to provide him with a proper quantity of skilly. Now, Champions, we have bought our giant experience dearly—at the cost of much heart-burning and many indignities—and I consider it would be folly to abandon the pursuit of giant game because of one miserable failure ; I think that with a little caution, a good deal of daring, and an extraordinary amount of strategy, we might succeed in retrieving our lost honour ; and it is with the intention of consulting you and laying my plans before you that I have summoned you to this meeting. In short, Champions, my idea is that we should make a bold dash for the diamond beds."

The six Champions who formed George's audience groaned bitterly at the suggestion of revisiting Giant Island.

" Can't be done, sir," said Patrick curtly.

" But it *must*, sir," thundered George. " What do *you* say, Brayhard ?" he added, stooping forward and addressing our hero.

" I consider the proposal a piece of rash and unmitigated tomfoolery," answered the Donkey.

" Do you, indeed ?" fumed George, biting his nether lip savagely. " Perhaps you consider this a little bit of

tomfoolery also," coming down whack, whack, with the wand on our hero's hide.

The Donkey hee-hawed most piteously and pirouetted about the field on his hind legs (causing the six Champions to fly in all directions), until George's rage had exhausted itself—but he allowed no tear to fall from his liquid eyes.

"You are a cowardly biped," he groaned when George had ceased to whack him. "You ask me for an independent opinion, and because I give you one which does not coincide with your own you thrash me mercilessly. Fie, fie, sir!" continued the magical Donkey. "I would rather see myself stretched a corpse on the highway—even at the risk of having a sentimentalist weep over me—than give an opinion which would be in conflict with the dictates of my conscience."

Champion George felt somewhat crestfallen at the Donkey's observations, but he was not in a penitent mood, and pretended to ignore our hero's rhetoric. He backed the animal into the centre of the ring re-formed by the other Champions, and frowning severely at them he said :

"Look here, you fellows, you will have to understand that when I command you have simply got to obey. Discipline is nature's first law, and this confest, some—like me—are and must be greater than the rest—like you."

"That is the very reason," interrupted Champion Pat, "that we say it can't be done. You can look at

things from under an invisible hatband, you can open locks whoever knocks, your sword can cut everything from a corn to a jugular—”

“Except,” interjected Brayhard, “in the case of a poor relation.”

“I accept the honourable quadruped’s amendment,” said Patrick ; “and I repeat, sir, you can cut—”

“Oh, cut it short, governor !” groaned David.

“Order ! order !” brayed the Donkey.

“If the noble and gallant Champion of Wales will permit me,” observed Patrick tartly, “I will bring to a close quickly my impromptu peroration.”

“Eh, mon !” exclaimed Andrew of Scotland, “dinna fash yoursel’ !”

“Fellow Champions,” said Patrick, “I appeal to your sense of fair play to allow me to speak for you. I am endeavouring to put your case tersely and concisely. As I was about to say, you, noble George, can retreat from an adversary at the rate of an electric spark, and not one of us is furnished in any way with those magical appliances which enable you to regard with equanimity the most dangerous and deadly expeditions.”

“There is always something in what you say, Patrick,” observed the Champion of England ; “and I readily own that for Champions you are not too well furnished. I have not the slightest desire or intention of allowing you to run any unnecessary risks, and one object of mine in calling you here to-day is to lay before you a scheme for our future and mutual benefit in our

capacities as the real and original Champions. Each of you possesses a sword. I will furnish you out of my private purse with a dark lantern, a box of silent matches, a pair of rejected army boots, an air pistol, and an ass. With these possessions a man who cannot distinguish himself is unworthy of the name of Champion."

"We are much obliged for your generous offer," said Patrick; "but might we ask how profits are to be apportioned?"

"I have considered that matter fully," answered the Champion of England, "and I think you will admit the following plan to be an equitable one. The net profits will be divided into twelve equal parts, and each one of us will receive one equal part or share in our individual capacity as a Champion."

"Very fair indeed, I think," said Patrick appealing to the various other Champions, who nodded acquiescently.

"But what is to become of the remaining five parts?" asked Champion Andrew suddenly.

"I will tell you," said George. "One part is to go to me as a founder's share in the business. Is not that fair?"

The six Champions gazed at each other interrogatively, and after a brief consideration of the matter they consented to the founder's share.

"Then," said George, "I shall require one share as managing director. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

A dark frown settled on the brows of the six Champions at this, and it was some time before they could

make up their minds to submit to the managing directorship clause.

"Then," said George, "I shall require another equal part or share as promoter of the business."

"Oh, come, come, come, noble brother!" exclaimed Patrick. "This is laying it on too thick, you know."

"Sir!" said George with much asperity. "Allow me to remark that I consider your impertinent interruption most offensive and ungracious. I lift you absolutely out of the *débris* of a cellar. I give you your first start in Champion life. I offer to purchase for you out of my own pocket a regular Champion outfit, and to mount you on a steed. And when I put before you a scheme which will render you rich beyond the dreams of avarice, you raise objections to trifling matters of detail. I appeal to you, gentlemen of France, Spain, Scotland—"

"Oh, cut it short, governor," whined David of Wales imploringly.

"I appeal to you, gentlemen all," went on the Champion of England,— "could anything be more honourable, reasonable, indeed more generous, than my suggestions as to the division of profits?"

"Just one moment!" exclaimed Patrick. "You seem to ignore the fact that it was we who personally discovered and inspected the diamond beds, not you, noble brother."

"A paltry and unworthy quibble, sir!" said George indignantly. "It was under my leadership you visited

Giant Island, and whatever you discovered there the firstfruits of it belong to me."

"I suppose you'll be claiming the firstfruits of the giant gooseberry bushes next," observed Patrick sarcastically. (Pat had already furnished an account of them to a syndicate of newspapers.)

"I decline to bandy words with you, sir," said George in his most magnificent manner.

"All right, boss!" sighed the Champion of Ireland. "I suppose it's the old business of might against right. We've got the brains and you've got the money, though indeed, you didn't earn the coin in a manner that would recommend itself to the honest working man."

"You are an ignorant fellow, sir," sneered George. "I will not stoop to argue with you. I presume, Champions, my proposals so far are agreeable to you?"

"Oh, have it your own way," said Champion Andrew shaking his head solemnly.

"Very well, gentlemen," said George. "Now there are two more equal parts or shares to be apportioned. One of these is to be allotted to 'our mutual friend,' Brayhard, in recognition of his distinguished services in working up the Champion business. I also propose to appoint the animal as our legal adviser and referee—a dual post which he is well fitted to adorn—and in payment of his services I intend to allot the remaining share in the net profits to him, his heirs, executors, and assigns.—How's that, umpire?" asked George playfully addressing the newly-appointed legal adviser.

Our hero hee-hawed his thanks briefly but energetically.

The six Champions felt they were in too utterly impecunious a position to raise any further objections to their chief's mode of allotment.

"Now, gentlemen," continued the gallant George of England, "I have for purposes of advertisement, etcetera, decided to call our little venture

" 'THE CHAMPION HEPTARCHY.'"

"It is a good, high-sounding title, and more likely to attract and command attention than 'The Seven Champions,' 'The Champion Band,' 'The Champion Ring,' 'The Champion Heptamerede,' and other titles which have occurred to me. I propose to insert in special positions in the leading financial newspapers of the day and week the following advertisement."

Here the gallant advertiser took a sheet of paper from the breast-pocket of his overcoat and read aloud :

"THE CHAMPION HEPTARCHY.

THE GREAT CHAMPION HEPTARCHY.

THE CHAMPION HEPTARCHY (Unlimited).

THIS GLORIOUS INSTITUTION is entirely Unlimited in its aim and objects, and has no connection with any other Heptarchy in the trade.

CHAMPIONS FOR HIRE (without option of purchase).

TAKE NOTICE: GEORGE, CHAMPION OF ENGLAND, begs to inform the Princes, Nobles, and Gentry of Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Oceania, and the Ionian Islands, that he has now on hand a
PRIME AND WELL-SELECTED STOCK OF CHAMPIONS."

"I object entirely to that phraseology," interrupted Patrick, his face ablaze with excited indignation. "Why, it makes us all perfectly ridiculous! One would think we were a cargo of seed potatoes—'Well-selected stock of Champions,' *inagh!*"

"Perhaps you are right," said George suavely, eager not to wound too deeply the susceptibilities of his comrades. "We can alter the phraseology when we get a proof. I will continue the reading of the advertisement, gentlemen.

