

## INTRODUCTION.

My old sixth-standard mate, Johnny Fro, had got about fourteen days over the turn of some sort of fever, when I called at his mother's place to see how he was getting along, and should it be agreeable, to keep him company for a short spell. As I went into the house, Johnny was stretched flat on his back on a couch, right under a window, looking down into an orchard, holding in his hand a lot of pencilled papers. "Hullo, Birrel ! It is you, is it? How good it is of you to come," he sang out cheerily. "Awfully glad to see you, Johnny," I said. "Does the doctor say when you may get about again? The boys are all awearying to have you once more in the sports. But, dong it, Johnny ! tell me, do, what's all this writing about on these scraps of paper which your fingers are 'round ?" "Oh, this is a Fairy Tale, Bir, which has been floating in my mind like a panorama, and which I've been putting into words the best way I can." "Of course, the-once-upon-a-time sort," I jocularly remarked. "I like fairies myself well enough to read about, but bother the plaguy things, they always have a trick of keeping away from anyone alive having a sight of them—don't they now ?" "No, no, my boy," seriously said Johnny. "Such isn't, I think, always the case ; because, lately, since getting better, I've been looking upon and talking with fairies the same as I now do, this very minute, to you, and that too you will probably be enlightened upon if you only take the trouble to look over these papers. Here—have them ! To avoid confusion, every one of the slips is distinctly numbered. But, Bir, have you now the time?" Then and there I managed to pretty-well make out what Johnny had been occupying himself with during his convalescence. Afterwards, I took the following copy, which can, I can confirm, be thoroughly depended upon as giving almost word for word of the text.

JOHNNY FRO,  
By Archibald Hood

A FAIRY TALE.

CHAPTER I.

ONE night, lately, while all alone, conning over my lessons, I kept walking round and round different outskirts of the town, heedless about where my feet led me. Finally, I found myself leaning over the rails of the Poet's Bridge in the Recreation Ground.

It was a fine clear night, and the waxing moon's light, coming between the shadows of the trees around, sparkled like bright silver on the still sleeping waters. There I gazed for so long a time at the beautiful surrounding patches, that bit by bit I felt my eyelids getting unusually heavy. Most likely, I think, I might have gone to sleep straight off, in this upright position, had not I heard a gentle foot fall on the other end of the planks from where I was placed.

At this instant there was something somehow set me all aquiver. I lifted my head, and turned my face aside, and what I then saw, I am quite sure, as long as there is breath in my body, will never pass from my memory. This was a girl, so altogether enchanting as to outrival any prize painting. She asked me, with a frank, sweet voice, on drawing towards me, something or another, but what that something or another was—well, I could not in the least be certain about. The truth was, for the moment, I could neither speak, nor neither could I clearly comprehend. She had gone several paces beyond me ere I could collect myself ; then afraid that she might slip me altogether without having a word to say, with no little effort, I managed to call out—

“Hie !”

At this rude hail, she slowly drew herself up, turned her face around, and—Great Stars ! threw upon me the glances of such eyes, as never, I am sure, has been seen

in the face of anyone else : for dazzling lustre I feel convinced that no gems could ever cap.

“What's it ? You called, didn't you ?”

At a loss for any proper reply to this question of hers, I feigned a false one, saying— “Excuse me, will you—do ! Isn't your name Miss Grim ?”

“Miss Grim,” she repeated, with a puzzled countenance, and slowly pronouncing the name, as if spelling out the letters. “No,” she immediately said, with a most bewitching smile, “I am neither grim by name, nor grim by nature—Marimemonia Breenge is the name I am known by. Will my horse be safe, do you think, tied up to a post at the entrance there beyond ? I never care about riding after dark down that steep, lumpy, road. I'll be back within a-half hour or so.”

“Oh, I'll see to't all right enough,” I eagerly replied, “if that's all the time you mean to be away ; it will be longer than that, I daresay, ere I think about leaving the grounds here.”

“Really, so kind of you, if you would. I'll hurry back as fast as ever I can.” Then, in an alluring manner, she took herself away, saying, “I'll likely see you, then, as I come back.”

With this, Miss Marimemonia Breenge proceeded on her errand. At the upper entrance I found the horse all right. I didn't weary much waiting; I was much too full of joy for that.

Pretty precise to her time, Marimemonia once more put in her appearance. On rejoining, she kept chatting away with such volubility, and smiling and laughing with such graceful gestures, that I thought could not well be withstood, even by a king. Whilst I, on the other hand, like a silly—oh, how enraged I was at my own incapacity—remained all the while as though tongue-tied ! Strange it was, however, that no sooner was I alone again than I could recall to mind easily enough scores of smart quips and taking phrases, ay, and utter them too, with the utmost ease to vacancy, where nought they could avail ! Well, and such a precious ninny was I, when so very badly I wanted to engross and shine !

