MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

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MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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CHAPTER I
DOWN FAIRYLAND WAY

Fairyland! Fairyland!

There was to be high revel in Fairyland. From far and wide, from uphill and down dale, from here, there and all about, the little people were to gather in the Violet Valley.

Oberon and Titania were coming, as well as Mab, Puck, Gloriana, Tinkerbell, and innumerable unnamable others of the princes, thrones, dominations, powers of Elfdom.

Pixies, gnomes, kelpies, sprites, brownies, sylphs, every shadow and shape owning allegiance to the Fairy King, would endeavour to be at that congress of the mimic immortals.

It was a red-letter night in the history of the aristocratical democracy: the greatest occasion of the kind since the year One.

To-morrow would be Mayday, and midnight was not just yet.

Nightingales were tuning, preparing. The air was honeyed with the scent of flowers.

A round white moon looked from a shining sky on the Violet Valley. It lingered; travelled tardily across mountains and spaces of leisurely-drifting clouds, waiting with its best dilatoriness, intending to see all that was possible of the approaching revels.

It looked upon and lighted a scene of young-leaved trees, grass of the freshest green, new-come flowers, and sparkling waters. The world which is always beautiful wore its best loveliness then.

That was Fairyland.

Far away northwards there was a lurid, hazy glow in the sky. Red, vast and vague it loomed, obliterating the stars beyond, marking the place where Fairyland was not.

That was the shadow which shone over London.

In the country there was peace–absolute peace; then, mellowed by distance, the chimes of a church clock.

Twelve! The fairy-time had come.

At once a nightingale began its emotional song; and others, scattered on many trees, gradually joined in the throbbing chorus. Every moment their melody grew in joyousness, and, ever spreading, roused nightingales on still more distant trees to join in the anthem of rapture, until every glade in Fairyland was happier for their happiness.

There was some reed-fringed water in the centre of the Violet Valley. It was a pond or lake, according to the charity and imagination of the mortal who looked at it. To the fairies it was a lake, large and estimable enough for their most ambitious purposes.

A bright light appeared in the depths of that water, and slowly uprose till it reached the surface, when the nymph of the pool appeared. She sat, a shining figure, on a water-leaf and waved a glistening wand.

In prompt obedience gnomes appeared. Pell-mell, up they came tumbling, a multi-coloured host, every one with shining face and as full of excitement, activities and the thousand mischiefs as is the moonlit night of shadows. So rapidly they swarmed, elbowing, scrambling, hustling, stumbling, clambering, from hidden holes and grass-shrouded crannies of earth that actually slender paths were worn bare by their hurrying feet. From the branches of trees they dropped, over hillocks of grass they hastened, to prepare for the revels. The gnomes are the democracy of the Elf countries, and, like some of us mortals, are the folk who do the necessary drudging work.

They set to labour with willingness. Not often had fairy eyes seen such obvious earnestness to be well done with irksome business. Weeds, which are really weeds, nauseous and mischievous, and not flowers become unpopular, were carefully uprooted and packed away, fuel to feed the fires of brownies' anvils; a

broad tract of green was made flawless that fairies might dance there unhindered; glow-worms were coaxed or forcibly carried to places where their blue-white lights would be at once ornamental and useful; dew was scattered broadcast to reflect from myriad points the diamond moonlight; the lamps of the flowers were trimmed and lit, and soon, from all sides, were shedding gentle radiance. Dreams came drifting down from the opal spaces.

While the gnomes worked they whistled–not fairy songs, now; but snatches of lame melodies borrowed from holiday mortals. It was a hotch-potch of sounds, a sizzling blur, not so unpleasing. Gnomes are rather fond of that sort of thing. Their ear for music is, possibly, imperfect.

Presently there was trouble. Bim was a centre of petty uproar.

He was a gnome, very young as they go; and, from top to toe, red as a holly-berry.

While his work-brothers rushed and bustled, Bim was languid. Even Monsieur Chocolat himself could hardly have been less useful. He did his best–little better than nothing; but then he was very tired.

All that day and through the previous night he had been travelling. From the distant Land of Wild Roses he had toiled, following laboriously the course over which a company of fairies had easily flown or danced. They had been hastening to the valley of revels; and he must needs come too, because June was amongst them.

It had been–such a journey! The mere remembrance of the toil caused him to ache through every one of his six inches.

He had started on the previous evening, the instant the moon had peeped above the horizon. The fairy contingent had preceded him some hours earlier. He had only the vaguest notion of the way to take, never having been out of the Land of Wild Roses before.

Three things kept him, more or less, to the right track. He saw now and then solitary fairies on the wing wending their ways towards the place of assembly; more frequently, he passed flowers of sweetness so refreshed that evidently they had been touched by beneficent wands but recently. Thrice owls, hooting, had spared a word of advice and direction to the persevering wanderer.

The moon, which lighted his pathway, had followed her course till lost in the shine of morning. The stars had brightened and quivered and gone. The sun had lived his period of hours; the birds had worked and sung, the flowers and grasses had waved through a long bright April day, and still the determined gnome had laboriously journeyed on, following the flight of the fairy June.

Bim had been several times led astray through his ignorance, but all his wanderings, stumblings and weariness could not dim or lessen his determination. He rested but once, sleeping for a sunny hour in a welcome bedroom of

nightshade and nettles in white blossom. At last he came to the turning of his long, long lane.

Now he was in the Violet Valley, and pressed with the others of his below-stairs brethren to the work of preparation: and he could not. He had the full weariness of a new arrival. Those of the gnomes, even those who had journeyed long distances, had been able to rest before labouring. There was no such fortune for Bim. Here he was, and at once he must do his share. A great many gnomes, noticing his languor, ceased work altogether to insist that he did not shirk.

So there was uproar. Five minor tyrants–self-appointed foremen–began to kick him. Bim squealed like a tin whistle; then justice, in the person of the nymph of the pool, intervened.

And thereby hangs this tale.

One word from the water-fairy was enough to release Bim from his persecutors, and to send them hurriedly to work again–till all preparation was ended and the Violet Valley was ready for rejoicing.

"Gnome," said the nymph, "you must be young as spring-time, or you would not have come so far and arrived so late. You are, I see, from the Land of the Wild Rose. So was I. So is June–our June. You shall be favoured. Lie under that dock-leaf; keep still and take rest. You shall see the best of the wonders. Lucky gnome!"

Bim obeyed, creeping to the hiding-place and lying there, resting, his eyes alight, as quietly as a mouse with suspicions.

The gnomes, their business well ended, ran to points of vantage. They clambered along boughs, clung to tree-creepers and shrubbery, like blobs of living fruit. Cross-legged they perched on mounds, whistling, singing, playing impish pranks, chaffing and chiding one another, in all the happiness of easy idleness. They were the jolliest mob in Fairyland that night. There was not a grumble in the whole assembly.

Then the fairies began to arrive.

From here and there, like musical snowflakes, they fell, flying down from the skies. They sparkled like gems, their wands were pointed with brilliance, their wings shone with iridescence, their garments were spangled gossamer. As each elf-knight alighted, he folded his wings and marched, with lance or slender sword upraised, to an appointed place, and stood there attentive, waiting, while in myriad gnome-voices the heroes were acclaimed. As every gentle fairy came to earth, she tripped or lightly flew over the dancing-ground and sat or reclined among the flowers. The Violet Valley was thronged with a thousand pictures of loveliness and enchantment.

All the while the gathering proceeded they and the fairies were singing a world-old fairy-song. The bells of Elfland musically jangled.

Bim and the stars were delighted. So was the moon. Fairy horns and trumpets pealed: a fanfare of welcome rang with echoes over the higher-land grasses. For here are the royalties!

A procession worth seeing slowly approached and passed. The pride and panoply of mortal pageantry is tinsel and crudeness in comparison with what the fairies can do.

Leading came a bodyguard of gnomes, looking quaint and important in their warlike furniture. Their round faces, wearing expressions of tremendous seriousness, their goggle-eyes, and legs, some spindle, others bandy as half-way hoops, gave a sort of pantomime poetry to the proceedings.

"Shiar-shiar-shiar!" shouted their commander in his best militarese.

They halted, turned inwards in two long lines, stepped backwards, leaving a generous space between, and shuffled into comparative exactness of places. They were ranged in companies, according to colour, the pride of position belonging to the sky-blue and grass-green companies.

Following came the flower of fairy chivalry. Knights, whose duty it is to control and imprison the dragons which long ages ago terrified and destroyed humanity, passed along, proudly cheered. Down into fiery depths of earth these happy warriors go, and there, with infinite courage, flashing swords and magic spears, do battle with and awe the flame-breathing furies, preventing their escape to earth, where they would wreak mischief, work havoc, and destroy. Fortunate for us–if only we knew it–that we have the fairies to rid us of these monsters and keep them in restraint. Banish the elves from our imaginings and many hidden horrors would rise again. The old forgotten terrors and a million uglinesses which ever threaten us would resume their evil reigns. Banish the elves, indeed!

There were knights tried by all manners of adventure, thousand-year-old young heroes whose efforts always help in the battle of right against wrong. They are the joyous chevaliers. The fairies are bright, as their services have been beneficent. The best of the warriors are as dazzling as sunlight at noontide; and as the knights marched in inverse order to their prowess and worth, the most meritorious and honourable last, the procession became brighter and brighter as it progressed, till only elf-eyes could have endured its absolute brilliancy. It was as a rippling river of light, travelling through fields of melody.

Bim, to whom all this was a magnificent dream, trembled with excitement and awe. He had heard tales of majestic doings, told by gnomes who had made adventures and seen; but nothing before had sounded so fine as the mere shadow of this. He lay in his burrow, snug; and repeatedly pinched his leg to remind himself of his wonderful good luck.

He saw the knights group themselves in a wide semicircle round a double-throne, gem-built and golden, made by moonbeams and magic out of a nest of

wild-growth. Jack o' Lantern, Will o' the Wisp, and their shivering green company kept guard about it.

Goblins gathered on a poplar-tree.

Then after an interval came perfection at its best, sweetness in all its qualities, loveliness beyond adjectives–the fairies who watch the flowers in their building, and tend them that they may give generously of their treasures in scent, colour and brightness; who teach birds music and win from them their finest songs; who carry day-dreams to those who require them–they only bring some of the dreams of night; who help Santa Claus during his Christmas mission; who put hopes in the hearts of the weary. They flew slowly, on fluttering wings, just over the grass: the beads of dew beneath glistening sharply, a thousand thousand points, reflections. Last of that chapter of the marvellous procession came one whom the lookers-on acclaimed with ardour–the heroine of that silver night.