"EACH CHAMPION is securely mounted on an expensively-caparisoned steed, and is prepared to undertake any sort or kind of Champion-commission from the Dethroning of a Tyrant to the Upsetting of an Apple-cart.

SPECIAL ATTENTION is given to the DISTRESSED FEMALE and the BURIED TREASURE branches of the

business; and, when it may be deemed necessary, each Champion can be furnished with a Certificate of Conduct from the Home for 'Reclaimed Dogs,' and a Diver's Suit.

GIANTS, Ogres, Tax-Collectors, Egotists, Organ-Grinders, Brigands, Bores, Sea-Serpents, Lion-Comiques, Satyrs, Blackmailers, German Bands, Money-Lenders, and all sorts and conditions of Monsters exterminated on the most reasonable terms possible.

A SPECIMEN GIANT of enormous proportions, has recently been captured (at unlimited expense) by THE CHAMPION HEPTARCHY, and can be viewed at the offices of THE HEPTARCHY on payment of a nominal fee.

N.B.—THE CHAMPION OF ENGLAND is prepared personally to undertake (prior to his farewell tour of the Globe) a few select engagements for the exploding of Fiery Dragons and kindred Mythological Animals.

For Terms and further particulars apply to GEORGE, CHAMPION OF ENGLAND, Post-office, Bæotia.
(To be left until called for)."

"That," said George, placing the paper in the pocket of his coat, "is the advertisement as it stands; but I also intend, in order to popularise the scheme, to offer a leg of mutton, or its value in cash, to any one (except

a public prosecutor) who, having died a *natural* death, is found with a copy of the prospectus on his body."

"Why not offer the corpse the loan of a hearse on the hire system?" asked Patrick with a wicked smile.

"I have no doubt," sneered George, "that our worthy brother, the Champion of Ireland, often mistakes flippancy for wit.—But a truce to this unseemly levity! What is your opinion, gentlemen, of my scheme?"

"It seems a pretty fair sort of prospectus," said Champion Philip, stroking his moustache, and looking particularly fierce. "I trust you will give me a commission in the Distressed Female line at an early date."

"I hope you do not expect me to accept an engagement for the upsetting of an apple-cart," observed Champion James, who was eaten up with inordinate pride.

"That is a mere advertising figure of speech," smiled George. "You always profess in advertisements to do things which you cannot possibly accomplish."

"I have but one objection," said Champion Anthony, "and that is to the proposed extermination of the organ-grinder. It is quite possible that amongst that gallant band there may exist some fellow-countrymen of my own."

"I will see that the clause is struck out," said George, "as I have no wish to cause unnecessary offence to any of my brothers-in-arms. Anything else, gentlemen?"

"I don't see why you should keep the dragons and serpents—the whole cream of the Champion business, in fact—to yourself," complained Patrick.

"Very well, sir," said George, severely. "You shall have the earliest sea-serpent on our list to your own cheek. Anything else to-day?"

"Well, I must confess I like my own title best, 'The Champion Syndicate,'" said Patrick. "'Heptarchy' has an obsolete air about it, totally out of keeping with air-guns and rejected army bluchers."

"Ah! but does it not sound highly respectable?" sighed the Champion of England. "However, I think it is one of the points we should leave to our official referee. What sayest thou, Brayhard?"

"I incline to 'Syndicate.' The word 'Heptarchy' is rather archaic," replied the Donkey.

"Very well, gentlemen. We shall change all that, as our gallant brother Denis would say, and resolve ourselves into a 'Syndicate.' Now, in order to start with a good working capital we shall have to raise money somehow, and I think you will agree with me that if we could only procure a few handfuls of these giant diamonds as samples, we could 'scoop in'—I believe that is the correct expression—a vast amount of public money for the further exploration and future annexation of the beds. So let us make up our minds to make an early dash on the alleged diamonds."

"But how is it to be done?" asked Andrew. "We told you how we fared the night before last, and so far as we can learn the beds are overlooked by the Ogre, with whom civilized warfare is out of the question."

"Leave that, gentlemen, to me," said George mysteriously. "I have a plan for settling, single-handed, the hash of the wooden-legged monster. And now we must arouse the giant Tiger and ascertain from him accurately the habits and customs of the enemy and the lie of the country generally."

"If you are counting on the active co-operation of Tiny Tim," said Patrick, "I fear you are reckoning without your host, for he's made up his mind never to return to his giant home."

"Oh, that's absurd, my dear fellow," exclaimed George. "He must return. We can't keep him in food or drink here, and I don't think it likely that the parish authorities are going to erect a special casual ward for him."

"Perhaps he would take a situation as a lighthouse-keeper," suggested Andrew. "We could get him fixed up in Long Hope."

"It would never do," said George. "He could not be kept in provisions. We must make his condition plain to him, and insist either on his returning to his native country or on his joining a menagerie. Come, Brayhard, give him a few vigorous kicks to rouse him from slumber."

The Champions were now about to start in a solid body to assist at the awakening of the sleeping Tiger when suddenly the figure of a man appeared in a gap in the hedge, about fifty yards distant.

It was Professor Hemlock!

"Stand!" shouted the Professor, levelling a rifle apparently at Champion George.

"What ails you, man?" shouted the Champion of England, pale with surprise and terror. "Put down that firearm, or perhaps it might go off."

"I never hesitate to shoot," grinned the Professor. "As you are well aware, I am Chief Magistrate of Bœotia, and on my way here I have carefully read the Riot Act three times, so that I am legally entitled to shoot in cold blood any one who lives and breathes within the borough bounds. However, it is my intention to be merciful to-day and to spare all men, but the Ass I will now proceed to insert a bullet in."

"Quick, noble Champion, quick! On with the hat-band!" cried Brayhard.

George immediately did as the Donkey suggested, and the six Champions on foot rushed helter-skelter across the field.

Exactly at the moment that George became invisible the Tiger, who had been lying almost in front of Brayhard, started from sleep. The rifle-bullet went "piff" as he rose to his feet, and struck one of the large horn buttons which adorned Timothy's jacket, completely shattering the button and causing Tiny Tim a momentary pain in his stomach.

To say that the Professor was astonished at the vision of the Tiger (whose recumbent figure had not previously caught his eye) rising (as it seemed to the Professor) like a giant mushroom from the meadow would

be saying very little indeed. The rifle dropped from his hands and he stood rooted in the gap, quaking with terror.

George, finding that neither himself nor his steed had been injured by the rifle-bullet, determined on instant revenge. He manœuvred Brayhard round the yawning Tiger until he got fairly in front of the Professor, and then giving the Donkey a smart flick of the wand he rode full tilt at old Hemlock.

With a triumphantly audible shout he invisibly rode the Professor down, and as Brayhard felt himself (like the wind) "passing heedlessly over" the prostrate body of the magistrate he let fly one of his hind legs and inflicted a severe but merited scalp wound on the unlucky man.

"Guess he won't try another Riot Act against me in a hurry," snorted Brayhard, through his nose, as George pulled him up at the far end of the next field. "And don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER XXI.

The Champions re-cross the Ferry—The Tiger Humbugged—Indignation of the Giant—A Temporary Wooden Leg ordered for the Ogre—The Tiger's Headache disappears—The Old Road—The Tiger is Sarcastic—Four Champions disposed of—Anthony and Denis left in the Lurch—George's Plot—This way to Ogre Hall—Fancy Portrait of Uncle Ned—Supposed Frying of the Little Children—A Dangerous Climb—A Creeper trailed through the Tail of a Coat—George invisibly enters the Ogre's Den—Harpsichord Leg a Bad Fit—Soliloquy of the Ogre—Artistic Pursuits of Uncle Ned—The Ogre contemplates going out on Strike—George is Puzzled—He tries to cut off the Ogre's Natural Leg—Invulnerability of Poor Relations—George cuts off a portion of a Wooden Leg—Hazardous Nature of Aerial Jumping—The Donkey Brays—George tries a Seven-league Flight through the Ogre's Window.

EARLY the same eventful evening our hero and the seven Champions, accompanied by the giant Ostler, might have been observed travelling down the truly rural lane which led to Tom Smith's ferry.

George had easily succeeded in bamboozling the simple Tiger. He told him he was about to pay a return visit—a mere matter of ceremony—to Mr. Smith for the purpose of explaining—as a matter of etiquette—the strange cause of his backward flight. “Incidentally,”

observed George, "I shall assure your governor that though appearances may have been against you there was nothing in your conduct to deserve the slightest reprimand."