On homeward starting, I kept slapping at my breast and giving voice to all sorts of ridiculous nonsense.

When, lo ! out of the cup of an arum lilly, bordering the path, such a queer looking womankin of a figure sprang, robed as seemed to my fancy in wreaths of airy down !

There's no use in saying that I was not dumbfounded with this totally out-of-the-way experience. I was more than that, I was clean beside myself with terror, until a few kind and courteous words from the diminutive sylph quite reassured me.

“Be calm, be calm !” said she, in a tone low, and yet commanding, melodious, yet distinctly audible. “I am Gismorelborom, the Queen of the Fairies in these sylvan shades, and I may freely aver, without a vestige of arrogance, that whatever I undertake to go in for I am seldom balked in the accomplishment of— mind that now, will you ! I have just got to know, that all of a sudden you have become alarmingly infatuated by that trig and wholesome looking maid that you met, for the first time to-night, on the bridge beyond there. Possibly she may be hard to win, and when she is won, it will be harder still to win Graspacute Breenge, her money-grubbing sire. 'Tis said that one Noxey something, I forget the surname, stands now the favourite. However, the proverb which is pat among you mortals is a good one, which says: Patience and Perseverance works wonders. You take heart, you do ! If you do as I bid, I'll stake my regal position—I will— on the prosperous issue. The conditions are these: That every day you try to resist evil, and do all the good that ever you can; for each morning ere the clarion of the cock, without cognizance, there will be put into your pockets certain tokens corresponding to either the good or the evil which you may have done from one period of supply to another. The greater and the lesser in value of these you must put separately and carefully away, inasmuch as whoever has the greatest show of the first of these tokens when Marimemonia's birthday comes around, which happens to be on Midsummer day next, will stand— for so oddly determines her father—the

greatest show for Marimemonia's hand. Now, mystified mortal ! there's something all cut and dry, isn't there, for you to work upon ; something that ought to spur you on to virtue, something which holds out a mundane reward. But toos ! I now must away, or otherwise summons some of my courtiers around, I am positivily forgetting myself standing here all this while, unaccompanied, talking to you."

## CHAPTER II.

SUBMISSIVELY entreating her not to leave just yet awhile, I cried—

“O! thou highly exalted Elfin Queen ! I should ever so much desire to look upon these courtiers which just now you made mention of.”

“Oh, how I have been yearning for a long time for the opportunity to have a good look at sprightly and gayly arrayed courtizans ! Although, if the truth be told, men, now-a-days, pretend to jest at pomp and rank; but, for all that, I am perfectly well aware that such is merely a make-out—the inner core of their heart, I am quite sure, is still inclined to hanker after pageantry.”

“Perceptible mortal, I do delight to hear you talk in such a candid and sensible way ; it evinces that your bringing up has been in the right direction. Just conceive, in a world like this is, so many variations in alike species. Is it consistent, feasible, or even possible, to do such a thing as to altogether abolish social distinction ? The thing is utterly outrageous and entirely ridiculous. Follow me, will you, to the jutting floral-plot underneath, where the long-link path branches off from the topmost terrace, whereto I shall give instructions to my herald to summons thither together my liege courtiers ; then you'll be enabled to give a flat contradiction to the industriously circulated misconceptions which avers that no such things as fairies now, or ever did, exist.

Well ! the ignorance of mortals, on very many points, is distressing, painfully exasperating, and, to a sensible well-informed mind, positively intolerable.”

When we arrived at the place indicated, Gismorelborom stooped and plucked from the green sward a hay-stem, placed it between her ruby lips, producing a shrill, piping sound, which in a jiffy was attended to. And then, lo ! as if they had, then and there, bounded out of the bowels of the earth, a troop of fairies were before my eyes ! They all in concert made a low

obeisance to Queen Gismorelborom, which she, with an imperious bend, most graciously received.

Then, in the first place, she commanded to nearer approach her person five of her titled maids of honor, calling them one after the other respectively by name, which were, if I remember aright—Assyld, Corinta, Sirbyne, Istorel, and Borbece.

Each of these were most beautifully draped in light refulgent robes of a gossamer-like texture, fringed with gold edging, and flecked with delicate clots of azure ; with light coral chaplets on their crowns, from which swept, pending to as far as the loins, in minute undulations, their auburn-tinted hair.

They were exceedingly pretty, I thought, but of that peculiarly, in contrast to any mortals.