"June! June! June!"

In her honour all this rejoicing was made. The great event of that calendar night was to be the crowning of June.

Then with new trumpetings came Oberon and Titania, the most puissant of kings and queens; whose realms and governance extend from the depths beneath, where the brownies in their fire-shops labour and create, to the high-built hidden palaces of the clouds. All castles in the air are in the kingdom of Oberon. Remember that! The royalties of Fairyland are royal indeed.

They were accompanied by an escort of princes and princesses, of knights, elves, and gnomes; until the procession ended.

Oberon and his queen sat on the double throne. He raised his sceptre in signal; the revels began. Many of the fairies who had been waiting, thereupon ran to the dancing-green, and on wings and feet as light and graceful as moonbeams on flowing water, danced. It was a vision of loveliness, the perfect poetry of music and motion. And so it went on and on, a kind of dream and of worship, till every one of the fairies had sung and danced her share.

All the while there was the singing of elf-songs, to an accompaniment of nightingale voices, and joyous feasting on honeyed nectar and cates, the produce of fairy kitchens.

The moon drifted along, jealous of the passing clouds which occasionally veiled her view, watching, and, from her loneliness, rejoicing with the fairies in their joy.

Till Oberon arose. The birds ceased their songs. An owl hooted five times. Bim, forgetting caution, came boldly out of his hiding-place, the better to watch. The king raised an opal cup and gave the word:

"June!"

Every voice in Fairyland echoed him. The woods repeated the name:

”June! June! June!”

CHAPTER II
THE MADNESS OF JUNE

Throughout the revels June was sitting but three hand’s-breadth distance from Bim, so that he–who is our chief authority for these pages of history–better than anyone else could see, hear, and know all that happened in Fairyland on that very, very young May morning.

June had been sitting there smiling, enjoying herself supremely. It was hard for her to believe that this banquet of sheer delight was entirely to her honour. Even Oberon, Titania, and those others whose names are as immortal as the passing pages of the books of humankind can make them, were there in a new relation–her subjects for the time being.

The crowning was the only event which remained undone: it was the culmination of the revels, and would not happen until the cock which crows in the last of the morning darkness had duly squawked and shrilled.

Every year in Elfland the fairy credited with the greatest number of kind doings, as entered in the Golden Book of Bosh, wears the magic crown which the spirits of Merlin, Prospero, and Michael Scott met to make and charge with their mystic powers on a howling night of eclipse. Five-and-twenty sheeted spectres had watched its making and guarded the crown when made. It had been transported to the valley wherein Dante met Virgil, to Ariel’s Island, to the Hill of Tara, to that Valley of Shadow in which Christian fought Apollyon–who was Abaddon, to the altar in the Chapel of Arthur’s Palace at Camelot, to the Never-Never-Never Land; and in each of those places had rested for a year and a day, gathering the mystical, magical powers of the place.

Now by unanimous acclaim, June was again the chosen favourite. For the second time in succession she had won the crown–a circumstance unique! Never before in the long annals of Fairyland–in comparison with which any mere national history is but the record of a few stained and noisy days–had such a circumstance been. That was why there was so great a gathering; why all the notables–and Bim–were there!

The crown which, with its changing colours, sparkled with brightness better than sunshine had been placed on a cushion before the throne. During the

revels, chosen knights–proud sentinels–stood guard over it; the brightest eyes of Elfdom watched it then. June watched it too.

But there was something which, even in that hour of magic and of triumph, troubled and perplexed her, and drew away her attention from the revels. It was as a shadow of sorrow overhanging the happiness; the only blur on a condition of perfect contentment and peace.

Where she sat, facing Oberon and Titania, she also faced that vague and lurid glow which showed where Fairyland was not. It was strange and weirdly troublesome to her. There was no such dismal shadow over any part of the Land of Wild Roses, and never before during her previous visits to the Violet Valley had she seen that brooding glare. But now its ugly glory oppressed her. Again and again it won her eyes from the happiness, and filled her heart with a growing burden of pain.

The owl had hooted. "June! June! June!" had come the king's, and then the universal, cry.

Chanticleer gave the note for the crowning.

The king rose, took the crown from the chief of the knights attending, and raised it that all of Fairyland might see. The singing and the laughter died away, and were hushed to a tremendous silence.

June flew towards Oberon, but suddenly stopped, and gave a cry of pain.

There was wild excitement at this. It belied experience, was an unkind precedent, made the long night's harmony suddenly crooked and awry. What ailed June that she should act so? The fairies with all their wisdom were impotent to read the mystery.

But soon June made it plain. She pointed her wand at the glow beyond, and cried:

"Evil! Evil!"

Every gnome, elf, fairy–all–turned to look at the vague red light over the far-away city. Oberon and Titania alone did not move, but gazed at June, solemnity in their eyes. They knew.

"June," said the king to her, "that light is the shame of Fairyland. No one of our glad company can live beneath it. It is the land of unhappy ghosts, where the shadows called men make and endure infinite ugliness, shame and pain. Slowly the fairies who would have loved and helped them have been driven away."

"I must go there," June said.

"No, no!" cried Titania, hurriedly stepping down from her throne, and clasping the fairy's shoulder, holding her wings.

"We can't spare you, June," said the king. The hearkening elves sang agreement with him. "It is all quite hopeless. Time was when the fairies ruled in London and the other great towns, and were believed in, welcomed, appreciated. In

those days England was called 'Merrie,' and deserved the joyous name. Then things began to change. Men became less in sympathy with the beautiful and the unseen; their faith in us dwindled. They wanted more than they should have done the dross called riches; and in following and finding wealth lost much of their welfare. It was a sad experience for fairies, who one by one deserted the wilderness of streets and went to their work in the country. The condition of the towns grew worse and worse. Then came that age of material progress, the Mid-Victorian Period—-"

"You should have seen their wall-paper, my dear!" Titania interposed.

"And in despair the last of the fairies went!"

June sighed.

"Is it hopeless?" she asked.

"Hopeless, hopeless!" declared the king solemnly. "Only Death can do away with that wilderness–Death and his cousin Decay. More than that, the men there would not be helped by us if we would. They are vain. They have no love for the fairies. They like their grime and their grubbing. They hoard their dross and tinsel, and are greedy about it. That world of stone and shadow beneath the red haze is marked with doom. Let it alone, June, as we have done and are doing. Fairyland is large enough, and can spare to mortals those blotted areas."

June hid her face in her hands and shed fairy tears. Tears on that night of triumph! A flower, close by, in sympathy quivered and put out its lamp. Titania felt her royal firmness oozing out of her wings.

"Let her go, Oberon! Why should not fairies go even to the wilderness if they can help there?"

"I cannot spare them," he answered.

"We should spare them," the queen asserted. June raised her head to listen.

"Titania?" said Oberon, in surprise.

"The fairies ought not to have left London to ugliness," the queen exclaimed; "besides–is it so ugly as you in your eloquence make out?"

"Titania?"

"Even if the fairies have deserted London–and shame to us for it–many men and women, strengthened and inspired by us, have been doing fairy-work there. I am not so sure that London is so hopeless!"

"Titania?"

"May not June go?" the queen then asked.

"I said 'No!'" Oberon declared with loud authority.

"You are as obstinate as ever," Titania observed impatiently. "Since you played your trick on me with that oaf–that clown–that donkey's head; and foolishly I gave way to your tricks and pleading, you have been—-"

"Silence, Titania! You are my own dearest queen; but I am your king and

the king of Fairyland. I forbid June to go."

There was an end of the suggestion.

Applause, loud and long, greeted the royal pronouncement. The elves did not wish their favourite to go. They feared for her. Titania, realizing that the last word was said, for the time being–what a model for some!–returned to her place by Oberon's side, and June roused her drooping happiness.

"Now, fairies," cried the king, "the triumph song!"

They sang. All sang, proudly, proudly! How it rose, swelled, rolled in a volume of musical delight, over the tree-tops, waking any birds that foolishly might have been sleeping, compelling them by its power, joy and confidence to share the grand chorus.

Only June, of all the bright multitude on which the moon then looked, was silent; only she, though sharing in the pride and happiness–how could she have done otherwise?–stood, seemingly unemotional, there. She was thinking, thinking, thinking of the great dim wilderness, whose crowded wretchedness, referred to by the king, called for the gifts and presence of the fairies, and could not enjoy them!

"Oh, sad city," whispered she to herself, while her comrades were singing the triumph song. "Oh, pitiful shadows, foolishly imprisoned there!"

Dawn came creeping up. The moon grew pale with annoyance that daylight was coming to close the revels. The more timid of the stars closed eyes and went to sleep. Only the boldest lights in the greying sky fought against the progress in the east.

Then the song ended–dying out with a note of long-drawn content, the sigh of satisfied victory. There was silence again except for the awakened birds, which, well aware of the rapidly approaching day, chattered and twittered with increasing energy, careless of the history happening beneath them.

June was stirred from her inopportune reverie by the touch of the crown which Oberon, descending from his throne, placed upon her.

A great shout went up.

"June, June, June!"

That was the moment of her triumph. It was the moment of her madness too.

The touch of the mystic rim quickened her indefinite aspirations and sharpened her sadness. She would go! Not Oberon and all his fairies should prevent her. The crown–charged with mighty powers–gave her strange new determination and an influence more potent far than she had ever possessed before. That town-world might be hopeless, but she would not say so till she herself was convinced of it. She would go to London.

Oberon, watching her face, was aware of this fleeting debate in her mind

and the disobedient decision. He is the gentlest knight in Fairyland, and for June, who deserved so well of everyone, had an especial reverence and affection. That she should disobey his public command would be almost as hurtful to his pride as allowing a dragon, pent in its subterranean prison, to escape.

"June," he said to her gently, "you will go back to your home in the Land of Wild Roses. A hundred of the fairest knights will guard you and the crown–your precious burden. You will go at once. The revels are ended."

Daylight filled the sky. The moon was a pallid shadow of her former self; the stars had become invisible. The birds, self-centred, were flying hither and thither, bustling about for the wherewithal to live and to help live. One by one the flowers put out their ineffectual lamps.