Tiny Tim was greatly relieved in his mind, and when the procession started for the ferry he strode out in front at a funeral pace of about twenty miles an hour, and whenever he found himself out of sight of the Champions he rested on the top of some mossy bank until Brayhard and his seven companions caught him up.

George ambled gently along on the Donkey's back, and the other six Champions did their utmost to keep up with him at a good sling trot.

When the procession reached the ferry they found the Giant's boat moored safely where Tim had made her fast.

Mr. Smith of course had discovered that his craft had disappeared, and coupling this with the broken axle and the return of his mare he made up his mind, correctly enough, that for some reason his stable factotum had been induced to convey the six Champions across the ferry.

Tim's unfaithfulness and his diabolical recklessness in running down the Ogre puzzled poor Tom Smith greatly. He could only make up his mind that contact of any kind with men was ruinous to a giant mind not properly and securely balanced.

He was extremely wroth at the accident to his poor relation's leg, at the destruction of the axle of his tax-

cart, and at the purloining of his ferry boat. "However," said he to his son William, "it is fortunate that all the disasters can be easily remedied."

The young giant wanted to build a raft at once and go in search of the missing ferry boat, but his father convinced him that the proper thing to do first was to see to Uncle Ned's leg, and to take his measure for a new stump. "In the meantime, William," said the parent giant, "fix him up a temporary limb—the leg of our old harpsichord will suit admirably—as there is no knowing now what may happen, and accidents will occur in the most undecimally regulated families."

It was dusk when the Champion party were landed on Giant Island. Tiny Tim stepped jauntily ashore and seemed quite a different sort of person from what he had been in Bœotia. He had complained a good deal of headache during the day, and Champion George had politely assured him it was owing merely to the heat of the sun, though in his heart he felt the origin of the ache might have been traced to the various hogsheads of old ale with which the Tiger had slaked his thirst.

"Now, gents," he cried, "it would take me a matter of about an hour and a half's solid hard walking to cover all by myself the ground from here to home, sweet home. I can, I think, manage to carry the six of you that's on foot, but I'll have to do a bit of a rest now and then if I do, and it may run to a matter of two hours to

cover the ground. What say you, Master George ? Will you follow us on the animal ? ”

“ Yes ; that will suit me nicely,” replied George. “ And might I ask you to take the old road for it ? ”

“ Well, I’d rather not, if you’ll excuse me, gents,” said the Tiger, respectfully touching his cap ; “ for you see that would bring us pretty close to old Uncle Ned, and if he came across me after bowling him over, goodness knows what would become of me.”

“ But he is probably very ill and confined to bed,” said George. “ You can’t run down an old man without shaking his system a little, even if you have broken no bones, which is impossible. You heard a crunch, didn’t you ? ”

“ Oh, most plain, governor,” groaned the Tiger—“ but don’t you, please, remind me of it, for it makes the sound ring in my ears again.”

“ Now, look here, Tim,” said George, “ don’t be so dreadfully nervous. You couldn’t help what was done, as I shall explain to Mr. Smith, and if we do meet the Ogre I can completely exonerate you. Be a man ! ”

“ Can’t you see, governor ! ” grinned Tim. “ I’m only an unfortunate giant, and you can’t make a man of me nohow.”

“ I was not aware that a vein of sarcasm ran through your composition,” sneered George. “ All I can say,” he added, “ is that if you decline to travel by the old road I must only leave you to settle your quarrel yourself with Mr. Smith.”

"Oh, here, I say," whined the Tiger, "don't you go and leave a cove in the lurch, Master Champion. I'd never have the face to meet the governor again without matters being explained to him in a proper light, for I'm no scholard, and couldn't tell him anything but the plain honest truth."

"Well, are you prepared to travel by the old road?" asked George.

"If I must, I must," groaned Tim.

"Stop at the diamond beds on your way, and let us have a few rocks as samples," said George in his haughtiest manner.

"Eh?" murmured the Tiger. "The diamond beds again! I'd 'a' thought you six Champions had got enough of that 'ere bloomin' locality."

"These are my instructions, Timothy," observed George waving his hand. "Start the procession!"

"Well, here goes!" cried the Tiger, stooping and picking up Patrick and David, whom he placed in the lower pockets of his coat. Then he picked up Andrew and James and stowed them in his exterior breast-pockets. "Now, gents," he said, addressing Denis and Anthony, "where am I a-goin' to fix you two?"

"Stick them into your waistcoat pockets, old boy, and button your coat up over them," suggested George.

"Never do," replied Timothy. "Coat is too tight, and would smother them clean."

"Please do not attempt any experiments with me, sir," said Denis snappishly.

"I'll tell you what you might try," observed Brayhard, who had been remarkably silent and subdued since his arrival at the landing stage. "Stick them between the first and second, and third and fourth buttons of your coat with their heads out."

"I ain't got no fourth button, worse luck!" said the Tiger. "Something struck it this morning in the field, and shivered it to atoms."

"This is most annoying," fumed George. "Can nothing be done? At all events, there is no reason why you, Denis, should not be conveyed between the first and second button of Timothy's coat."

"And supposing he forgets me for a moment and suddenly opens his second button?" expostulated Denis with all the vehemence he could command.

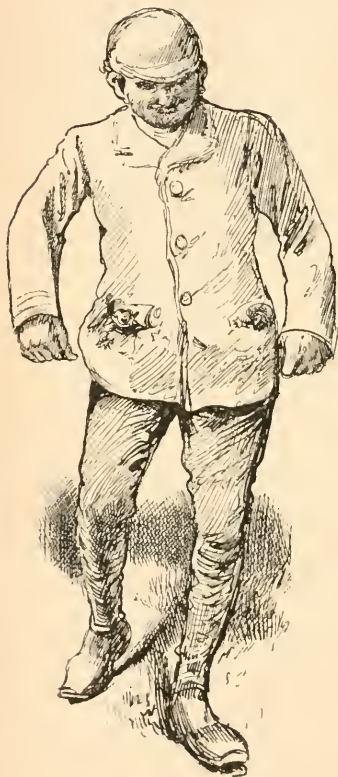
"You two had better remain at the landing stage until we return," cried George snappishly. "There is no use in trying to please French and Italians."

"We shall have much pleasure in obeying the gallant Champion's commands," said Anthony and Denis almost in the same breath. And then both of them doffed their caps and bowed most deferentially.

"That will do," sneered George in a very ill-tempered manner. "Come!" addressing the Tiger, and giving Brayhard a flick. "Start the procession! And don't linger on the road for me, please."

As the Tiger was homeward-bound he started out at the rate of about fifty-five miles an hour, and had soon left our hero and his rider completely in the rear.

Brayhard at first tried a gallop, but he couldn't get up his speed even to a paltry seven miles an hour.




It was now dark, and as George was in no particular hurry he gradually reduced Brayhard to a gentle trot, and finally to a walking pace. His secret instructions earlier in the evening to the other Champions were to go forward with the Tiger, to enter the diamond beds with him, to ask him to root up some immense diamond rocks, and while the simple-minded creature was labouring to uproot the rocks, the Champions were to fill their pockets with small stones, escape unobserved from the Diamond Valley, and run back to the landing stage as quickly as they

possibly could. George had no doubt that sheer hunger would compel the Tiger to push forward to Castle Smith, and by the time the Giant returned home in the

morning, the entire Syndicate with its legal adviser would be well under way in the ferry boat.

Such was the Champion of England's project; but he had another scheme in his mind which was nothing less than to carry home with him as a trophy the head or (if he couldn't manage the head) the wooden leg of the Ogre.

Brayhard advanced along gently for about two hours, and then George drew him up at the entrance of a narrow lane which was at right angles to the main road. There was a notice-board at the entrance, and striking a match George read :

“ *This way to Ogre Hall.*”

N.B.—Trespassers will be Prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the Law.”

“Poor old Smith !” smiled George. “That notice to trespassers is no doubt a formula he picked up in our country. Now, Brayhard, we shall start the invisibility dodge, and I'll soon see if, with the aid of my trusty sword, I can't make an example of this wooden-legged individual.” And saying the words he fastened the hat-band round his hat.

“What is an Ogre, by the way ?” asked Brayhard. “I confess I am not well up in Monster-lore.”

“According to the best authorities,” answered George, “an Ogre is a hideous creature of the giant species, who feeds chiefly on little children.”