Afterwards, I was introduced to the Lord Chamberlain, Master of the Rolls, Almoner, Goldsticks, and other potent dignitaries, who also were gorgeously equipped. Lastly, I had the honor of being presented to Tipwip, the Court Jester and dwarf, whom I had the utmost difficulty to Properly distinguish, being, as I calculated, little bigger than an eardrop, However, he bore himself with an air of imposing hauteur, and indeed, a little later on, I ascertained that Tipwip really was rated as the most notable in all the Queen's household—a regular all-round sort of attendant, holding the combined offices of jester, tipstaf, archer, and alchemst-in-chief. At times, in the ordinary affairs of mortals, playing the very deuce—such as causing them to love to distraction that which, without his influence, they should have positively abhorred, and loath that which they would have loved, misplacing movables, chattels turning upside down, making honey sour, milk acrid, and vinegar sweet. In short, doing all sorts of madcap mischievous things, for the amusement of the august court. No sooner did the lowering of the mace declare the reception ceremony over, than the Queen signified that it would be her pleasure for Tipwip to delight the company with a song, to which, with the utmost alacrity, Tipwip, with this, as under, complied : —

The moon is in the Cairy,  
The dew is on the blades;  
Our couch is nice and airy,  
Beneath the leafy blades.  
But what still, does most thrill,  
Our bosoms with delight,  
Is that our gracious fairy Queen  
Presides o'er us to-night.

No more winds Artic chill us,  
Quite balmy is the air ;  
Under the weeping willows,  
To maidens, swains love declare.  
But what still, does most thrill,  
Our bosoms with delight,  
Is that our Gracious fairy Queen  
Presides o'er us to-night.

All looks serene and glad, oh !  
By hedgerows, dells, and brakes ;  
Fair Egmont throws her shadow,  
Deep in the sleepy lakes.  
But what still, does most thill,  
Our bosoms with delight,  
Is that our gracious fairy Queen  
Presides o'er us to-night.

This song of Tipwip's was received with thundering claps of applause. Every one of the courtiers, and sundry other attendants, joined with hearty enthusiasm in the refrain. Of a truth, I myself was, more than once during its execution, on the eve of putting in my own voice in the exhilarating strain, but wisely, I think, forebore—concluding that it would not very well harmonise along with any of theirs. Following a brief interval of general conversation, several of the princely



courtizans, as if with one accord, commenced to chant, with lively measure, these few lines given as under:—

We are folks jolly, who scorn melancholy,  
And never a wrangle e'er causes a strike ;  
Ay ! we are the fairies, controlling the dairies ,  
And turns from the churn any butter we like.

For some reason or another unexplained, the Queen Gismorelborom declined to give her approval of the above, and shortly following commanded music to be struck up for a dance. Aye ! was I not surprised to note the loyal and ready compliance of these puny ærial forms. Lo, the pleasure of their sovereign, thought I, could hardly have been fully communicated ere all the midget partners were promptly in their places. Then, at once, the enlivening music struck up, which set the whole concourse in rapid motion. The lightening speed, like to sparks from an anvil, in which these most clever, dainty ærials went twisting and twirling through the intricate and sinuous evolutions, dazzled me with profound amazement. I had never in all my life imagined that anything short of a cannon ball could attain to the like velocity. One moment, beheld them in circles, another in curves, another in columns, and another again they deployed into lines, and, throughout all, not the slightest hitch whatever took place in all their puzzling manoeuvres. It is not sufficient to say that I was deeply engrossed—I was infatuated beyond expression.

“Mortal, what think ye of our revelries ?” her majesty deigned to ask.

“Incomparably clever ! Incomparably clever !” I bewilderingly repeated.

Overcome, at length, with the strain which such a giddy spectacle produced, I betook myself apart to rest and to restore composure.

“Ah, me !” I then ponderingly said to myself, “ After what this night I have been a conscious witness of, can

I ever think otherwise than that Nature places before our eyes things, perhaps, not one-half of which is discerned ! Up till now I could never conceive that two distinct kinds of people are living at the same period, and in the same place, and one of them to be unenlightened of the presence of the other.”

While thus astride on a log, deeply meditating, the dwarf came briskly towards me with a sort of bouquet, no longer than a tin-tack, in his hand.

“Inhale this grateful aroma,” said he, putting it to my nose, and from thence consciousness with me for the time was suspended.

### CHAPTER III.

When I awoke, I found that it was clear daybreak, and, at the same time, that I was tucked up comfortably in my own bed. Incident upon incident of the previous night's revelations, bit by bit unfolded. The best test, I thought to myself, that I could make of the reality or otherwise of what I imagined to have seen and heard would be, that which bore reference to what was promised to be put into my pockets. Therefore, losing no time, I took hold of my clothes lying over a chairback by my side, and carefully searched one after the other of the pouches. I was dreadfully disappointed. I found not a single wrap had been deposited in any of them. "The whole affair is nought but a sort of a will-o'-the-wisp delusion," I testily uttered. "What a Zany I must have been to think that anything at all reliable would emanate from such a shady quarter." But, somehow, quite unaccountable it was, I felt as though my nature had entirely changed in the direction of finding myself, imbued with kindlier and more generous impulses—I begot, as I thought, a new-born deference to age ; a new-born pity for distress and indigence. Something clean out of my ordinary practice, I got up and lit the fire, put the kettle on, cleaned the boots, and helped my good mother to prepare the breakfast. Having partaken of that repast, I strolled towards the beach, where I observed an aged cripple, called Dan Durbow, struggling with all his might and main to get a limb of driftwood up the terrace, to replenish his stock of fuel. I hastened to the old man's side, and asked him to allow me to drag it for him. Old Dan, for a time, seemed as if taken quite aback with surprise, but suddenly yielded. When I had got the wood at the top of the cliff, the delighted old cripple exclaimed—