Ordinarily, the fairies would have decamped forthwith; the gnomes in weary, grumbling, clumsily-clambering pell-mell, every one of them with the fear at his elbow that he might be chosen for some fatigue duty–as our straight-backed friends of the scarlet tunic expressively call it. But on this occasion they stayed. Not an elf stirred. Everyone stared and wondered.

"Was June in disgrace?" they asked of each other, "and if so, why?"

The questions were answered by further questions. There was a jostling of inquiries without any progress made. Rumours rioted. It had been a night indeed!

Again June made appeal.

"Let me go just to see–for only one day and a night!"

"Not for one hour can you go," the king obstinately replied. "Men through their meanness and worldliness have driven the fairies away. We went regretfully, unwillingly; but we went, at last, absolutely. There are innumerable homes of men-folk where the elves are believed in and are welcome. We carry our gifts to them. There the children have smiling eyes and happy faces: but in the narrow world of mean streets and mistaken people, over which that glare is a pall, the children fade, are shrunken, neglected, have some of them forgotten how to smile."

"That is enough!" cried June, and she looked straight at Oberon. "Wherever the children are neglected the fairies ought to go. How can you blame the people for being mean and the places ugly if the elves are forbidden entrance there? Great king, I go!"

In the most daring manner, she raised her wand, made profound obeisance, and was off, like light. Her wings shimmered in the shining of the rising sun.

Fairies started forward to stop her; but she was away before they could do so.

"I told you so!" said Titania, to nobody in particular.

"Stay, all of you," loudly commanded the king. "June has gone wilfully, and

must suffer. I would not use the smallest power in Fairyland to bring her back. She has gone disobediently. She can return when she will. I will not send for her. She has gone foolhardily, and must endure alone. We are all of us sorry. There will be no more elfin revels till June has come back again."

"The crown! She has taken that!" said Titania.

Oberon echoed the queen's words. "She has taken that. It cannot perish. June cannot keep it beyond the year. She will have to bring it back then, or earlier. Now, fairies, May-day has come. To your homes and the daytime labours. Away, away! The revels have ended indeed!"

Then there was hurry on the part of the gnomes. Oberon and Titania and their sparkling company flew in a long procession on a winding aerial course, to the palace of the king, which is hidden from eyes of men on an Irish mountain.

They were there in a twinkling. Wink thrice and a fairy's journey is ended, though it be over deserts and beyond seas. It is not so with the gnomes. They must labour and struggle along, like mice and men. But the winged lords and ladies of Elfdom are the happy fortunate. They can put Time in a thimble when they please, and play leap-frog with continents.

In less than three and a half minutes, as measured by a well-behaved clock, the Violet Valley was deserted by all but the birds and Bim. Even the nymph of the lake was invisible. She had sunk to the depths of her pellucid palace the moment June made her bold decision.

Bim waddled to the place where the throne had been. It was rank wild-growth again. No one not a fairy could have dreamed that such a sight had been there but a fragment of time before. He threw himself at full length–such a little full length–on the grass where June had been standing, and thought for a long while with his very best wits.

He made a soliloquy.

"King Oberon said we were not to go. He said that June was to come back alone. He said no one was to follow her. I shall be punished if I go. Pricks and pains and aches and beatings! Ugh! But would that be worse than Fairyland without June? No, it would not. Fairyland will not be Fairyland to me without June. I am going after her; Oberon can beat me till I'm blue." So declaring, he sprang to his feet.

"Brave gnome!" said a voice behind him.

Bim turned about in fright. The courage which had risen during his soliloquy went–pluff!–like an unset jelly.

The nymph of the lake had spoken. She had returned, and stood again on her leaf in the middle of the pool. He was pleased to see she looked at him in the friendliest manner.

"We are behaving very badly indeed in being so disobedient," she said; "but

June is from the Land of Wild Roses. So are you and I. Go to her, gnome. She is alone, and even you from Falkland–I beg your pardon for putting it so–are better than nothing. I have no counsel to give you but keep a stout heart. You will need it. You don't know the way!"

Here was the truth. Bim was an expert in ignorance.

"You will find June in the wilderness of stone and evil. In the daytime it is covered by cloud and fog. In the night-time the red glare of lights reflected shines over it. That is what to follow and where to go. When you come back I will find a gift for you. Away with you. Go!"

Bim went.

CHAPTER III
PARADISE COURT

There are many Paradise Courts in London. The one which comes into this story is identifiable from the fact that a public-house is by its entrance.

Probably this hostelry has given the court its name, for it was the nearest approach to anything of an Eden character which that blotted part of existence held.

The public-house has been known at various times by different names–The Red Lion, The Green Man, The Blue Dragon, The Queen's Head. Possibly it is spoken of by another name now, for its management has always changed pretty frequently, and almost as frequently celebrated the occasion with a new title. It may perhaps be called "The Laughter of June"–who knows?–but digressions are sinful, when they anticipate. These facts are stated to help the reader to find the Paradise Court of the story–if he wants to.

To describe Paradise Court is to tell the picture of one or other of more than a thousand of the mean ways of London. It was narrow and flagged, with cracked slabs of cold stone; was utterly dismal, dingy, dull. Its tenements were brown with years of smoked atmosphere; the windows stained, or stuffed with paper, or empty of glass; the doors, broken gates, giving entrance to inner realms of squalor and nakedness. There is no place on earth more thoroughly hopeless and ugly than was that dismal colony of condemned humanity. The makers of Hell would probably be ashamed to imitate this limbo, where the poorest of the poor crowded and managed to exist.

Hunger and fear were unfading terrors in Paradise Court. Every room was haunted with the tragedy which never dies. No tears were shed there, for the heart which knows despair is dry as a river of sand. In Paradise Court only the babies could have any glimmer of hope, they being utterly ignorant and unable to know. The others were mere mute bodies, too hurt and heavily burdened to feel weary and sore.

There were dangerous brawls sometimes amongst the Paradise Courtiers–they hit their hardest and cunningest to kill; but, fortunately, used fists or sticks–though sometimes the boot found play, and always fought with drink-muddled senses. The men, women and children there knew how to blaspheme: and though the range of language in use was limited, it was violent enough for any ordinary occasion. Sometimes the supply of available adjectives was insufficient for a very special purpose, and then Jim, Bill and 'Arry, Sal, 'Arriett and Liz, repeated themselves unconscionably. The ears of the neighbourhood were not sensitive, which, perhaps, was as well.

Once upon a time a policeman, presuming on his proper faith in a new uniform and the truncheon in his trouser pocket, followed and tried unaided to capture a sneak-thief who had found refuge in its Alsatian sanctuary. When the policeman emerged from the court empty-handed, he was limp and battered; and report–on the lips of the curate, who heard it from someone, who was told by so-and-so, who learned it from somebody else–asserts that his lost truncheon was used thereafter promiscuously to settle private quarrels with. Since that ill-advised adventure, the police only entered the place when they had to, and then went in adequate numbers. Paradise Court had become an independent republic, where the King's authority had ceased to run, and, in effect, was a little farther out of civilization than the forests of Mumbo-Jumbo.

There were fourteen houses in the Court, with five rooms in each, a passage and flight of stairs. On an average four persons slept in every room, and in the summer months the stairs had their occupants, so that the population of the place was as near three hundred as need be.

Paradise Court was, in brief, a piece of Black Country, given back to Chaos and old Night, the haunt of such terrors as are bred of insanitation, rack-rents, thriftlessness, drunkenness, extreme poverty, utter and absolute neglect. It was one of many wens in the metropolitan wilderness.

On every side of it London stretched; immediately about it were clattering thoroughfares, with hurrying streams of life, constant processions of rumbling and jingling vehicles, and buildings, buildings, buildings, streets after streets of them, nearly every one looking jaded, faded, an edifice–fine word!–in despair. Only the public-houses remained clothed in glaring, brave livery, and looked prosperous and vulgarly perky.

June found herself in Paradise Court in the course of that May-day afternoon. How she got there, even she did not know.

Out in the country her journey had been plain flying. She had skimmed over the fields and hills like light in a happy hurry. But gradually the air became heavier, and her wings, which in a joyous atmosphere could have moved unweariedly for almost an eternal time, lagged. She struggled along bravely, and, not for the shred of a moment, wavered in her purposes: but eventually, bewildered by the clamour beneath her, the closeness and thick smoke, which overhung everything–there was the pall which, lighted, was visible from Fairyland–felt her powers vanquished. She tried all her arts–the fairy arts–to make the way easier; but the spoilt air of London oppressed her–it was to her–who more sensitive?–as fiery breath from dragon's nostrils, nauseous.

The crown pressed on her brow with a heavy rim of pain. She clung to remembrance of the children who needed her.

She became as helpless in the hands of circumstance as a snowflake, the sport of winds; was borne hither and thither, buffeted up and down as though mighty mischiefs made her their shuttlecock.

For hours she was hustled along in this condition of blind bewilderment: and then–slap!–felt herself brought sharply against a window-pane, for all the world as if she were a blind wasp or blue-bottle imprisoned in a summer room. She tumbled and clung desperately to the rough stone sill whereon she found herself; and there rested, breathless, draggled, exhausted.

She was the tiredest fairy in and out of Christendom.

So June found Paradise Court.

She rapidly recovered, and looked about her.

"This is very, very ugly," said she to herself. "The fairies can't have been here for ages."

She touched the dingy window-pane with her wand. The glass divided and opened inwards, as if its two parts were separately hinged; but the atmosphere of the room was so old and very evil that June waved the wand and closed the pane in a hurry. Human eyes, examining the glass, ever so carefully, would have been positive it had never been parted. Brothers, how blind we are!

"Can the fairies ever have been there!" murmured June to herself.

She cleared the pane with wishes. It became so clear and burnished that the glass itself seemed invisible; and then, pressing forward eagerly, she looked inside the room, and examined mankind in one of its cages.

"It is a good thing they are shadows, and cannot know or feel very much. If they were as real as we are, that would be bad–bad! Even now I should like to turn them into sparrows; they would be far more fortunate so. Poor people! And there is a child!"

The sight of Sally Wilkins working constantly with ever-weary hands, made June so to tremble and shake with agitation, that she nearly dropped her wand and fell from the sill; but once more she clung with her infinitesimal hands to the narrow column of wooden framework, and, beginning now to feel indignant and angry, looked still more eagerly into the room.

The picture she saw was, alas! not uncommon. Ten thousand interiors of London life down in the grey parts where grinding Poverty is king, were more or less repetitions of the sight June gazed upon.