"Ugh, the brute!" cried Brayhard, a shiver convulsing his whole carcase. "I hope you will allow me to have a few special supplementary kicks at him before you annihilate him."

"Certainly," said George. "But pray be cautious. Suppose your hoof gets entangled in his beard—he is sure to be an extravagantly long-bearded fellow—we might have a repetition of the accident which occurred when you tried the kick at Champion Pat in the lane-way."

"I know, I know," murmured Brayhard. "My bones still ache from that fall."

"How fortunate it was that you fell under me!" observed George.

"Fortunate for *you*, no doubt," said Brayhard; "but it would have been much pleasanter for *me* if you had gone first and broken *my* fall."

"Gee-hup!" cried George, giving the Donkey a flick, for he didn't want to get up an argument just then with his worthy steed.

In about half an hour from the time they had entered the side road George found himself at the door of Ogre Hall. It was a plain wooden building of the bathing machine style of architecture, only there were no wheels to Uncle Ned's residence. There was a ruddy light shining through a window, the sill of which stood about forty feet from the ground.

"No doubt he's frying the little kiddies in there now," observed Brayhard, indicating the window with his left

ear—which, by the way, he always used as a kind of index finger.

“I suppose so,” said George. “I wonder how could we manage to get a peep inside before we try the doors with the key of keyholes?”

“Don’t know, I’m sure,” murmured the Donkey. “Even if there was a ladder lying about it would be no use to us, as there would be nearly twenty feet of space between each rung.”

“That’s the worst of this absurd giant world,” said George savagely.

“I think you can manage it,” murmured Brayhard. “That trellis-work there runs up near the side of the window, and it ought to be easy to mount it.”

“Not a bad idea at all!” said George. “Good again, Brayhard! Don’t hee-haw, for goodness’ sake,” he cried the next moment as he felt the Donkey swelling visibly from pride.

In a moment George had dismounted, and reminding Brayhard that he—the Donkey—was now plainly visible, he started to climb the trellis work, which formed a porch—about a hundred feet in height—over the hall door.

When George had with some difficulty reached that point of the trellis work which was level with the bottom of the window he found that he was separated from the window itself by about twenty feet of wooden walls. (It was not easy to judge distances accurately in the darkness.) However he knew he could trust to the

creeper that trailed itself round the window as the young shoots were considerably over an inch in circumference at their slenderest parts. It seemed to George the creeper was trailed round the window through the tails of dress-coats, the legs of trousers, and the sleeves of ulsters, all of which were nailed up against the house with kitchen pokers—but of course it was only giant listing and giant nails he was gazing at.

With some difficulty and no little risk he succeeded in clambering over to the deep broad window-sill. As he mounted the sill he saw that a portion of the window was open from the bottom so he had no difficulty in taking his observations.

The room into which he was peering was of course a room on the ground floor, and the Ogre used it as a general living room, a kitchen, and a laboratory. The monster was now seated at a blazing fire stirring with a long iron spoon something that simmered in a cauldron.

George looked about him for some means of effecting an entrance into the room. There was a drop of over forty feet from the bottom of the window to the floor, and of course the Champion of England could not manage to fall so far without the risk of breaking every bone in his body. He stepped inside the window to see if he could discover anything that might aid his descent, and to his great delight he observed at one corner of the window two stout hawsers which he presumed were the cords of the window blind. The ruddy light from the

fire showed him however that these cords were broken and almost touched the floor. George calculated they would land him within about ten feet of the floor (ten feet of course was nothing to an Ogre) and he could fix some stout string of his own to the end of the Ogre's hawsers and so slip easily to the ground.

Then he began to reflect upon his retreat, in case of a rout, and he was almost in despair on this point until he suddenly thought of his seven-leagued boots. The blood began to course through his veins as he remembered the magical locomotives, and it was with a light heart he caught one of the frayed window hawsers and wound his legs round it. When he got to the end of the giant cord he took a ball of ordinary stout string from his pocket and fastened the loose end of it to the window-blind hawser. Then he took the ball itself in his hands and boldly dropped to the floor.

The ball paid out too freely and landed him with a heavy thud on the carpet of the Ogre's room. The noise—slight as it was to an Ogre—caused old Uncle Ned to cease stirring his cauldron, and to turn his head towards the window.

“Bother the bats!” he cried in a thin squeaky voice. “I must close the window.” Groaning a good deal—for the accident on the roadway caused him a good deal of pain in his hips and shoulders—he gradually rose to his feet; and it is no disparagement to George to confess that the gallant Champion felt very small indeed as he gazed at Uncle Ned.

The Ogre had grown very fat since his appointment as store keeper to Mr. Smith, and he stood at least seventy feet in his boot (for of course he had only one), so there is no exaggeration in describing him as a perfect mountain of flesh. He had a shock head of grey hair and a magnificent flowing grey beard which reached almost to his knees.

The temporary harpsichord-leg, it was evident, was a very bad fit. It shook and rattled a good deal in its socket, and the Ogre was not quite sure where it would meet the ground again once he lifted it.

The noise of the stump as it came thump, thump, on the wooden floor was positively deafening and caused poor Brayhard outside to feel very uneasy about his master.

George was eager to see for himself what was in the pot on the fire, but of course he could not reach it in any safe way, and naturally he was afraid of tumbling into it by accident, and thus converting himself into an invisible plate of broth for the hungry Ogre.

Uncle Ned was not long closing the window, and then he returned to the fire again with his thump—thump—thump—wobble—wobble—creech. The leg would go all right for about three steps, then it would wobble, and then take the floor transversely and make a hideous noise (such as bad little boys sometimes make by placing the palms of their hands on the balluster and running swiftly down stairs).

"Eh, but it's a hard life! a hard life!" he squeaked, taking up the spoon and beginning again to stir the pot. (His lonely career had engendered a habit of talking aloud to himself.) "To sit here all day storekeeping and pot-boiling while brother-in-law Thomas and family live in royal state at the castle with nothing to trouble them but the undecimal system. Nothing to trouble them. Deary me, deary me!" he sighed, "'tis a poor life, a poor life! If it weren't for the amount of scientific knowledge which I have to display in the making of my toffey and the nice sense of proportion which is brought into play in setting the almonds artistically in the rock, blowed if I wouldn't go out on strike against brother-in-law Thomas!"

"I wonder is the creature mad?" George asked himself. The six Champions had not told him anything about the toffey-making proclivities of the Ogre, and of course the invisible Champion could not make out what Uncle Ned meant by setting almonds in the rock. "I suppose it's some dodge about the diamond rocks," he mused. "Perhaps old Smith wants to put them on the market and make a splash with them, but what good could almonds do? Now if it were setting flies in amber I could understand it—but where's the use of bothering one's brains with speculations? These giants are very kittle-cattle, and simple as they seem on the surface there may be a lot of financial duplicity fermenting underneath."

The Ogre was silent for a few moments and then

with another deep sigh he began to renew his conversation with himself in the extraordinarily squeaky voice which distinguished him.

"It's hard lines, very hard lines," quoth Uncle Ned, "but then what's a poor relation got to do except to put up with the jibes and jeers, and worse than all, the patronage of his relatives? Faugh!"

"Poor relation!" reflected George. "I wonder if my magical sword is powerless against other people's poor relations as well as against my own? If so it considerably reduces the market value of the weapon. Let's see what effect a cut of it will have against master Ogre."

He drew the sword of Damocles, invisibly of course, from its scabbard, and then with his eye measured the highest point of the Ogre which he could expect to reach. "The lower end of his calf is about as much as I can do, I think," he observed, gripping his sword with both hands and making a wild sweep in the air with it. Then putting all his strength into the blow he brought the edge of the weapon crash against the lower part of Uncle Ned's calf.

He expected to see the monster's foot sent flying across the room, but to his extreme disgust he found he produced no effect whatever except a short squeak from the Ogre as he rubbed the spot where the sword had just struck it, crying, "Rheumatics got down pretty low, worse luck! Oh, deary me, deary me!"

George was in a quandary now. Uncle Ned was then

a *bond fide* poor relation, and therefore completely invulnerable.

Then a bright thought struck him: "His wooden leg



is no part of himself, and therefore if I can cut a few feet off it and carry the section home as a trophy, my mission will be accomplished. Two or three feet of the balk is as much as I could carry."

So he drew back the sword again and made a wild and invisible sweep of it in the air, bringing it down on the temporary wooden leg and cutting off about two feet and a half of it as clean as if a steam-saw or an amputating surgeon had been operating on the limb.