"Well, my shturdy young buchul, in throwth, but oive now for a long toime thought that sich loike obloiging dispoitions wid bhoys, as you've now showed, had entoirely desarted creation. Yunker, God bless you; an' if e'er you take a woife, begorah, though

she were an aphrodite, let her have loads of the ever needy stingo.”

Then it struck me that I had a message to deliver at the other end of the town. On passing along the principal street, I noticed a little girl weeping bitterly alongside a shop door. I ascertained that the child had let drop a half-crown, which had trundled after falling and dropped through a grating into the cellar. At my instance leave was got to go underneath to search. Luckily, after a while, the fugitive coin was recovered. Then the change which instantly appeared in the little creature’s countenance, from lines denoting stinging grief to those evincing unbounded joy, were, I considered, ample recompense for the service I had done.

Back, on my way home, I encountered a mob of youths seeking amusement by inciting the anger of a poor, half-demented soul, familiarly known by the name of Skoop. Skoop at this juncture stood at bay flourishing a great stick in his hand, roaring out with all the power of his lungs—

“You blackguardly vermin I’ll be upside with everyone of you, if you should find the weight of this bludgeon on your bare scalps.”

This menace of Skoop’s was met by a salvo of loud laughter from the assailants, one after another of them shouting—

“Come on. Skoopy, Skoopy—you come on ! You’re not game, Skoopy, to back your threat ; there are too many of us here to be at all frightened for your noisy ranting.”

At this point, in lieu of chiming in with my mates as customary, I began to remonstrate with them, and to call their conduct unmanly, wicked, cruel, and absurd.

“Well, well, what a whirlround,” holloed out big Jack Sumbry. “*Scissors!* what next, I wonder. Johnny Fro, turned—well, I declare—goody-goody.”

“Calling one names don’t break any bones,” I said “but if you take me for one of those goody-goodies, who so make out merely to hide their silliness and cowardice, you are, I tell you, this time, on the wrong track.”

On giving them this taste of my mind, I kept all the while, bit by bit, creeping in the direction of Jack, as if I meant to have a set-to. Jack suddenly withdrew, under the flimsy pretext that he saw someone coming whom he didn’t want to. The other boys followed suite by clearing off, and Skoop for the occasion was left unmolested.

The rain came down heav’n’s hard towards noon, and I kept in the house doing a few necessary odd jobs. However, at about three o’clock it ceased, and I then made my way to the furthest outskirts of the place, to pay a visit to a friend. On my way thither, at a certain point, I was in the very nick of time to render assistance to an elderly lady who, as I was passing, had the misfortune to slide down a slippery bank and plunge into a deep mudrut. I ran into the slush—nearly up to my boot-tops—and offered her a purchase by stretching out my hand. However, despite the uncomfartableness of her situation, she, much to my bewilderment, edged, as it were, back from the proffered aid, saying—

My kind young friend, never you mind me for the present—that you may do afterwards. First, look—do, if you can lay eyes anywhere about on my muff—I’ve lost it. Oh, how sad; whatever shall I do if I can’t find my muff. James Crowl, my dear, dear, husband—now in his grave, eight years now come Lammas-day—bought it for me, sir, in Shoelbred’s shop, Oxford Street, London, when we were newly married ; and at the time, I mind, I said to him : la, that’s much too good for me, James.” Then, dear, dear me—ah ! he gave such an “unarmored” look, and then he said, he did. —“Is it too good for Queen Victoria, on the throne of England ? for, if not, it’s none too good for you, Jane.” “Hoh-ho ! and may-be after all this dreary length of time, its lost at last. He, dead and gone now eight years ago come Lammas-day next coming.”

To the extreme delight of this ancient lady, I found the memorable muff a few paces up the bank, behind a clump of gorze. She then, without further hesitation, stretched out and took hold of my hand, and when once more on solid footing, became profuse with thanks, which, by the way, were much ampler for the recovery of the muff, than for her own personal delivery.