Two women squatted on the floor, sewing rapidly, with machine-like steadiness. A third suckled as well as her poor means allowed a feeble baby. The mother stared before her with eyes which were very tired. Unlighted–as grey stones in a hollow face–they gazed at a present and a future, too dreary for dreams. All her life was a stain and a grief. One of the women, her companion, was racked with a consumptive cough.

There was by the inside wall of the room, a pile of half-completed clothing–raw material for sweated needles to work upon–and very little else. There were a frameless looking-glass; a few bottles; a battered beer-pot, stolen from the haunt of liquid happiness at the entrance to the Court; one chair, which served as table, cradle and cupboard, when there was something to hoard underneath it; a verminous straw mattress; and some broken wood, cardboard, and rags–the gleanings of rubbish boxes. That is a complete inventory of the furniture, the ornamental as well as the useful.

On the window-ledge were broken crusts, as stale as the phrases of charity, and a black-handled fork, with pieces of string, cotton, needles, several empty reels, which would make firewood some day, and cards of buttons, the capital and essentials of those women's industry.

June, fresh from the revels of Fairyland, was appalled at her picture, and as near to tears as an indignant fairy could be. She felt hot anger against Oberon.

Then again she gazed at Sally Wilkins and studied the hapless child. The fairy's whole being was eager sympathy and love. June knew Sally's history at once through the influence of her powers and the crown.

That was a child who had never seen a green field, or heard any wild birds singing; though very well she knew, as every town-child must do, the twittering of the pert sparrows in the streets. Sally was a lump of solid ignorance. She had heard of God because His name was some necessary part of several favourite swear-phrases; but of the fairies and other sweet realities she had heard just nothing. She lived–poor lass!–in so narrow and limited a world that she might as well have been born in a grave as to the child's destiny in Paradise Court.

She sewed and she sewed, with hardly a pause–"seam and gusset and band"–though in her case it was buttons and buttons and buttons. So constantly

was she threading her way through the dark material that life was to her nothing more than a dreary pilgrimage into and out of eternal button-holes. Her fingers were the all-important machines. Her brain was dulled: her soul unquickened. She was twelve years old; and composed of skin, bones, hunger and weariness, wrapped in a modicum of Nothing.

June could not endure the sight any more. Her wings quivered with indignation. She touched the window, flew into the room, and alighted on Sally's shoulder.

The child, without her fingers resting from work for the least part of an instant–time means life to the working poor–looked up wondering. Why did she seem suddenly lighter? Was there sunshine in the room? No, everything appeared precisely as before: though–yes, somebody had certainly, through an obvious misunderstanding, been cleaning the window.

June took off the fairy crown and perched it on Sally's tangle of hair. The consequence was amazing.

Sally began to dream for the first time in her life. A new world was opened to her. She was in a wonder country, and felt she had enjoyed as much food as she wanted–plenty of hot gravy. Her thoughts were always drifting on a river of gravy, towards the promise of pudding.

Under her feet was a kind of green hair–grass–far stretches of it, as cool as the night-wind, but infinitely pleasanter. Flowers, looking for all the world as if they had been picked off stuck-up ladies' bonnets, were pushed into the ground, where they waved, looked and smelt as delicious as–more gravy, Sally's only simile.

The sky was strangely blue, and much broader and higher than the London sky ever was. How did they keep it so clear? She could not see a house, but there were any number of trees shading the grass, trees of all sorts and sizes, some so high that their tops tickled the sky; others with branches so broad and full of leaves that a hundred children like herself could have slept without quarrelling in the shade of any one of them. What a very nice world this was!

There was more still, for look at that very round "spadger" with the red breast that perched on a branch, and went twit, twit perkily, and that very large bird–could that be a spadger too?–with brown speckled breast, and that tiny blue upside-down, eager thing with its sweet chirrup, chirrup; and the other mite of a brown creature, with saucily upturned tail; and this scolding black gentleman with his yellow bill; and more birds too, many more. What a lot there were! Why don't we have fellows who look and pipe like them down our court?–and don't they sing cheerily? My!

There is one going up and up, as if it were climbing a round stairway which couldn't be seen, singing all the while like–like–a tune gone balmy. Sally could

hear the soft prevailing sound, and opened her eyes wide–to hear better! There was a brown cliff, and down, tumbling with much splashing and thudding, came water in a shining flood. At first she shivered–water is so cold, and cleansing; but the fright went suddenly when Sally, examining herself, found that though she had no recollection of the horrible process of washing, she was quite clean. So she need not wash, and could, without fear, admire the falling water. Hooray! This was a splendid country. She revelled in its light, warmth, freedom, happiness.

There were loud unsteady footsteps on the stairs. June removed the crown, without removing the sweetness of the dream-world from Sally, and flew to the empty keyhole to reconnoitre.

A man, one of the masters of Paradise Court, was stumbling upstairs, making hob-nail progress. He was mazed; because of the public-house at the corner–the nearest place where the community could discover the correct time. Long experience of similar circumstances safely guided his feet up that rickety rat-haunted staircase, and he lurched into the room, clumsily kicking the door to after he had entered. June hovered over him, flew round and round his head, and still more puzzled his foolish wits.

"'Ave I got 'em?" he asked most seriously, and stared at the revolving wall.

The three women looked at him listlessly. One spoke.

"Shut yer jaw, Bill," she said, and paused to thread her needle. "'Ullo, brought some beer?" she continued, when she saw the tin can he dangled. "Give us a drop, mate!"

June, steadying herself by grabbing his stubbly beard–for fairies are not entirely impervious to the law of gravitation–leaned forward and, just as he had said "Garn! I brought it for—-" touched his lips with her wand. He substituted "Sally" for "myself."

Bill put the beer-can on the chair, and rallied himself with an effort.

"I *am* drunk!" he asserted most seriously, as though a mighty uncertainty had suddenly been put straight.

Sally was still in the green joy-land, whereto June had enchanted her; but she took the can dreamily, and put it to her lips.

That was too much for the man. He stooped forward and grabbed the can.

"Not 'arf!" he said, as he took it from her, spilling some of the contents.

Sally's thoughts were torn from the trance-world. She was snatched from the green dream-country, brought back summarily to the hungry, grey realities of the present. She looked at Bill, and then blasphemed fluently. June, horrified by the child's fierce anger, touched her lips with the wand. Sally was obediently silent, though still her mouth moved with muted imprecations. The two women had, meanwhile, gone on with their work, and the mother stared, her eyes two stones.

Bill sprawled on the boards, and pillowed his head and shoulders on the pile of half-completed clothing. He supped at the beer with long luxurious satisfaction, and slowly tumbled into sleep. The emptied can slipped from his fingers and rolled half-way across the room.

June, who in the presence of this experience had been bewildered and unprepared, flew to where it was lying, and contemplated it thoughtfully.

"There has been magic there," she declared, "worse than the evil of witches."

Sally went on with her sewing.

CHAPTER IV
COCKNEYDOM

That night June made her nest among the chimney-pots. There was a broad cleft in the mortar which bound the stack, and a black hammock of thick cobweb swinging as the wind-drift blew upon it. June put the crown for safety underneath her; and, clasping the wand with both her guarding hands, reclined on the cobweb and waited for slumber.

Ordinarily sleep comes to fairies as it comes to birds, instantly and absolutely. But now June could not lose herself in its blessed forgetfulness. For a very long time she lay awake, staring at the veiled sky and listening with strained attention to the eternal throb and hum of the moving life around her.

Very far away, it seemed–far higher than ever in Fairyland it had appeared–the moon was ghostily journeying. There was now no such expression of interest on the lunar countenance, as there had been on the previous night, but dull wakefulness and watchful indifference. All the elves might have run awry and the flowers have withered, for aught the moon appeared to care.

June felt lonely then, especially as not a star was showing, and there were no nightingales. Fairyland seemed millions of miles away. She began to feel strange depression, to fear she had not done well in taking on herself the impossible quest. Just as every Quixote smarts from the despondence of folly, during the cold periods of a divine pilgrimage–so then did she.

June was as dismal as London could make her during those hours of involuntary vigil. As she swung in her cobweb, and stared at the starless mirk, she tried hard to impress on herself the need of her service, and the wisdom of that adventure. Owing to much weariness and the gloom, she took a lot of convincing.

The life of those mortals was truly a sad business. To think of Sally and her grown companions working continually for the sake of mere existence, enduring a life of want and ugliness, with the fairies nowhere near, was truly very sad! All the more need for her to go on and labour.

So it was settled.

The thought was so comforting that her wakefulness came to an end. She fell asleep almost at once, and dreamed she was resting in her own home-bower, in the Land of Wild Roses. Happy cobweb!

The moon went into the clouds, and the hours marched by.

June was awakened by a shrill whistle. A factory called, and the fairy rose.

London at dreary dawn! It was more than ever a dismal scene which greeted her on that grey young morning. Her despairing hopes of the previous evening went down, plumb, to zero. She looked at the miles of black roofs and dingy chimneys. What a hideous world it was! Not so great a wonder, after all, that the elves had determinedly deserted it.

She preened herself carefully, tested both wings to see they were uninjured, fared on the magic food which fairies can, when necessary, make from dew and the west wind, and then felt ready for a day's activities. Her remedial work was to begin at once. To watch evil, and not to check it, was to invite despair and failure; but to displace bad with good was encouraging, and the fairy's business! June put on the crown and began.

Her first duties were with the folk of Paradise Court. She spread wings and was wafted down to the window-ledge. Early as it was, the women and Sally were already labouring with their needles. They were breakfasting while they sewed. Their fare was stale bread, rejected refuse from middle-class tables, and some fearful meat bought–a pound for a penny–from Mother Wolf, a hag in the neighbourhood who made profit by selling offal for human food. How that purveyor of nauseousness escaped the penalties due for so doing is a mystery; but so she did.

Bill was still sleeping, another man by his side. The lords of creation had the pile of clothing to themselves for bed, pillow and quilt. The feminine members of the establishment had managed as well as they might do, lying close together to keep each other warm. That was the usual order of things.

June entered by the magic way of the window, and tickled Bill's nose with her wand. He sneezed, stretched, got up; his first words were just a little lively language–an ungenial good-morning to his companion in luxury, which effectually roused that gentleman.

The men put on their caps–so completing their toilette–yawned, and, without saying a word to the women, went out to look for work. That was their profession–looking for work. They never found it, but ever continued seeking.