The Ogre felt that something had gone wrong, and attempted to rise suddenly to his feet. In doing so he fell on the floor with a horrible crash, for of course poor old Uncle Ned was not aware that one leg had suddenly grown so much shorter than the other.

Moaning and groaning most fearfully he managed to get himself into a sitting posture on the floor, and then he saw the cause of his accident.

"Bet my life," he squeaked, "this is a trick of that young whipper-snapper William! Gives me a present of a leg with a bit of it sawed through—just like the young beggar! See what it is to be a poor relation! They work off all their practical jokes on you, regardless of your grey hairs, your rheumatics, and your feelings."

With another fit of groaning he managed to catch hold of a chair and lift himself up, and then he hopped over to his seat again on his own leg, picking up the excised portion of the wooden leg from the floor and placing it on the table.

"Blowed if I don't have the laugh against young William!" he squeaked. "I'll just glue the sawed-off bit on again and pretend nothing has happened. Eh! eh! eh!" he laughed—"that will be splendid. Nothing

upsets a youngster more than to find his practical joke has *not* come off—Eh ! eh ! eh !”

George was now more puzzled than ever. He had been so intent on watching the gyrations of the Ogre that he had never thought of picking up the bit of the leg as it lay on the floor, and of course it was utterly out of his reach on the table, and in a few moments it would again be part and parcel of the Monster. He also began to reflect that if he were to use the seven-league boots for an aërial flight that he would have to be impelled slap through a portion of the Ogre's shanty, and perhaps his brains might be dashed out in the hazardous experiment.

The Ogre had now taken the portion of the leg off the table and was examining it critically as he sat at the fire.

Suddenly Uncle Ned and the Champion of England were electrified by a most terrific peal of brays.

The Ogre let the two feet and a half of his leg fall to the ground, and then he hopped over to the window as quickly as he could, threw up the sash, and shouted : “Who goes there ?”

“Grenadier,” shouted Brayhard involuntarily.

George now saw his opportunity had come. He picked up the section of the leg from the floor and without waiting to hear Uncle Ned's next challenge he three times wished himself seven leagues away.

Immediately he was shot out of the open window.

CHAPTER XXII.

George Lands in a Strange Spot—He Marvels Exceedingly—
Poetical Description of Grass, &c.—The Sun at Midnight—
A Beautiful Garden heaves in Sight—George Grows Poetic—
Strong-smelling Flowers—Absence of Noise—No Bees nor
Birds about—Silence Irksome—The Vanishing Rose—The
Champion Terror-Stricken—A Sound!—Music Described—
In an Inner Garden—The Musical Fountain in Full Play—
George Reflects on Invisibility—He Removes his Hatband
—Kicked by a Shade!—Another Seven-Leagued Jump—
Bœotia Again!

IN the passage of a second George once more was safely landed.

Then he rubbed his eyes in wonder, for he knew that when he started from the Ogre's wooden shanty it was dark and near eleven. Now his eyes were dazed with sunlight, and his spirits were ecstatic, as if wine of some rare vintage through his veins was swiftly coursing. And his step was light and springy—scarcely touched the velvet surface of the turf he glided over.

“Do I dream? Is this a vision? Or is all I see about me just as real as Bœotia and the truly rural alehouse? Why, this meadow is prismatic! I can

hardly tell its colour: it is green and it is yellow; it is violet and purple as the passing breezes move it like the swell of some great ocean which the clouds have ceased to shadow. And the sky is opalescent. Can my foolish eyes deceive me, or is all a trick of fancy? No! I breathe, I speak, I marvel. All my senses are awake, and this is life devoid of sorrows. No remembrances disturb me. I can laugh at all my follies. . . . There's a glorious sun above me, but its light is soft and mellow: it but floods the vault of opal. . . . Why, I've fairly grown poetic! What would Brayhard think about me if he heard me gush, I wonder? Worthy beast! if he were with me we could flout the great Professor; *for I've seen the sun at midnight*, though I haven't bored a tunnel of preposterous proportions. Still, I can't expect old Hemlock to accept my *ipse dixit*. (Shades of yesternight preserve us!)

"Here's the entrance to a garden. What a wondrous hedge surrounds it! Like the rainbow are its colours, and it sparkles like the diamonds in a duchess's tiara. And the perfume wafted towards me is mysteriously laden with intoxicating pleasures.

"Let me live within this garden while the life blood fills my body!"

Full of poetry to bursting, George is now inside the garden. It is all ablaze with colour, yet no glare offends the vision; and the odours of the roses, of the violets and lilies drowse his senses till at length he sinks exhausted in an arbour.

"What is this?" he faintly murmurs. "Have I wandered into Eden? I am faint with strange emotions in this silent land of summer. . . . Not a sound disturbs the stillness—not a living thing is present. . . Yes, the silence is stupendous. E'en the breeze which gently fans me makes no moan. No bees are humming. Do they sleep—is this their midnight? Not an insect in the garden—not a bird, nor beast, nor reptile that my eye can yet discover. . . Are the glowing blossoms real? I will wander forth and pluck one."

Then he glided forth, and kneeling near a rose-bush gazed in wonder at the beauty and the colour of each perfect flower. The perfume thrilled his senses, as if wine infused with some narcotic potion exorcised his baser nature, till his spirit swelled triumphant.

Stretching forth his nerveless fingers he caressed the potent petals.

Then a cry of pain escaped him as the rose beneath his fingers crumbled, vanished, leaving nothing.

Up he sprang, and then a shiver shook his frame as if an ague had possessed him.

On he wandered through the garden, filled with terror, filled with vague and awful terror, till a sound—the first—arrested his attention and enthralled him.

Liquid music! like the murmur of enchanted waters rippling; like the faint melodious echo of a lute of clearest crystal through which fairy lips had whispered;

like the swelling sounds of triumph from a grand celestial organ !

All his terror now had vanished.

On he wandered, heeding nothing save this all-absorbing music ; and at length his footsteps led him—how, he knew not—to an inner garden.

Here he paused and sighing sank, with ecstasy exhausted, on the sward, and eyes uplifting he beheld a dazzling fountain made of rubies set in diamonds, and in emeralds embroidered, jetting wreaths of filmy water which refracted all the colours of a sunset in the autumn.

George upraised himself and marvelled ; then approached the fairy fountain.

All the while the mystic music louder grew but more melodious.

“Why—unless my ears deceive me—’tis the *fountain* makes the music !”

So it was. The jets of water plashed on hollowed slabs of crystal ; and each note as now he listened was as full and clear and mellow as the tone of bells of silver which the hand of Time hath softened.

Lost in ecstasy and wonder he drew nearer to the fountain.

“Here alone am I,” he murmured, “in this land of awe-full pleasures.”

Then he paused as he remembered his invisible condition.

“Can it be that in this Eden there are Shades perambulating ? Is my shadowy existence quite the

rule, or the exception? If I doff the magic hat-gear will some stranger's eyes espy me? . . . Let me try."

And as he pondered he removed old Kalyb's hat-band.

In a moment a commotion seemed to rage around the fountain. Noises strange and weird vibrated round about him, and he trembled like an aspen. . . .

Then an impact shook his frame, and quite convulsed him, as if foot of Shade had kicked him.

"Can it be," he groaned, "that Brayhard has invisibly attacked me? No; he cannot travel singly on a seven-leagued excursion. He is still on Giant Island—still conversing with the Ogre. But he may not be the only ass who boasts a magic master. . . . What, another!—and *another*!"

Now the garden seemed to crumble, and the sun grew dim, and darkened.

"Here's a horrible dilemma! How I wish I'd stuck to Brayhard!"

Then he suddenly bethought him that his feet were still surrounded by the leather locomotives; so he wished that he should travel seven leagues from out the garden, which was rapidly dissolving.

When the wish was duly spoken George again was whirling onward, and his feet next found a landing just outside the licensed entrance to the truly rural alehouse!

And the sky was dark and humid, and the hour was close on midnight.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Verbatim Report of the Conversation between Brayhard and the
Wooden-legged Ogre.

“WHO goes there?”

“Grenadier.”

“What do you want?”

“A pint of beer.”

“Where’s your money?”

“In my pocket.”

“Where’s your pocket?”

“I forgot it.”

“Get along, you foolish blockhead!”

“Stop! Do not close the window. I fear I have
been speaking in my sleep.”

“Who or what are you?”

“An Ass.”

“I did not know that Asses could speak.”