For that day, there was nothing further of moment occurred. As soon as I awoke by daylight though, on the morning following, my very first care was to have another grope at my pockets. When, lo ! however—am I able to fully convey the extent of my joyous exuberance ? —in one of the trouser pockets, there were actually nothing less than thirty-three pieces of the current precious metal, and in in my coat pocket, one solitary piece of dull cold lead. It boots not to say that I was in a perfect phrensy of rapture at this altogether mysterious affair, and amazed at the curious way that the tokens had found their way hither. It was as much as ever I was able to do to keep the matter a secret from my poor mother. When my excitement had in some measure wore off, I began to rack my brain about what I had done amiss so as to earn the leaden medal. I kept a long time tickling with my fingers at my ears, as if I were trying to get at the bothering thing that way, but still the misdemeanor whatever it was, continued a perfect puzzle. Ha, ha, ha ! I had it at length ; yes, I had it at length, and that too, without the slightest chance either of there being any mistake about it. The cat must come out of the sack : I had turned up my nose at cold saveloy for supper !

#### CHAPTER IV.

Direct payment for well-doing is not the thing, the goodness therefrom looks like stage grief, but simulated for reward. But, tell me, who is there that could well decline anything, not exactly highly culpable, whereby to try and win one of the most radiant maidens that has ever yet graced creation ! As a matter of course, with such an object in view, all my bent now was to make as many good records as I could, and to keep the leaden tokens down to the lowest possible ebb. And, truly, it was almost incredible, the way in which I did succeed.

Why, what can be thought of it ? In less than seven weeks' time, I positively was in the possession of eleven hundred gleaming pieces of gold; the which, when nobody was about, I stowed carefully away in a stout calico bag, under a loose board in a dark corner of our scullery. I likewise put away the pieces of lead in another place of security, and proud was I to note that the total number of the latter was but trifling.

All this while, I had never, but on one occasion, clapped my eyes upon my unrivalled Marimemonia, and that was on one day as she rode close by our house, accompanied by a great lumbering hulk of a Chap, carrying a face upon him as rubicund and round as a prize mangel. This casual glance though, at *Psyche*, turned out rather a bad job for me, as upon the following morning, very much to my dismay I found that I had a good few extra leaden pieces, all through my quite inadvertently wishing some sort of evil would speedily overtake this detestable escort of hers.

After this occurrence, how intensely was my yearning for another interview with my all-absorbing nymph. I hardly dare venture to correspond or seek for communication through the medium of a go-between, through fear of punishment following for audacity ; and thereby running the risk of at once spoiling the whole game. It could only be by opportunity, I plainly saw, that my craving desire stood any chance of getting gratified ; and, under whatever auspices it was, I was

not kept very long awaiting for the fulfilment of my wish.

One day, as evening was coming on, a retriever dog, limping badly, was making its way for the South Road. I noted at every few paces, the poor brute had to stop a second or so, to allay its torturing pain. Not altogether, I confess, without a little misgiving for my safety, I ventured in a chary way towards it, patted it on the shoulder, timidly raised the affected limb, examined the foot, and thereon discovered a nasty looking gash.

A woman in the neighbourhood, while standing looking around her at her porch, had likewise taken notice of the crippled animal, and humanely brought some hot water, a sponge and soap. I immediately set to and cleaned the wound and soothed the effected part.

There was a flash brass collar around the neck of my patient, and on glancing at the inscription, oh, how deeply interested I suddenly became. For thereon I read, "G. Breenge, Walliwalli Villa, Junction Road."

I had barely completed my work of mercy, when, down the way a bit, a covered sulky came spanking round the corner. At this object, like a shot—lame foot and all—the dog bounded forward. Then a voice, like the sweetest melody that ever was heard, called—

"Gordon, you naughty dog, Gordon. Where have you been?"

The sulky drew up near to where I was standing, and—O day ! how can my ecstasy be adequately described ?

The Jehu thereof was none other than Miss Marimemonia Breenge, all by herself.

In making my salute, I am under the impression that I did so by raising both hands at once to raise my hat, and began my address by saying, "Your dog, Miss Breenge, has had a nasty cut on one of its forefeet."

Oh, has it ?" she unconcernedly replied. "It must have lost me, and got itself hurt while I was in attending the Bazaar."

Then, most intently fixing upon me her matchless luminous eyes, she added, "Lah ! now I know you—



you're Master Frost, who kindly looked after my horse one night at the upper entrance to the Recreation Ground."

Ye gods, how crushed I felt !

At this precious instant, I should have gladly welcomed being pitched-forked to Jupiter, or any other distant planet.

In the first place, blundering so aggravatingly with my name, together with accosting me as if I had merely been some needy-nobody of a lackey.

Then in a petulant and sheepish sort of style, I fear, I answered, "That my name was Fro and not Frost."

This enlightenment which I made, most apparently must have touched her understanding a bit, inasmuch as straightway, somehow or another, her manner changed from the nonchalant to the affable, interested, and tender.