They breakfasted on beer, bread and grease at the hostelry which gave joy to Paradise Court. The liquid part of their meal lasted till not another copper could be found, borrowed or cadged. Bill's life was a long process of idleness, blessed with beer.

In the morning the clothing that was finished had to be taken to the tailoring firm in the City for which it was made. The various garments were arranged in a bundle, tied round with one of the treasured pieces of string, and perched on Sally's narrow shoulder. She clasped it tightly with her thin hands, trying to believe it was a baby to be nursed.

June decided to go with Sally, to help her bear the burden. This she managed to do by sitting upon it, using the wonderful wand, and wishing the bundle should seem only a tenth part of its real weight. So it was made to be; but Sally, who had not been encouraged to observe things, or to estimate differences, did not become aware of its lightness. In any case, the burden, even when reduced by June, was full heavy enough for a child of her strength and years. But many another like Sally was bearing a similar burden.

Down the stairs and out of Paradise Court went the girl and the fairy; along a dreary, slippery pavement, passing a thousand people, self-interested, self-centred and hurrying, who might laugh, talk, bustle and frown in their individual ways, but who still to June, as to Oberon and all else of the better land, were poor, pitiful shadows, journeying, worrying, moiling for a few thousand days until the extinguisher was put over them.

Yellow and blue tramcars went jangling by. June, seeing people get into and out of them, was minded to make one of them stop, so that Sally could ride; but it was better this first time for Sally to go her own gait as usual. Anyhow, June was alert to be helpful, and handled her wand as the infant spendthrift fingers his penny, determined to use it as speedily and extravagantly as possible.

Sally toiled along slowly. She kept to the chief road, never daring to relax her hold of the bundle, because of the difficulty of recovering it.

She came to a wide crossing–a tramway and omnibus terminus–and passed through a maze of carts and people. June began to feel frightened because of the clamour and crowding, but soon lost her unworthy fears by remembering that these creatures and things–in comparison with herself–were only shadows, permitted to dwell for a little while in the beautiful world which belongs to the fairies, and others of spirit-land. She had more power in her wand and will than they in any or all of their Brobdingnagian faculties.

June was profoundly impressed by the wonderful powers of the police. The way the helmeted man of authority stood in the midst of the press and ruled it, appealed to her as nothing had done since she had witnessed Oberon in his majesty commanding the shapes and princes in the Violet Valley. As Sally went slowly

by the policemen, June gave each a fairy's blessing. They became thereafter, and are to this day, more than usually polite and attentive to the timid.

Sally plodded along steadily. She passed a pump dripping with water. June saw several fat sparrows before it, squabbling over the corn which had fallen from a horse's nosebag. She went to chide them, as fairies do to birds in the country when their manners would bear mending; but these town sparrows, in their Cockney ignorance, never having seen a fairy, or dreamed there was anything in existence more important than themselves and perhaps some thin stray cat, pecked at her disrespectfully. As she paid no attention to their surliness, they took sudden panic and fled in a fright, chattering at one another in fine unanimous complaint.

June resumed her perch, but now on Sally's hat. She throned herself on its broken brim, and viewed London with exalted detachment.

The squalor was left behind, but to fairy eyes the City was particularly dreary. The buildings withal so heavy, high and ambitious, wore looks of decay, and were stained with grime. The coarseness of the atmosphere, too, was oppressive. What a life! What a place! June could not resist wistfully thinking of that happier world where the flowers are free and soft winds kiss them. She deeply pitied the folk, who, voluntarily or not, were foolishly imprisoned in the stuffy stone-land.

Sally turned down a court and threaded a series of alleys, bewildering to a stranger, till she came to an ill-painted door and rang a bell.

She lowered her bundle gladly and sat on the step in a state of weakness and exhaustion. The powers within were dilatory or inattentive. She had to wait a good long while before the door was abruptly opened by a lantern-jawed youth, with red bristles on his upper lip, hair plastered with oil, and a paste diamond pin stuck in his yellow necktie. His associates knew him as Ernie Jenkins.

"Why wasn't you 'ere earlier?" he asked. "You'll 'ave to wait now. Mr. Oldstein's out and I'm busy. You seem to think you can come when you like. But you can't. See? You can leave the goods inside and 'ook it for a time. Now remember, and look alive next week. See? Come back in three-quarters of an hour and get yer money."

The door–the back-entrance to Mr. Emmanuel Oldstein's wholesale tailoring emporium–was forthwith shut. Sally, meanwhile, must amuse herself as best she might. Again, with the patience of the starved, she sat on the step to wait, and sufficiently forget herself to think she would like to cry. However, she refrained from tears–the neglected have none to spare–and, as usual, centred her mind on things to eat. Food, food, food–there was her aspect of Eden. The object of her particular desire was again, as always, gravy, "'ot and smelly."

June read her thoughts, and went to work to realize them.

A school-boy was going by, whistling. He had been excused his lessons for the day and was cheerily hurrying to the Oval to see the year's first cricket-match. A white-paper parcel, spelling lunch, was tucked under his arm.

June gazed fixedly at him, waved her wand, and willed him to look at Sally.

He did so. The spell was on him. One glance was enough to influence his inexperienced heart–he was not old or wealthy enough to have learned caution in his charity. He could not now have enjoyed his cricket, remembering, as he must do, the pale, starved face of that weary child, and not have helped her.

He hid his actions in the shelter of a convenient doorway, opened the packet, took out two sandwiches and a chunk of cake, shoved the rest in his jacket-pocket, and, running shamefacedly by, dropped the provender on Sally's lap. He heard her give a gulp of joy as he went on with singing heart, to be the happiest lad in Kennington.

Surrey did better than usual that day.

While the child greedily munched and waited, June, grudging the wasting of time, flew skywards to investigate.

She was soon above the roofs, and awed by the myriad chimneys. Her attention was caught by the dome of St. Paul's, which gloomed like a round purple cloud, over and above all else. It was, as it is, the crown of London. She had never seen anything like it in Fairyland, and wondered at the patience of men. Truly, they were poor things, transient creatures, and all that; but they have faith in what is material, and manage many things in their few years.

Her wings moved rapidly. She sped like a flash of fragrant light over the intervening courts and houses, and quickly came to St. Paul's Churchyard. She passed between the branches of the trees in the railed garden, greeting sparrows and pigeons as she went, and wishing–wishing heartily–she could meet some of those bright-hued, happy-songed friends of hers, who bless the friends and skies of the country. But that could not be. The birds she loved had followed the fairies, leaving prose in feathers behind.

She circled slowly right round the big dome, and wondered more than anything else at its crusted dirt–which dated from the Stuarts. She settled on the weather-ruined statue of an apostle–whom it represented being as indistinguishable as Shem in the nursery Noah's Ark–and gazed with wonder and without admiration at the moving, stretching scene–the live panorama–before her. Roofs and steeples and streets–stretching on and on–that was the picture seen by the fairy. It had its wonders, no doubt; but oh, the pity of it, the crowding and the treelessness! What a woeful waste of space!

The fairies, amongst their shortcomings, have absolutely no sense of political economy. Had June been told that ground-rent on Ludgate Hill is so many pounds sterling a square inch, she would have been totally unimpressed and pos-

sibly bored.

"Where could the children find room to play?" she said to herself. "And the flowers must all be smothered!"

She flew to the open space below, and perched on the statue of Queen Anne, to watch with sorrowing eyes the tired and hurrying people. Poor shadows! In a little while they would be back again in the ground which gave them, their opportunities for kindness and happiness ended; and here they were, thinking only of to-day's gains, rushing after the mirage, losing what mattered.

She had grown weary almost to weeping of the sordid scene, and was thinking miserably of its contrast with Fairyland. Oh, why had the elves forsaken London?–when–there was Bim!

The gnome was toiling up Ludgate Hill. He seemed to have shrunk and become a very pale red. Weariness and bewilderment had, for the time being, taken the colour out of him. He was awe-struck and terrified by the rolling volume of traffic, which, though it could not possibly have hurt him, seemed very formidable. He looked with round eyes at the lumbering vehicles, and though to him they were really but shadows bearing all manner and shapes of shade, he was bewildered by their multitude and variety.

With its shining slope and insistent traffic, he found Ludgate Hill a trying and slippery ordeal.

He was repeatedly in straits during that scrambling ascent. The horses could see him; the human beings could not. Time and again a boot threatened him, a skirt swished by him; the wheels of a vehicle often seemed over him; but always he managed–though not without numerous sprawls and tumbles–to avoid contact with the objectionable shadows.

He reached the top of the hill and stood panting and triumphant. Suddenly he saw June, a fairy crowning the effigy of the queen who is dead. He squealed with joy and stared in goggle-eyed rapture. Hoo-oo-oo-oo-ray!

His happiness received a check.

A scavenger boy, running along, crouching, scooping up refuse, scooped up Bim! Before the gnome could say "Robinson" he was up, carried away to a receptacle for dirt, and forthwith tumbled in.

He crawled out puffing and disillusioned. He blessed the scavenger boy thoughtfully for his hospitality; squatted bewildered upon the kerb; then, remembering, turned about and lost all woes, aches and weariness in the joy of seeing June.

"Bim, my brave Bim," she greeted him.

He stared open-mouthed, panting and smiling. He had now no words for

answer, and needed none.

CHAPTER V
TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND

Bim was almost top-heavy with joy at meeting June just when his hopes had been at their lowest; she was hardly less delighted at seeing him. For not only was the gnome something from Fairyland, a reminder of its dear delights and golden days, and the means of strengthening her strained determinations; but he had come from her own particular corner of the delectable realm, the Land of Wild Roses, and brought to jaded Cockneydom some fragrant home memories.

But she must get back to Sally. She flew down to Bim, and held out her wand. he grasped it, and forthwith was up in the air, magically borne along by the hurrying fairy.

It was no new thing for Bim to have an aerial journey. One of the favourite games of gnomes–naturally no more able to fly than a pig is capable of "Bo"–is to grab the legs of a pigeon and cause the silly bird to go circling. This was the first time his means of sky-progress had been a fairy. It was an experience strange, terrible and new, to be dragged and wafted over that wilderness of roofs. But it was also exhilarating. He began to sing in his croak of a voice an old elf-song about moonbeams that became icicles. June, listening to him, and watching the scene beneath, vowed and vowed again that she would not rest till London was restored to Fairyland.