“Yes. In my country every Ass is really an Orator,
but the majority is mercifully spell-bound.”

“Is every Orator in your country an Ass?”



"Not *every* one. Now you have asked me a good many questions. May I cross-examine *you*?"

"Certainly."

"You are an Ogre, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No."

"Has the error of your ways ever been properly demonstrated to you by any institution?"

"No."

"Have no attempts ever been made to rescue you from your perilous position?"

"None."

"Have you never been interviewed?"

"Never. What is it?"

"Dear me! You are quite behind the age. Tell me, did you ever by any chance eat an Orator?"

"Never."

"What, never?"

"Well, hardly ever. . . . Of course I mean I never did such a thing in my life—but I could not help making the orthodox reply; I am rather given that way."

"To orthodoxy?"

"Yes."

"It is pleasant to find a congenial spirit. Did you ever, ever, ever catch a whale by the tail?"

"I don't know that one. Try me again."

"Is your rest broken at night by the squalling of a sick child?"

"Is the answer something about not washing clothes?"

"Come, come, sir. Remember you are under cross-examination."

"Well, ask me another. I fear I have got things mixed."

"Do you prefer your, your—" (for the life of him he could not manage to say "little children," he was so deeply affected)—"food raw, roast, fried, grilled, stewed, or boiled?"

"Boiled—in their jackets."

"Don't you find the jackets hard to digest?"

"I don't eat them. I remove them after boiling."

"Any seasoning?"

"Salt, pepper, and a lump of butter."

"Have you any special—if I may use the expression—brand?"

"Yes. Champions."

(Brayhard trembled fearfully.)

"And can you put away many of those juvenile Champions at a meal?"

"Juveniles? I prefer them full grown. I can get through about a hundred, I should say."

"A century of Champions! Terrible, terrible! ('Where's your Heptarchy noo?' as the Vice-President of the L.S.D. would say.) What an appetite you must have!"

"Nonsense, man! Come in and have a feed yourself. I have some cold Champions in the pantry which I can quickly warm up, if the gentlemen in the pot are not cooked to your liking."

"You make my flesh creep."

"It is the night air. Take my advice and come indoors."

"You are sure you never make mince-meat of an Orator?"

"Haw! haw! haw! What an absurd question! Never! I give you my word of honour. Ho! ho! he! What a wag you are! Ha! ha! ha! Make mince-meat of an Orator! Do you take me for a sausage machine? Perhaps you think I'd stew one in his own juice? He! he! he!"

"Your hilarity is rather of a piercing character; but I will trust you on your word of honour. How am I to get in?"

"The hall door will open automatically if you drop a fifty-six pound weight into the letter-box. There are always some half hundred weights lying about the

grounds ; a nephew of mine plays 'pitch and toss' with them here occasionally."

"How high is your letter-box?"

"About twenty-five feet from the ground, I should think."

"Couldn't reach it."

"Why? What is your altitude?"

"Well, I can touch about seven feet with my hind legs at a pinch."

"You are extremely small for an Ass—your kick would be only just about high enough to reach the lower part of my shin."

"May I on some future occasion kick your shin?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you have some black blood in your veins?"

"Probably. There is a legend that I am the only living representative of the real and original Uncle Ned."

"Who had no hair on the top of his head in the place where the wool ought to grow?"

"Exactly."

"But about the door?"

"I will proceed to open it from the inside."

* * * * *

"Enter, and welcome!"

"Thanks."

"Dear me! how *very* small you are! My poor back aches from stooping to look at you."

"Don't stoop. Your leg seems awkward."

"Seems, animal ! nay, it is. But I shall soon discover the missing link."

"Is he to be found in these parts ?"

"He ! Who ?"

"The missing link."

"It is not a he."

"A she ?"

"You make me smile. I refer to the missing portion of my leg, which I intend to glue on, presently."

"Ah !"

"Will you walk into my parlour ?"

"Said the spider to the fly.—You are fond of nursery rhymes, I see."

"Yet I forget that one—my memory fails me a good deal, latterly, I find. Pray be seated."

"If you have no objection, I will recline on the hearth-rug."

"As you please. Excuse me just a moment, while I endeavour to gum on the end of my leg."

"Don't mention it. By the way, how big is the log—I mean the leg—at the small end ?"

"Diameter about a foot and a half, I should say. But, gracious me ! What has become of the piece ?"

"Perhaps it has been accidentally rolled into a corner of the room. Logs have a way of getting rolled in this world."

"Pshaw !"

"You sneer. Do you never roll logs here ?"

"Never. I do not understand you in the least."

"Ah! of course! I presume you have no indigenous literature?"

"None. We import all that we require."

"That accounts for it."

"Accounts for what?"

"The absence of the missing link."

"You are really completely unintelligible. Perhaps, sir, you are privately poking some asinine fun at me?"

"My dear Mr. Ogre, I assure you I would not dream of such a thing. Let us change the subject, my *dear* sir."

"What a sweet, low voice you have now!—so different from that infernal yelling which first drew my attention towards you."

"I was partly asleep then, and perhaps did not bray euphoniously. Shall I tell you my dream?"

"If you please."

"I dreamt that I dwe-helt in——"

"O come! that's a little too thin."

"Pray hear me out."

"Go on."

"I dreamt that I dwelt in the happy home of my childhood. My worthy mater came home to tea, as was her wont, and seemed strangely out of sorts. Presuming it was a case of an overwrought brain—she did a little platform work now and then—I thought some gentle and judicious prattle might soothe her savage breast, so I asked her a few conundra. She stood the

trial very well for a short period, but when I defied her to tell me why a miller wore a white hat, she got into an awful rage and proceeded to chastise me with a pair of newly-shod hind feet. Terror-stricken, I brayed for help; and then I presume I endeavoured to shake off the nightmare——”

“Your mother?”

“No, sir—the visionary demon which hovers o’er my chest whenever I fall asleep in an uncomfortable attitude.”

“Well?”

“In shaking off the dream-fiend I vaguely remember hearing your challenge, ‘Who goes there?’”

“Then your replies were probably hypnotic?”

“Up to a certain point, yes.”

“Do you suffer much from hypnotism?”

“A good deal. Most asses do.”

“Dear me, how awkward I do feel with this short-legged stump!”

“I suppose you are often on the stump?”

“Beware, animal! I can stand a good deal, but there is a point at which even the early worm turns. Have you ever seen a worm at bay?”

“Never.”

“It is a weird and awful spectacle.—But I am forgetting the Murphies. They will be boiled to rags.”

“Do you mean the gentlemen in the pot?”

“Yes.”

“Are they all Murphies?”

"All. Why?"

"I am so much relieved. I thought you said Champions."

"Well, they are all Champion Murphies."

"Dear me! I had no notion the family was so prolific. I think you boasted you had at least a hundred on the boil."

"Now then, take care I don't tread on your tail while I am removing the pot. Deary me, how very awkward this short leg is, to be sure! You are trembling. What ails you?"

"To be candid with you, I fear the sight of your supper will be too much for my weak nerves."

"Nonsense, animal! There we go. That will do nicely. Heigho! but I wish I could find the end of my leg!"

"Stick a stool under your stump, and try how that will work."

"A capital suggestion! You seem a highly intelligent quadruped."

"Hullo! Do you dig out your food with that spade and hayrake?"

"Spoon and fork you mean. Yes."

"Why, bless me! but these are only ordinary or garden *Potatoes!*"

"And what on earth did you think they were?"

"Ahem! Oh, nothing particular."

"You are rather tantalizing. Yes; they are only the mannikin potato. We have not yet succeeded in getting

them to grow any bigger than our native filberts; but they are very wholesome and tasty."



"I believe you, my boy. Who introduced them into the Island?"

"I think it was Bridget—my brother-in-law's cook. There is a legend, or folk-tale, that they were concealed in the bottom of her trunk."

"I am immensely relieved. Will you excuse my asking the question point-blank, but do you never *really* dine off juveniles?"

"Juvenile what?"

"Ahem! Little children, to put it plainly."

"Good gracious! What an absurd query! Do you take me for an anthropophagist, sir? Deary me! deary me! what next, I wonder?"

"Pray do not be so upset. I apologize humbly for exhibiting my ignorance."

"Dear, dear, dear! The bare thought of such an atrocity as you suggest overpowers me. It has quite taken my appetite away."

"I am *so* sorry."

"Why, sir, I am an advanced anti-hypophagist."

"I suppose you would even draw the line at a red herring?"

"Certainly."