With a frank ring in her voice, she at length exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Fro ! I really do beg pardon. But now, mind do, that we are both of us quits, for the difference, you'll see, is not anything like as great between Frost and Fro, as it is between Grim and Breenge."

It boots not to say how much this smart, well-merited hit, uplifted me and made me again quite reconciled, infatuated, and more enraptured with my *vis-a-vis* than ever I had been before.

After a little more parleying, she asked, with mild solicitude, if I should mind jumping up and taking charge of the reins, as there was an awkward bit of road a little way further on that she always had a dread of passing. Did I mind ?—what a doubt !

I did mind this behest that she made. Why, I minded it with phrensical delight, there never could, I think, have been an injunction with so much alacrity acceded to.

I expressed my pleasure to oblige, took my seat by her side, with the broad back of Gordon for a foot-mat, discarded the whip, and allowed the old horse to trudge along at any sleepy pace it had a mind to.

While thus, elbow to elbow, in the outset, did not I open her eyes considerably, by duly apprising her that I was not by any means the sort of young fellow that most probably she might take me for. Then gradually I enlarged on the incalculable intensity of my overwhelming passion, to all of which she demurely and passively listened. But O—cruel ! She evinced no indication—no, not the slightest—of her being in the least smitten with a similar passion. Continuing then for a painful duration, in moody abstraction, after a while, she broke the ice by beginning to regard me with a sad, downcast, and pensive look, and in a tremulous voice, said—

“Do you know that my papa is going to put me up, in a way that may justly be regarded, as it were, for auction, on my next birthday—mid-summer day next?—when I’ll be eighteen years of age. Oh, how utterly horrible. It quite upsets me to think of it. I am to be knocked down to the highest bidder, and that will be—mind I’ve no doubt of it at all—” Here, visibly, tears started to flow, and audible sobs were heard. “And euh ! I very much fear that the highest bidder will be the very lowest, lowest in my esteem of all, and that is Noxey Fob— plague him.”

Under ordinary circumstances, at this most distracting revelation, how I should have vehemently denounced such a proceeding with wrathful words.” “But once bit is twice shy.” The dread of an extra supply of the leaden pieces deterred me, so in the best way in which I could, I swallowed my rising indignation, and past it off quietly by merely saying—

“Bah ! Noxey Fob’s not everybody.” “Pooh,” I continued, “for as far as that goes, I may give a greater bid for you than he myself.”

“No ; could you now ?” betraying with the one breath, disbelief and curiosity.

“But, oh my ! you’ve no idea about Noxey Fob, for even supposing you should happen to get the better of him, you see he’s such an immense giant— he is; besides, too, so dreadfully vindictive, that I verily believe he would never rest satisfied until he had

crushed you under his feet as flat as he would do a toadstool.”

Most heroically I replied to this intimidating harangue— “Never mind all that. I’ll stand all the racket—mind, providing that you would for ever afterwards stand by me—that is, supposing that everyone else on the eventful day I should out-bid.”

And she said she would !

## CHAPTER V.

DAYS came, and days went. At length the day of days wore around—midsummer day—Marimemonia's birthday. As for myself, everything was in readiness prepared for the singular competition. Had received the previous night, from the most fashionable tailor, a flash suit of kaupukapuka tan-coloured tweed, provided myself with a high-crowned broadleafed Parisian silk hat, a gold watch chain—one of those massive cable patterns—patent leather highheeled boots, and eye-glass—affecting a learned and decorous mien—besides all the several details which go to make up a young gentleman of—well, lofty aspirations and affluent means.

Upon this morning, however, when everything was considered complete, “a rift was discovered in the lute.” I counted over my gold pieces before taking to the road, and could not for the life of me make out more than nine thousand five hundred and one—all told ; whereas, calculating from a former computation, I ought to have had the full ten thousand ; yet, there was not anywhere the least thing disturbed around where I had them concealed, and neither my mother nor the maid, Marianta had set eyes on any suspicious vagrant about. Finally, fearing that the Worry over this misadventure might tell against my looks at the very crisis which I eagerly desired to look my very top best, I resolved to disabuse my mind of the trouble. Shortly after doing so, and my natural composure restored, the thing at once dawned vividly on my mind that the counterpoise of lead tokens had, no doubt, been by the agency of the sprites subtracted.

Notwithstanding the delay which this outward hitch had caused, by means of a light spring fly, I got to Walliwalli Villa in sufficiently good time, where I at once discovered that three others, on the alike errand, had preceded me ; all of them, I particularly notified, were furnished with great swelled-out, strong, leather reticules.

Prompt to the pre-arranged time, Marimemonia's exacting papa appeared in the large drawing-room. He was a lankey-figured person with, as I thought then, a rapacious-looking countenance.