Bim had no consciousness, as he croaked and dangled there, of the effects of his influence on the fortunes of the dark city: London likewise had no idea of it.

Sally was still waiting, though the passing of people on business to and from the Oldstein establishment had required her to move to another doorstep, where she sat and watched for the summons.

This seeming neglect on the part of the red young man so irritated June that she flew in hottest haste, head first, through the opening for letters in the door, prepared energetically to remind him.

He was sitting on a counter with stacks of clothing about him–how musty it all smelt!–hard at work reading a worn "horrible"–"Sweeney Todd" its hero–and yawning. Atmosphere, rather than weariness, caused the gape, which came

to an abrupt close.

As June was entering the warehouse from the back way, Max Oldstein, the only son of the ”firm,” was to be heard descending the stairs opposite. Jenkins was off his perch in an instant, and busily tumbling a bale of clothing from the counter to the floor.

June viciously poked with her wand the scraggy nape of his neck to remind him of Sally. Her protest was effectual. He went to the door and shouted:

”Come in, Kid!”

Sally eagerly entered. She stood on the door-mat trembling.

”Pay her four and twopenth,” said the master, as he put a tick on the paper he held, ”and tell ’er that if ’er people don’t do the work betterth, they’ll be wantin’ it.”

Max turned abruptly, and went to the other end of the shop, where he lighted a cigarette and thoughtfully admired the great gold ring on his large little finger. June, feeling angry because of his blatant unpleasantness, wished him a punishment of pain, which he felt.

”My corn!” he said, ”it’th goin’ to rain.”

Meanwhile Jenkins was addressing Sally.

”You ’eard what the young guv’nor said? And don’t you forget it! There’s the oof–count it!–and ’ere’s another lot of material. See? Twenty pieces. Now, you can sling your ’ook!”

Sally poised the pile of cloth on her shoulder and went. June followed her into the street, made the load as light as good wishes and touch of wand permitted, and instructed Bim, who during her absence had fallen fast asleep in the gutter, to clamber on Sally’s hat and go home–”home”–with her, to guard her.

Then she returned to see what could be done with Max Oldstein, whose ripe, unusual vulgarity fascinated her.

Sally, with Bim sprawling along her hat-brim like invisible red trimming, jogged slowly eastward. The exhausted gnome was soon again in his own little nod-land–sleep pulled so hard at his eyelids–and did not return to this world of the infinite unrealities till Sally was in the bed-workroom at Paradise Court, and the weary women had greedily counted and grumbled over the few coins brought to them.

At once they returned to the sewing, and plied desperate needles through the new mass of half-made clothing. So wore away more hours of their unblessed lives.

Bim, awakened and sent tumbling by Sally’s doffing her hat, crawled into the beer-can, which still was lying where it had rolled when Bill dropped it; curled himself up like a squirrel in its winter fastness, and was asleep again. This shows how over-tired the poor fellow was; Bim was, however, not too weary for dreams,

and in the visions of slumber, once more made that fearsome journey from Fairyland which ended with the finding of June. This proves that gnomes can ride nightmares too; a fact for the Psychical Society.

Max Oldstein puzzled June. She could not make him out. His interests and actions seemed so purposeless and mean. During that busy morning he was forty unpleasant persons rolled into one. When a customer who spelt prosperity arrived, Max lost himself in oily politenesses. He laughed vigorously at humour hardly there, and smirked and toadied like a *nouveau riche* at a Primrose tea-fight.

When there followed a journeyman-tailor who had wasted his opportunity in drink, and was impelled by repentance and family needs to beg pitifully to be taken on again, Max's politeness went like a bang. He snubbed the tailor-man for his ingratitude, and abruptly closed the poor fool's pleadings with a turn of his back.

There were so many other starvelings to take that wretch's place.

In the course of the morning Max showed himself shrewd, petty, fawning, arrogant, determined, stupid, vulgar, and cruel. Ernie Jenkins, who copied his manner as well as he was able to, lived in mortal terror of him. To Ernie, Max Oldstein was a mean necessity, his bread and butter, his all. To lose that hateful, pitiful employment would be to cut off every one of his private luxuries–his evening glass of bitter, with its opportunity for badinage with a barmaid, the Woodbine cigarettes, the weekly visit to a music-hall, the Sunday walk with Emily. So he went on, like a hundred thousand others of his kind–selling his life for a pittance, swallowing infinite insults, cringing and mean. Poor Ernie! What is to be done with such humans as he?

At one o'clock Max hurried to the "Haversack" for a large meal of stout and boiled beef with carrots, and, while eating, read with sniggerings a weekly pink paper, which gave oracular advice on race-horses, interspersed with funny paragraphs about lodgers. Also there was talk, in which barmaids, customers and waiters joined familiarly–of the X street murder, the betting prices, and the divorce case of the day with its pretty details.

Then Captain Crowe, whom the folk of his world knew as "Charlie," came in, and Max was pleased to speculate a shilling on a hundred up with him, which the young man lost with a very bad grace, till the Captain, who really had once upon a time held a subaltern's commission in a disbanded battalion, having borrowed half-a-crown from a casual customer, who knew him but indifferently well, restored his opponent's good temper with the gift of a soda and whisky and some flowers of speech, so leading the way to another game of billiards and another defeat for Max.

June was awed by all she saw, and puzzled how to win back to Fairyland–this! She sat amongst used tumblers on the mantelpiece, below the marker's

board, patiently watching and wondering. What could she do to mend things? How difficult it was! Were human beings worth saving? Was not Oberon in his ruling right, and she wickedly wrong? These creatures–so mean and sordid–were worse than ever they had been painted to her by their most candid critic in Fairyland.

Then she remembered Sally, and the sweated women in their evil home, and decided to persevere.

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" she said thoughtfully, unconsciously plagiarizing.

The whisky ended, and the business of recreation done, Max Oldstein paid his score unwillingly, and returned to headquarters. Ernie met him at the doorstep.

"Guvnor's come. Been waiting an hour," he warned him.

Max ran upstairs, two at a time, to see his father, and hastily concocted a detailed account of the business which had detained him. The lie was not required that day. He mentally pigeon-holed it for a later occasion.

His senior greeted him with a loud, glad laugh. Max wondered. His father showed him an invitation card with the arms of the City upon it.

"Max, my boy! Look at that!" cried the old man, clearing his throat. "What d'ye think of Papa now, eh?"

He rose, chuckled violently and rattled his golden watch-chain. Max took the card and read it. It was an invitation to dine with the Lord Mayor and some representatives of commercial houses. He felt a twinge of envy, and then of pride.

"Bravo, Dad!" said the son. They shook hands solemnly. "It'th to-night, too!"

"Yeth," said Emmanuel, taking the invitation and frowning at it. "Thoth idioth at the potht-offith nearly mitht my thecuring thith 'igh honour. 'Ere's the envelope. Look at the thtamp. Pothted a week ago, and I only got it to-day. Put in the wrong letter-box. I've written to the Potht-mathter-General to complain. A 'ot and strong letter I've written. Very nice of the Lord Mayor, ain't it?"

"'Ow did you get it, Dad?"

"Lord knowth! I lent one of 'is footmen money. P'raps that 'elped!"

"'Ave you accepted? You mutht, you know!"

"Twice; to make sure, I sent two letterth by expreth, from different poth-offithes."

"My word, Dad, you are spendin'. That'th what I call extravaganth."

"No, my boy, you muthn't look at the pennieth when there'th a twenty-bob dinner in store. That'th policy and busineth too. You can't teach Papa nothin', you can't! Now, 'ow are things?"

They talked of clothes, market-prices and details of their trade for a couple

of hours, while June listened and wondered. How these mortals did waste their time over the wealth which isn't worth having!

She made up her mind to go to the banquet at the Mansion House.

When the office-clock chinkled five the elder Oldstein looked at his watch to confirm the news, and hurriedly put away his papers.

"I mutht be off to dreth," he said to his son. "I'm going' to 'ave a bath."

He went, June after him.

He drove westward in a slow omnibus. The fairy sat on his knee, and, looking about her, felt disappointed with civilization.

At length they stopped by Maida Vale, and the wholesale clothier having ridden his full three-pennyworth, waddled down two streets and arrived at his dwelling. It was one of a row of buildings, mostly boarding-houses, in their dull unornamental dinginess strangely similar to each other. They were Mid-Victorian–the Drab Age!–and looked it from boot-scraper to roof-tree. Oldstein's private residence, like his business house, seemed in dire need of paint. What the household could do was done. What they could not do must be done without.

"Wathte of good money, my boy;" and then, "Next year, per'aps." And so on, season after season, year after year. Like Alice's to-morrow, the Oldstein next-year never came.

The clothier and his family lived at forty-eight. The next house was number fifty. The two front-doors were immediately adjacent, the entrances separated by a row of rusty railings.

As he ascended his steps, Emmanuel slyly slipped a folded, printed paper out of his breast-pocket; and leaning over the railings, gently dropped it into the next-door letter-box.

The same instant his front-door was opened by Hannah, the ever-indignant, eldest daughter of the house.

"Those people have been at it again!" she said, and angrily crumpled up and threw down a circular she had just taken out of the letter-box.

"The thame thort?" her father asked, shutting the door quietly.

"Yes, of course, this is the ninety-second they've dropped in. It makes me wild! I've made up my mind when the hundredth comes–if it does come–to give Aaron Hyam's youngest tuppence to break their kitchen window."

"Don't waste yer money like that; am I a millionaire?" He picked up and smoothed out the circular, and began to read it aloud: "'Thothiety for the Conversion of the Jews; an evenin' meetin' with addretheth.' Oh, put it with the retht, Max will make a spill of it. Leave it to Papa, dear. I've got a better plan for dealing with 'em; I've begun to put it in practice already."

"'Ave you, Dad? I'd like to scratch that little nincompoop of a son of theirs. He makes me mad with his soppy smile, and sandy whiskers, and conceited sanc-

timoniousness. I'd give 'im hymns at the street corner."

"A much better plan, my clear. You may as well give me them little billths–all of 'em. They'll be useful. They're poor, ain't they?"

"They are–as synagogue rats–if the faces of the tradespeople are anything to go by."

Hannah was very vicious.