"Or a bloater?"

"Most decidedly."

"Dear me! How *can* you expect to rise in the world?"

"I am sufficiently elevated. In fact, I am of opinion I should be much healthier if I were ten feet shorter and about five feet narrower round the middle."

"It is not unlikely. I should say you do not take

sufficient exercise. But might I ask, Mr. Ogre, what are those little pots I observe on yonder shelf?"

"Oh, they are also of the mannikin order. They are full of seasoning stuff which brother-in-law Thomas occasionally imports from a vegetarian restaurant. Its is called Extract of Beef."

"Beef?"

"Yes. A nourishing vegetable which grows in your country—Beef root. We have not been able to trace the root in this Island, though some of my ancestors were very famous florists, herbalists, and botanists."

"I suppose none of them happened to be a livery-stable keeper?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Did you ever try Cube Root?"

"No."

"Well, don't!"

"I fancy I heard brother-in-law Thomas mention it."

"Avoid it as you would a libel action, old man!"

"Is it as bad as that? What on earth is it?"

"A very dangerous and useless species of cramming for growing boys."

"I think it has been tried on my nephew. But, I say, the Champions are growing cold. Try some."

"Thanks. Perhaps you wouldn't mind mashing them in a teacup or something for me?"

"Would you like a little of the beef extract with them?"

"Do you take me for a cannibal, sir?"

"I don't understand you."

"Don't trouble, pray! Just give them a dust of pepper and salt."

"Will that be sufficient?"

"Quite, thanks! you are very hospitable, indeed."

"You are extremely polite."

"I am excessively hungry."

"Well, old boy, here's your mash!"

"Where?"

"Oh, you need not stare round the room."

"I thought you meant to convey that there was another Donkey on the premises."

"You seem strangely silly, or is it simply abstraction? Anyhow, don't neglect your Champions."

"I hope they have not fallen a victim to the Tiger's wrath. . . . Oh, please excuse me, Ogre! I fear my wits have been woolgathering."

"You are evidently insane. I hope you are a hereditary suicidal maniac."

"Do you? why?"

"Naturally, in order that you may keep the madness in your own family."

"A very reasonable explanation—but I am not mad."

"The cup is at your feet. Take care you do not kick it over."

"The cup! the cup that cheers but not inebriates!"

"Are you quite sure you are not a maniac?"

"I am absurdly sane. You seem alarmed."

"I am."

"Why?"

"I hate extremes. To tell you the truth, I would feel more comfortable if you had your muzzle on."

"My muzzle! Do you know whom you are addressing?"

"A very unfortunate animal, I fear."

"Sir! explain, or apologize instantly!"

"Well, I was once bitten in the wooden leg by a puppy—just about your size—and the creature became a howling lunatic. It might have been the varnish."

"You are an insolent, ignorant upstart."

"Please do not grind your teeth at me."

"I gnaw my hoof at you, sir."

"You are welcome—but you would be much better employed gnawing the Champions."

"Perhaps you are right."

"There—that looks better. You eat well."

"I do everything well."

"Do not trouble to make gratuitous observations.

. . . By the way, do *you* chew the cud?"

"Your ignorance is appalling."

"It is rude to speak with your mouth full."

"Don't you try to come the etiquette business over me, governor."

"Well, have you got through the contents of the cup?"

"Almost. It is grateful, comforting."

"Stop a moment! I think I have read that some-

where. Is it an old wheeze? Eh! bless my soul! what do I hear? The clatter of a fifty-six pound weight in the letter-box! It must be—it *is* he!—William, my bright-eyed che—ild, what means this undecimal intrusion?”

CHAPTER XXIV.

My Uncle !—Old Bob Ridley—Whittling a Wooden Leg—Strange Whispers—Juvenile Giant Vice—Real Live Champions—Astonishment of the Ogre—Bill Smith on the Shagraun—The Real Whangdoodle—Brayhard !—Our Hero awakes—Forty Winks—Intellect in Tails—Injudicious Observation of the Donkey—Patrick threatens a Blackthorn Poultice—What happened at the Diamond Beds—Cause of Influenza—Messages from the Prodigal Son—What the Giant saw through the Telescope—Nirvana Island—Farewell to the Ogre—Crossing the Ferry—Farewell to the Reader—The Last and Longest Sentence in the Book.

“O MY prophetic soul ! my uncle !” cried young Bill Smith, entering the Ogre’s chamber and shaking the hand proffered by Uncle Edward. “What brings me here—eh ? Why I’m going to see *life*, I am—just starting out on my travels, old hoss. But first let me divest myself of my overcoat, for I’ve covered a good stretch of country on shanks’s mare, and I’m as hot as old Bob Ridley’s boiler.”

“William, William, you young dog !” squeaked the Ogre—“but you *are*, you know you are.”

“Are what ?” sighed the young man. “Here, just help a fellow off with his coat, will you ?”



The Ogre hobbled very unsteadily round his nephew, laughing squeakily the while.

"I say, uncle," asked young Bill Smith. "What on earth ails your temporary leg?"

"Oh! oh! oh! What ails it? Eh! eh! eh! you young dog! But there, you always were rather given, up at the castle, to cutting your poor relations generally—only it's very hard when you play it down so low as the leg."

"Oh, knock off that sort of rot, old man!" said William a little angrily. "Surely that leg is too short,

and I was very careful about the measurements. Have you been whittling the stump for pastime?"

"Whittling the stump! Eh! eh! eh! you young rascal! That's the way you make a butt of your poor old uncle—but what on earth are these strange whisperings I hear?" inquired the Ogre, as he commenced to tug at one of the sleeves of his nephew's overcoat.

"Bless my soul!" cried young Smith, "I quite forgot the four Champions I've got stowed away in my pockets. There, let go the sleeve," excitedly addressing his uncle, "or the pair of us will be up before the beak for manslaughter."

"I am afraid, William," observed the Ogre somewhat sternly, "that you are keeping bad company and acquiring some very nasty habits. I don't mind orchard-robbing; I can smile at a practical joke even when it takes the form of presenting a relative with a leg which has been introduced previously to a cross-cut saw; but I do say that potato priggling is an accomplishment which I regard with peculiar horror."

"'Pon honour! you are talking hieroglyphics to me, uncle," exclaimed the bewildered young Giant. "I don't mind owning up to orchard-robbing, but I cannot understand what you are driving at when you accuse me of playing a practical joke on your practical leg; and as for stealing your spuds—such a thought never entered into my head."

"Oh, William! William! this duplicity is shocking—positively shocking," squeaked the Ogre. "Have

you not just remarked—there's that strange whispering again—that you have got four Champions stowed away in your pockets?"

"Oh, good gracious!" laughed young Smith boisterously. "I see what it means. I am referring to real live Champions—a portion of the famous—at least they tell me they are famous—Seven Champions." And as he spoke he dived his hands into the capacious outside pockets of his great-coat, and one by one he produced Patrick, David, Andrew, and James, and laid them on the table.

"What on earth are these?" asked the Ogre, stooping and examining the four men critically.

"They are Champions, I tell you," explained young Smith.

"This is too much for me," squeaked the Ogre sadly. "Your jokes are too subtle."

"Don't shake your head so," smiled young Smith. "They are very interesting when you know them."

"But you've got to know 'em first—eh, William? Had you there!" cried the Ogre proudly. "But how do these things work—by machinery, is it?"

"Yes," laughed young Smith. "Pull the string and the figures will move."

"What string?" asked the Ogre.

"Oh, you foolish old man!" smiled the young Giant. "These, allow me to tell you, are just as real as yourself. Flesh and blood, bone, sinew, muscle and the rest of it. They assure me they are full grown."

"How extraordinary!" squeaked the Ogre, his mouth wide open with astonishment.

"Yes," said young Smith. "As Bridget would say, it bangs Banagher."

"I know! I know!" squeaked the Ogre excitedly—"and Banagher bangs the——"

"Ssh!" exclaimed young Smith, putting his finger on his lips.

"I wonder, could we be descended from these little creatures?" asked the Ogre.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said young Smith. "They have cheek enough to furnish a whole family of giants."

"I suppose they are samples of the mannikins your good father occasionally visits?"

"Yes. And I may tell you, uncle, that I am going now to see their country with my own eyes."

"What! You?" squeaked the Ogre in his shrillest key.

"Yes. Me!" answered the youthful Giant. "That's what brings me here now. Just ran in to say good-bye before I started off, and to give you the tip about your timber toe."