The first of the aspirants who was called to show the validity of his claim, was a dumpy bool of a man—bordering seemingly on three score years, wearing a foreign expression—named Sylas, and who wretchedly stuttered with his words. “He-he-here,” he said, “Me-mes-mester Gras-gras-grasp Cute Bre-e-e-nge, wha-wha-what I come to do-do-do fo-fo-for your shwe-shwe-shweet child.” Mr. Sylas then placed upon the table two hundred twenty-pound notes, in addition to scrip of the Taranaki Aluminium Electrical Extracting Company, rated as equivalent in the share market to eight thousand pounds.

When Mr. Breenge had satisfied himself of the number and of the genuineness of the notes, he took hold of the scrip in his hand, looked it over and, with a depreciative wag of the head exclaimed, accompanied by a loud fillip of the finger—“Whoogh ! assuredly and positively, separately and collectively, not worth a snap.”

The next was a gentleman all the way from Tasmania, with the name of Tryton Psalter on his card, who put in a letter of credit for the modest sum of five hundred pounds, but with documents setting forth his proprietary rights in Mount Huxley, which were estimated at forty millions.

“This letter of credit, which you have first here presented, I can very well believe to be genuine,” remarked the wily sire, “But, but, as for the proprietary documents—whoogh ! assuredly and positively, separately and collectively, not worth a snap.”

Noxey Fob—Marimemonia's terrible giant—was next in order called to see what he could do, by way of backing his pretensions. Anon, Noxey drew from his sable bag, money of mixed kinds, altogether totting up to nine thousand five hundred pounds—aside, I said, exactly one pound below mine—with a list of shares that he was prepared to give, I thought he said, as a

lateral settlement, which he held in the Poneoh Chrom and Plumbago Company.

“This liquid specie now before me, is indeed highly satisfactory, very, very gratifying indeed, and in all probability may carry the day, Mr. Fob ; but, as for these papers, you might just as well have left them in your desk, for assuredly and positively, separately and collectively—whoogh ! they’re not worth a snap.”

Noxey’s heavy eyebrows fell a little at this latter clause of the speech.

“Now, my conceited little fellow,” said Marimemonia’s paternal parent, turning towards me, “What’s it that you’ve got to show—out with it ! I presume, a savings bank pass-book with an old packing case shanty or two when some of your friends are gone, perhaps the value of one of my old nags.”

Oh, how I boiled !

But soon a sudden change came upon the faces of the lot of them on my coming to cover more than half of the large table with my pieces of gold—their looks, at this supreme instant, would have made an interesting photo—and counted therefrom nine thousand five hundred and one current sovereigns of the realm.

After recovering from the stupor, which not unnaturally this wonderful surprise threw them all into, Mr. Breenge briefly intimated that the award was mine.

“A couple, only a couple, more pounds, Mr. Fob,” he said, with a wicked twinkle in his deep-set eyes, “and you’d now have stood in different shoes. It can’t be helped my dear sir, better luck the next time ; there’s no getting away, you see, from the highest bid, and, at the same time, you must acknowledge much the most desirable currency.”

Then the gigantic Noxey Fob waxed most irrationally wrathful, and, with a livid visage, swore by everything that he could get his tongue around, that he would leave no stone unturned to upset the marriage.

“You,” he said, sharply turning round and facing me,  
“You, you, you ! you conceited parcel of nothing badly  
put together. I’ll chuck you, I will—a gun shot length  
out there into the sea, and what then, my precious little  
puppy, can you do ?”

I answered, “I can then swim ashore!”

## CHAPTER VI.

With the impatience incident to youth, I could not on any account brook the idea of delaying the marriage. I would, independent of all opposition, have the ceremony gone on with almost right off the reel. At length, after a wearysome palavering, it was finally settled that it should take place on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, in the church of the parish. So as to avoid, were it possible, any tumult, it was arranged that the party, consisting of but a few friends, should quietly foot it to the aforesaid place. The hour for the service was fixed for three o'clock, and we started from Walliwalli Villa shortly before noon.

An awkward occurrence took place while we were on the way thither which, I daresay, for fully an hour's time delayed the advance. One of Marimemonia's bridesmaids had tripped over a gorse stump obtruding on the path and injured her left ankle, causing her to swoon right away.

Happily, however, the maiden was quite herself again when the procession got to as far as the head of the Recreation Ground.

But lo, then, to the complete astoundment of everyone of us ! Who, at that time, did we descry coming hastily towards us—all in a broil and quite out of breath ?— the very clergyman who had been engaged to officiate at the nuptials.

"To the total exclusion of all respectable people, the church is almost surrounded," he said, addressing Marimemonia's papa, "by the ruffianly myrmidons of one Noxey Fob, ready at a concerted signal to perform any malicious deed. Moreover, by the rarest chance imaginable, I also got wind that they designed to lay violent hands on the bridegroom here, and enforce him into a vehicle all ready waiting for the purpose of his abduction."