"Well, then, leave it to me. Every time they invite us to be converted, I invite them to borrow money from me–from Jabez Gordon. They've 'ad fourteen of my circulars already. I gave 'em a fifteenth to-day. That'th the best bait for those birds. Trust Daddy, my dear. They will bite–that sort of body always does. Trutht a hymn-smiter for a quiet gamble; and then—-"

"You will fleece them?" she cried, with fierce exultation. Something of Jephthah's daughter, of Deborah, of Hagar, of the ancient heroines of Israel, lived in her breast.

"Oh no, Hannah! Fleeth! we never fleeth. I will help them to some very good bithness, that ith all."

"That will do!" she said. "They convert *us*! The fools!"

"And ith the shirt well aired?" he asked. "I'm nervouth of cold white shirts."

"You'll find everything all right, Dad. Your bath-water will soon be ready. Mother's in the drawing-room ironing your dress trousers. Now don't you worry. Just wait while I'm putting your things ready, and listen to a tune on the gramophone. You've plenty of time. The brougham won't be 'ere for a good hour yet."

He went into the drawing-room. June fluttered above him. Her brightness was faintly reflected on his dingy bald head. She was strangely curious for a high-minded fairy. The home of want she had seen; now for the home of the master!

The sight awed and depressed her. She perched on the chandelier and studied everything closely, while beneath her a gramophone–set going by Becky, the second and last of the daughters–blared a blatant anthem of the streets.

The furniture was worthy of the house–Mid-Victorian to the last. A green mirror with gilded frame, a golden eagle perched at the top of it, reflected an untrue version of the objects before it. There was a clumsy clock, with black ornaments to match it on either side; at each end of the mantelpiece was a lustre with spills stuck into it. Photographs of Hebrew celebrities–singers, actresses, and politicians of a certain party complexion–were ranged about shelves and tables. There were albums and unreadable books with cheap, bright covers here and there. Some coloured engravings of sentimental pictures hung against the red wall. A dead musical box, waxen water-lilies in a glass case, and–but enjoyable as it is to take a verbal photograph of a characteristic, respectable British interior, it is unnecessary to do so here. We shall not require to enter that room

again.

The more June watched the place and its people, the more she wondered. And then, while she waited for Mr. Oldstein to bathe and adorn himself in glistening raiment, she decided on a plan of campaign. In her dreams of prediction, even then, in that centre of hopeless banality, she saw Fairyland exultant where vulgarity gloomed.

The crusade was to begin that evening. So let London hope!

CHAPTER VI
POST-PRANDIAL

Mr. Oldstein drove to the Mansion House in a hired brougham. Hannah travelled with him, for the sake of the drive. He talked of his father, who had been a publican in Petticoat Lane.

June was on the box with the coachman most of the time. She found looking at the passing lights and strange shops more entertaining than the conversation inside, which, indeed, was no better than the ordinary stodge most of us talk.

The fairy rested. She still felt the strain of the crowds, the noise, and the atmosphere; but not so severely as she had done during her entrance to London yesterday. She rested her very best.

They arrived at Walbrook in good time. Emmanuel had no intention of missing anything. This was a chance to be swallowed whole. The carriage found its place in the gathering queue, and slowly approached the side of the Mansion House where the guests were alighting.

June watched a few belated pigeons which had not yet gone to roost. An idea came. Dim would be of use that evening.

She charmed one of the birds to her, put her spell upon it, and despatched it at its special speed to Paradise Court. The pigeon flew well; it was to be rewarded.

In twenty-five minutes it was back again, with Bim clinging to its feet. June praised the pigeon and touched it, giving it nobler plumage. It was no longer grey and ordinary, but brightly speckled and a pouter. Sudden pride ate up its quieter qualities. It did not wait even the tail-end of a minute, as courtesy required, but was up in the pigeons' dormitory over the architrave, as swaggering and important as Bumble, showing off and strutting before its mate, who woke from domesticated dreams of well-laid eggs to gaze and grumble. She had been quite

contented with the lord and master as he was.

Bim's sleep had restored him. He was once again his old berry-hued self, and June's as devotedly as ever.

Mr. Oldstein had long since entered the Mansion House and been welcomed by the host and Chief Magistrate of the City, Sir Titus Dodds; but not all the guests had yet arrived. The most important–the representatives of the Church, the State and the halfpenny Press–were in fact but then arriving. So June flew and Bim scrambled up the red-covered steps together, and entered the palace of feasting in good time to share the greatest event in Oldstein's life.

Bim stared at the stockings of the footmen, awed, and Emmanuel followed his example. He admired and examined the mayoral furniture, appurtenances, ornaments; the busts, pictures and tapestry, appraising their value with eager professional interest. It must have cost a good twenty thousand pound! He determined to remodel his own drawing-room on Mansion House principles, provided he had good luck in Wardour Street.

He regretted now that he had not sought civic responsibilities and honours for himself. Dear, dear! Economy is a bad policy when it costs anything. He began to know golden-chained hopes; but the ambition never extinguished the tradesman. He wondered whether he might surreptitiously drop one of his Jabez Gordon circulars on that corner ottoman, and decided not to do so. There were too many risks.

He wished that his wife, Hannah, Becky, Max, could have seen him in his glory, waiting amidst that high company, and that they might have watched him shaking hands with the Lord Mayor–his fingers tingled with pleasure still. He must have an appropriate coat-of-arms–something gold and scarlet, with a rampant lion if possible. Social ambitions quickened within his brain. Yes, he would come into public life, if it did not cost too much.

So Emmanuel Oldstein went on building his castles–forgetting, forgetting they were based on piles of clothing sewed and made saleable by the needles of sweated women. That aspect of facts did not even for a half-moment occur to him. This was the prevalent fact–that he was a gentleman, enjoying the company of baronets and Common Councillors, received within the hospitable walls of that Zion of commercial probity and prosperity–the Mansion House.

The welcome summons came at last, and, the Lord Mayor leading, the guests trooped into the Egyptian room, place of daytime dullness and evening festivities.

The banquet was begun.

June, who afterwards confessed herself much impressed by the Lord Mayor's robes and diamonds, perched herself on an epergne full of delicious spring flowers. She feasted on their delicate scents and colours, while Bim

sprawled lazily on a jelly. Little did the masters of Gog and Magog, feasting there on their soups and meats and sweets, dream that a fairy and a gnome were watching them. June was thinking hard about Sally, and the hunger of the slums.

A solid hour was eaten away.

The loving-cups were brought in, and distributed to the various tables. Now was the time to act. June gave Bim her wand. In obedience to her command he dipped it deep in the spiced wine of the loving-cups. Never a common drink, it was nigh to nectar now. There was magic in it, and liquid warmth-of-heart, a loving-cup indeed! Every man drank the new ambrosia and passed the cup to his neighbour. So the fairy's influence went round, and the distinguished company of commoners was linked together in a union nobler than any of them knew.

The fun was beginning. How likeable seemed their fellow-guests! what a nice bright kindly world it was! They thought this generosity of feeling was their ordinary post-prandial satisfaction, fed upon warm meats and the drinks that are Philistine; but the fairy at the board knew better. Later on, some of the guests realized the difference too, for they are astute–those gentlemen in the City.

The toast-master made himself evident. He had a magnificent voice, and a big broad beard, which would get entangled with his watch-chain. Bim could not resist it. He gazed with longing, and then tucked the wand under his elbow, took a flying leap on to the arm of the mayoral chair, ran up to the back of it, and sprang at the beard. There he clung, and hid, peeping out of the brown forest at the concourse of happy gourmands.

The loyal toasts were given, cheered and sung. There was conversation and amateur music by Guildhall scholars.

The Lord Mayor uprose to propose the toast of the evening, "The Commerce of London." He was a picture of rubicund prosperity, a man of drab and scarlet. He began a pompous speech.

"My lords and gentlemen, the Lord Mayor and the ancient Corporation of London have often greeted at their hospitable board gatherings similar to this, yet never before, my lords and gentlemen, never before, has any Lord Mayor had the high honour of welcoming to his table a more distinguished gathering of leaders in commerce than that which graces it now."

The orator stopped to look at his notes. A rolling round of applause told him he was doing well enough.

Emmanuel Oldstein, whose seat was some distance from the speaker, craned forward better to hear. He–a leader in commerce! Good!

"Round this table," the Lord Mayor continued, with a sweep of his white fat hand, "are magnates of banking houses, shippers, merchants of all kinds of produce brought from the farthest ends of the earth, heads of railways, represen-

tatives of all departments of commercial industry. The prosperity of the United Kingdom–let me say the British Empire–is represented here. It's a happy, a very happy, condition of things."

Another pause for note-reading; another roll of hand-clapping and "Hear, hears." Cigars were lighted, wine sipped; the audience was in a particularly sympathetic mood. It is flattering and delightful to be reminded you are rich, and–the wand in the loving-cup had done its work.

The fairy who ruled the feast was frankly bored by this display of prose. To her critical ears it was drivel.

Some use must be made of this talkative gentleman, round whom the incense of tobacco–how can men make that stifling smoke?–was being assiduously burned. She flew to his shoulder, hovered for one deliberative moment above his head, and forthwith crowned him with the fairy crown. It shone like a golden drop on the shining bald space–a glorious globule on a barren sphere; but none of the mortals could see it.

The Lord Mayor at once threw down his notes. He had gained the confidence of Demosthenes. He smiled, and braced himself for an effort. His pomposity was forgotten; his hesitancy gone.

June was making a miracle. The wonders went on. Never before at a Mansion House festival had any such speech been heard as was then to be delivered; but now it was heard–and applauded. June flew back to the epergne to listen. She had reasons for being interested now. Bim, seeing his mistress's activities, crept out of his tangle and returned to sit cross-legged on the table to watch and listen with eyes and mouth at their widest, till the warmth and the smoke took their toll, and he lapsed into sleep.

"Now, my friends and fellow-citizens, I want to speak to you as man to men. I put a plain question plainly, and you will accept its truth. What is the good of our wealth if it is not well used? How can it bring us true happiness, if it does not bring others happiness too? Would you like to think that your possessions meant want in others?"

"No!" shouted Emmanuel Oldstein.

"No!" shouted everyone else.

"Of course No. You are true men. Princes of Commerce! And yet look facts in the face. Does our wealth bring those others who help us to create it anything like an adequate return for their labours in happiness or kind? It does not!"

Men rose from their seats to shout agreement with this utterance.

Was this the Tory City or an improved Tower Hill?