"Oh, William! William!" sobbed the Ogre. "Think of what you are going to do! Your good papa was never the same person since he visited that awful country. He came back more like a living clock-work than a Giant."

"Don't you fret, old man!" said Bill Smith cheerily.

"I know my way about, I can tell you ; and if any one tries a time-table on me, it will be just about as much as his life will be worth."

"And so these are Men—real live Men!" squeaked the Ogre, concentrating his gaze on the four Champions, who were shivering in their boots with terror as they observed the enormous proportions of the Ogre and the unsteadiness of his gait.

"That's so, sir," said young Smith jauntily. "Live men, and no mistake! Up to any game at night, my boys!"

"The real whangdoodle, I suppose?" inquired the aged Ogre.

"Yes, *sir*," answered his nephew.

"Ah! I had almost forgotten an earlier visitor of mine," squeaked the Ogre, "who is now reclining, and if my ears don't deceive me, snoring——"

"I thought I heard a cat purring," interrupted young Smith.

"It is my visitor," observed the Ogre ; "and if I am not mistaken he is of the same breed as these four little creatures on the table."

All eyes were turned on the hearth-rug at these words of the Ogre, and from the throats of the four Champions and the adolescent Giant came the astonished cry—

"BRAYHARD!"

Young Smith's lusty shout awoke our hero suddenly. Thinking the shout was merely some new form of nightmare, he proceeded to rub his eyes with his fore-paws.

Then he yawned vigorously, and stretched out his various legs until the joints cracked, and he was about to settle himself down for another snooze when young Smith advanced to the hearth-rug, exclaiming :

“I say, old chap ! Just look this way, and then you’ll remember me.”

“When other lips,” hummed Brayhard, licking his chops dreamily. Then turning round and gazing upwards, his eyes caught those of Bill Smith, and he instantly remembered the entrance of the youth. He rose suddenly to his feet, and bowed with considerable grace.

“Mr. Smith, junior, I presume ?” he said. “Proud to meet you again, sir ! I fell off into a little after-dinner nap—just forty winks—when you and your worthy relative commenced to discourse. I hope the family is all well, sir, at the castle.”

“Pretty tolerable,” replied the Giant.

“Kindly give my regards to your noble parents when you meet them to-morrow, and tell your father I am considerably impressed by his undecimal system.”

“Oh, dash the undecimal system !” cried young Smith angrily. “I’m turning tail on it this very night.”

“Turning tail !” observed Brayhard. “Do you really wear——”

“Oh, dear, no !” interrupted the young Giant with a laugh. “I do not pretend to be gifted in that way.”

“Ah !” sighed Brayhard. “It *is* a gift, sir. In fact, I am not sure that a large measure of intellect does

not gravitate to the tail. Witness the extreme intelligence of the dog, the monkey, the performing bear, the Kilkenny cats—not to talk of the species to which I personally belong; and then ponder just for one moment on the absolute and revolting stupidity, and the arrogant assumption of superiority displayed by those wretched bob-tailed Champions whom you met recently. Faugh, it makes me sick, sir!”

“Ah, then, my bucko!” cried Patrick from the table, “if I don’t introduce you later on to the tail end of a blackthorn, may I be sentenced to fast for a month without gate-money!”

Brayhard had not, of course, observed the four Champions, and he now stood on the hearth-rug covered with confusion.]

While the animal is endeavouring to think how he will appease the wrath of Champion Pat, we shall take the opportunity of explaining how the four Champions came to be stowed away in Bill Smith’s pockets.

When Tiger Tim had reached the diamond beds and had duly deposited his companions on the ground, he at once proceeded to root up some of the large rocks. Meanwhile the Champions were quietly but hurriedly filling their pockets with small stones and diamond dust, and when they felt they had provided themselves each with a considerable fortune they stealthily commenced their retreat from the beds.

When they reached the hedge and were trying to

climb over it one by one, they were suddenly seized by young Smith who was in hiding at the other side of the hedge. The four Champions fearing they might be annihilated by the sportive Giant, at once began to plead loudly for mercy.

"Hush, you young monkeys!" said young Smith in a stage-whisper. "I've been watching you for some time. I'm as anxious as you are for peace and quietness, for I want to avoid that stupid Tiger of ours, and to be piloted by you into your own country. I want to see what the newspapers call *Life*—we have no such thing on this dead-and-alive island. I want to see *ballets*, race-courses, prize-fights, divorce-courts, gin-palaces, ball-rooms, gambling saloons, cricket-matches, circuses—and all sorts of divilment (to use one of Bridget's favourite expressions). Can you manage that for me, Patrick?" he asked the Champion of Ireland, his face glowing with excitement.

"I can, sir," said Pat. "And what's more, I can introduce you to a highly respectable bookmaker."

"You're an emerald gem!" cried the enthusiastic Giant. "I believe I have discovered an infallible method of spotting winners."

"Don't forget golf," put in Andrew, "when you're on the rampage."

"Golf!" said Bill Smith. "That's a philosophic pastime, isn't it? I don't want any philosophy, young man. I'm dosed to death with it at home. Come now little chaps, are you 'on'?"

"Certainly," chorused the Champions. And without more ado, William rammed the four of them into his pockets and started out on his travels.

His reason for visiting his uncle was to inform the elderly gentleman that he had finished his new leg, and had deposited it with Bridget to be left until called for.

"I hope you will overlook my inopportune—and I must admit very insulting—observations," said Brayhard meekly to Champion Patrick. "It won't occur again, sir, I assure you."

"Oh, we have no time for squabbling," observed young Smith. "And now, uncle, I must say good-bye for the present. Tell papa I will soon be back again, and that I will be sure to take care of myself and lead a regular life."

Patrick nudged Andrew at this declaration of the youthful traveller, and Andrew winked knowingly but sadly at his co-Champion.

"Ah, William! William!" sighed the Ogre, "I fear this will turn out badly. Men, we are told, were deceivers ever. The same authority assures us that they always have one foot on sea and one on shore, which would naturally account for their suffering from a disease they call influenza. This is the first time I have ever seen Men, and to tell the candid truth, I am not favourably impressed by them."

"Oh, it's all right, uncle!" laughed young Smith. "I'll take care of number one, never fear. And now I want to tell you that your new leg is quite finished. The varnish will be dry on it in the morning. I left it with Bridget, and she has put it at the kitchen fire. Go over for it in the morning and give my love to the Mater and Daisy. Tell Daisy I'll bring her back an underground railway and a few suspension bridges and things of that sort; and you might soften the old man's heart by telling him I'll get a new telescope for him with all the latest improvements. Now, Champions, are you ready?"

"We are," replied Patrick; "but please don't handle us so roughly."

"All right. . . . Are *you* coming, Brayhard?"

"Yes. I think I'd better go with you, if Patrick will promise to bury the hatchet."

"Oh, I don't bear you any grudge," said the Champion of Ireland. "What can you expect from an ass but foolishness?"

Brayhard bit his lip until it bled, but he determined to bottle his wrath for the present.

"By the way, uncle," said the volatile young Giant, "the governor saw a strange sight to-day through his telescope. Just seven leagues due north of this very spot he observed floating in mid-air, right over the ocean, Nirvana Island."

"Nirvana Island?" exclaimed the Ogre, trying to

swallow a sob, for he was grieved to part from his nephew.

"Yes. The place where the good niggers go. . . .
Now farewell, Uncle Ned!"

* * * * *

About an hour later a gigantic boat might have been seen crossing the ferry, and the occupants of it were young Smith, six of the Seven Champions (Anthony and Denis having been picked up at the landing-stage), and our Hero.

And here we must drop for the present the relation of the adventures of Brayhard and his companions. If the reader—(of course we *hope* there will be more than one reader)—should desire to listen with credulity to some additional whispers of fancy, to learn how the travellers reached Bœotia and foregathered once more with their great leader, Champion George; what befell young Smith in Bœotia and his relatives in their happy island home; how the Seven Champions fared when they started out on their separate adventures; how Brayhard conducted himself when he was raised to the Championship by his noble master; how the Professor further enriched the noble arts of Poetry and Scientific Research; how a certain supplementary Champion from the United States joined the festive Champion Board, and what part he took in developing the resources of the Syndicate—he (or she, or they), need but express his

(or her, or their) desire in the columns of any respectable newspaper, and The Further and Unlimited Adventures of the Worshipful Company of Champions, Giants, Asses, and Professors, will be duly and conscientiously chronicled.

THE END.

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