My heart jumped again at this !

"Being a man of peace, after giving the matter mature thought, I deemed it prudent to eschew any scene of turbulence by coming to meet you and



recommending the sacred function to be held at your own house.”

His reverence had scarcely as much as cleared his throat, when a rider in hot haste approached to give the information that there were a formidable party gone on horseback for the purpose of doing some baleful depredation at Walliwalli Villa : on their coming to know that the parson had closed up the edifice and made his decampment, as they surmised, to the country residence.

Marimemonia, who throughout the whole of this hubbub had not been in the slightest degree disconcerted, then thus spoke—more by way of a jest, as I took it, than anything else— “Why, bother it all ! can’t the thing be done right off in the centre of the Maze here—see, right at hand. Oh, la ! wouldn’t it look so romantic ?”

At the first, this advice of Marimemonia's was treated as being inapposite, frivolous and nonsensical. Yet, on further weighing the matter well over, the scheme did not appear to be at all a bad one, providing that his Reverence had no objection.

After further deliberating, the result turned out that, by the aid of a guide, in a few minutes more the party found themselves in the very centre of this famous labyrinth.

But alas, alas—there were still in store for us a much more painful, vexatious, and perplexing crisis than ever. The focus of interest now shifted to Noxey Fob himself.

Arriving—wherever he had sprang from—at the outside of the place at the very instant almost that we arrived at the inside!

A good job it was that, though near, we were in a way far apart.

He commenced his hostile efforts by bellowing out, like a “bull” of Basin— “Look you here, look you here ! I’ll very soon spoil this wretched little game of yours—cunning, and all, as you take yourselves to be ; I’ll very

soon make Fro, there, dance to and fro on hot cinders I will.”

A little further on, had it not been out of place on the occasion, one might have felt disposed to burst out with uncontrollable laughter whilst espying, over the half-grown plants, the manner that Mr. Fob fumed, writhed, wriggled, circled, twirled, twisted, halted, advanced and retired, in his phrensical efforts to get to the middle. Howling vehemently out all the while threats of terrible consequence.

At every enforced pull-up on coming thump up against a blind ally, he would stand a minute or two, giving his head a vicious scratch, and ejuculate—“Darn the plaguy, pestering place—darn it, darn it, I say !”

Bravely, however, despite the interruption, the service was proceeded with. When concluded, another grave matter had to be thought over, which was this—“how were we to get out and effect a riddance of such a formidable and enraged miscreant ?”

Just while we were talking over this difficulty together, a sweet concord of shrill voices came floating through the air—voices which had only to be once heard, as I had heard them, to know who they belonged to. Such were Queen Gismorelborom and her Elphin followers ; but, of course, anyone versed in fairy lore would know quite well that they could not appear visible under the light of day; still, for all that, they could be plainly heard, and chanting the words of the following ditty : —

Periwinkle, tip, tip toe !  
Queery, peery, peep, peep bo !  
Perplex'd mortals this much know,  
We attend where o'er you go;  
The good to shield, the bad to bow,  
Now Tipwip here will show you so.

The very moment this spiritual stave wound up—TipWip must have been alert—an ass grazing hard by,

suddenly raised a deafening vociferous “he-haw, he-haw !”

Coupled with this lugubrious noise, the company became paralysed with profound amazement on their then observing Noxey somehow escape clean out of the Maze, and in a mad helter-skelter manner fly towards the donkey—all the while paying the most extravagant adulations to the dun, shaggy brute, calling— "O ! my blessed, blessed pearl, Marimemnonia. My peerless ruby, beyond all price, I am coming. Noxey ! your Noxey, has heard your dulcet voice, and he's coming."

On his proceeding as though he were about to hug this very rarely flattered kind, the long-eared One let its hind-quarters fly up in the air with the force of a discharge of dynamite, sending Noxey spinning right slap-bang into the lake, as dead as Titus Audronicus. People maintain that his carcass forms the foundation of the Islet—the nearest to the Brooklin Bridge. Possibly that may be all nonsense ; however, the above Islet goes by the name of Noxey—yea, even to this very day.

## EPILOGUE—

To a burrowing stream,  
Life likened may be;  
With restricted light's beam,  
From the source to the sea.

Lo ! nearer and farer,  
Distant worlds are shown;  
To know that they are there,  
Nearly's all that is known.

In this world of ours,  
Subtle mysteries abound ;  
Having depth of hidd'n powers,  
Beyond man's wit to sound.

There's a push or a pull,  
With all things on the move ;  
Time, but builds to annul,  
Nothing stable does prove.  
Do our best in our age,  
And no duty disown ;  
The good Fairies assuage,  
If we mean to get on.