The toast-master–in his private life a talking Radical, who always voted Conservative–listened with perturbation and amazement. He had not drunk of the loving-cup as had the guests. The speech was not strange to them; they un-

derstood, they sympathized, and at intervals punctuated it with rousing cheers. It was the very thing they wanted.

Archdeacon Pryde, who all his life had persistently blocked progress with many words of heartfelt sympathy, smiled benediction, and tapped the table, loudly encouraging the Lord Mayor to go on with his revolution. The Lord Mayor went on. Nay, he broke another record, established another precedent for the Mansion House, did what Mr. Pickwick did–stood on his chair that he might be better heard. The toast-master watched and hearkened, deeply grieved.

"It is just six months since the City did me the honour of electing me Chief Magistrate. I have tried to do my duty. I have tried to serve the City well."

"You have, you have!"

"Half my term of office has ended. The second half begins. During the time remaining I intend to do something to make my year of office more than ever memorable and worthy of the City. I am going to use my opportunity and my wealth to set an example and undo some of the evil that many of us have thoughtlessly done. I depend on the leaders of Commerce to help me. Gentlemen, will you?"

He looked around from his chair, the Olympian citadel, and was encouraged to continue. All the guests were listening eagerly. Cigars were going out. The wine in the glasses was forgotten. The speaker's face was the focus of eight hundred eyes.

"Money is a good thing," he went on. "It is necessary for economic activities and commercial life. In private hands, well used, it yields comfort, freedom, happiness, to countless homes. Never let us despise the goodly things of life!"

"Hear, hear!" said Archdeacon Pryde.

"But too much wealth in a few hands is an evil bringing disastrous results. Where is there greater unhappiness than with those multi-millionaires, in America especially, whose mass of possessions grows and grows, increasing their harassing responsibilities and anxieties, haunting them with panic fears of rapid ruin; useless in its vastness, mischievous, greedy? Like a golden horror, this Frankenstein-monster of overgreat wealth brings sleeplessness, madness, death, in its train. There you see money a burden and a curse."

Sir Titus paused again; and once more swept the faces of his hearers with a keen glance. The room was as still as a tired church. The toast-master now shared the interest of the guests. June sat on the epergne smiling. Bim noiselessly snored.

"It is trebly a curse when, its creator dead, it passes to the children. Think of those victims of fortune, and pity them. In the beginning they are glad because they own so much. They plan the enjoyment of an infinity of pleasures, and wonder how they can spend the hoard their fathers have left them. They are

victims caught in the toils. The great machine goes on. Still the wheels of its production are moving; the labourers are toiling, aching, and wanting. But the brain which has guided their operations has become cold. The new controllers of the machinery are comparatively effete. The old genius is gone. Hired managers do their best, no doubt; but the master, the head of the enterprise, is dead, and his place cannot be filled."

"Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear!"

Agreement came in a rumble, followed with appeals to hush.

"There are dislocations in the machinery, labour troubles, angers, strikes. I need not detail to you the consequences of swollen industrial organizations, or the infinite troubles which come to enterprises over-capitalized or run by incompetence. Let me, at present, be content to remind you of the effects upon the fortune-ridden, unfortunate children. The worldly folly of the fathers is visited on them. All their lives they have been preserved from experience. They have not been allowed to learn from contact with the roughnesses of the world. They have been spoiled babes, pampered children, gilded youths; and so grow up to responsibilities which they cannot realize, and are perpetually blind to facts, victims to the rapacity of rascals, puppets of fashion, tools and fools–wasting, extravagant, weak, morally ruined. The greatest evil a man can do is to leave his sons so much money that they need not work. The only occupation left them is play; and so they spend their lives, pitting excitement against ennui. Better far be poor with brains and character than rich with the fortune of Dives and Croesus. Is it not so?"

"It is!" agreed the Archdeacon, looking down his nose. He had a fine voice, kept in condition with constant lozenges, so that his approval was heard all over the room.

"Hear, hear!" cried others.

"The useless children of the over-rich are with rare exceptions prodigal, spendthrift, the gulls of unscrupulous rogues–no curse can be greater than the glaring and manifold inequities which come from undue wealth. I need not further remind you of these facts, for you are thoughtful men and sympathetic. But this counsel I venture to give, and this counsel henceforth I pledge myself to keep. When you have secured your sufficiency for comfort, for legitimate industrial enterprise, and for the proper training and equipment of those dependent on you, don't you think it better, instead of accumulating and still accumulating loads of unrequired wealth, to use the surplus for the communal good, for the improvement of the locality, and the betterment of your neighbours and fellows? I shall do this, I pledge my word to it. To-morrow I go to my office, and will ensure that every one of my employés has a fair wage and a secure prospect, provided he does his duty."

Such applause of approval went up, breaking the Lord Mayor's speech, that Bim awoke with a start. He sat up and looked around affrighted; but seeing June sitting among her flowers, laughing, he became the courageous gnome again.

He picked up the wand, and went for a stroll down the table, wantonly touching men's hands as he went by, impelling them to clap and thump the louder. He was delighted to be wielding such powers. It was a comedy out of Fairyland, a farce with an effective ending.

The Lord Mayor stepped down from his chair and lifted his glass of champagne. His voice took on new seriousness:

"My lords and gentlemen, I have not forgotten the toast I am asking you to drink. 'The Commerce of London' is a mighty fact, a tribute to our national energies and honourable name. It is potent; yet its power might be greater than ever for securing human happiness. All that is required is a little more humanity, sympathy, imagination, easy sacrifice on the part of–*us*! We, the masters, can do great things. Let us manage this. We shall not make our means and wealth appreciably less by securing that those dependent on us have sufficient to live on in decency and comfort; nor shall we lose anything worth the keeping if we resolutely refuse to condescend to such shoddy evils as sweating, jerry-building, wild-cat speculations, and the maintenance of the slums. Let us live well, and avoid dying leaving preposterous fortunes behind us. Let me make a public confession. I own five houses in a street in South London. They are old, ill-built, badly-drained, rack-rented. I know it well, but have never thought of the true facts about them till now. Those houses shall be destroyed; and, in their stead, buildings erected that will provide decent and comfortable homes at a fair rent for the present occupiers. I shall not lose much, if anything, through the improvement; but the happiness I shall in consequence gain will be immeasurable. There will be no skeletons in my cupboard henceforth. My lords and gentlemen, am I to go on this crusade alone? Will you join me in this effort for human good?"

Every man in the assembly, including the toast-master, rose in his place and shouted "Yes!"

"Then may I suggest that each of you takes his menu and writes on it resolutions–no pie-crust promises these, no New Year good intentions, but resolutions to be lived up to and with determination kept? If I fail in my intention, hoot me and stone me at the end of my year of office; but I will not fail! I will not fail!"

June flew, and kneeling on the top of the Lord Mayor's head–so round and smooth and shiny–kissed it delightedly. A new inspiration thereupon came to him:

"Above the resolutions write–'Let us make London fit for the fairies!' My lords and gentlemen, I give you the toast."

They drank it in bumpers.

CHAPTER VII
ARCHIDIACONAL FUNCTIONS

When the excitement which followed the Lord Mayor's speech had to some extent subsided, there was a hurried borrowing and sharpening of pencils.

The Lord Mayor wrote his resolutions with a flourish.

"I'll have that framed," he said, as he gazed with head a-slant at the inscribed menu. The Archdeacon wrote his in Latin verse. Emmanuel Oldstein–far away–began his with a gold pencil as large as a cigar; and then paused, puzzled.

"'Ow d'ye thpell fairieth–oh, and what are fairieth?"

He had a faint fear that they were something to do with the Book of Common Prayer.

The man he addressed was a Personage, the Past-Master of a City Company–which had no longer a Hall, and was blessed with a dwindling income of seventy pounds per annum.

"The fairies," he began, with a tremendous air of authority–"tales, you know–ah!–the fairies–."

Bim, who happened to be wandering along his part of the table, hearing this hesitancy on the most real and important subject under the sun and moon, raised the wand and gave him a punishing rap on the knuckles. At once the Past-Master was an informed authority. He talked like a school child who knows his lesson too well, hurriedly, glibly.

"The fairies are the mimic rulers of the world. Where beauty is, where purity is, where love is, there is Fairyland. Oberon is the king, Titania queen. The little people are the only living realities. We–you–I, these others–are shadows, only shadows!" He paused. "May I trouble you to pass that candle?" he asked, and lighted a new cigar.

Oldstein was impressed. He wrote his resolutions–there were necessarily many, as his past social defects had been numerous–with firmness and slow care, in a good commercial hand. While he did so, the music was playing, and there were brief, ecstatic, uninspired speeches, built on the lines of the Lord Mayor's. June waited for higher game.

At last the Toast-master's voice rang out for the last of their orators.

”My lords and gentlemen! Pray silence for the Venerable Archdeacon Pryde!”

The ecclesiastic slipped a final voice lozenge between his lips and calmly absorbed it, while the applause which welcomed his rising went on. The hand-clapping and table-rapping coming unexpectedly and abruptly to an end, he swallowed the last of the lozenge with a gulp.

”My lords and gentlemen, the toast which it is my privilege to propose is in an especial manner also the toast of the evening. I am going to ask you to drink with me the health of our host, the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor!”

During these words Bim had been clambering up the Archdeacon’s right-arm coat-sleeve. It was a fine piece of mountaineering. He arrived safely at the summit, and squatted cross-legged on the speaker’s right shoulder, proud and pleased, intending to lead the cheering with waves of the wand. June decided once more to be an influence at the board, so she fluttered up to the archidiaconal head, and reverently topped its raven tresses with the crown; then she reclined on the gentle slope of his left shoulder. Again the effect of the crown was instantaneous.

The Archdeacon, let it be confessed, had prepared a speech. It was to be full of adulation and carefully considered impromptus. There were to have been a Greek epigram, two quotations from Shakespeare, one from Stow, one from the Archdeacon’s own version of the ”Georgics,” two old stories from Punch, and a reference–dragged in somehow–to the Oxyrhynchus papyri. The peroration, as devised, was a golden picture, with purple slabs, of the wide, wide, circling Empire, with the Lord Mayor’s bounteous table as its hub. That speech was like the heroine of an old-fashioned love tale, beautiful and doomed.

The speaker gasped when the crown touched him, and cried, ”Ahem!” Then the words came in a torrent, tumultuous, tumbling, liquid, verbal waters of Lodore. He clenched a fist and looked sternly at his hearers.

”This is no conventional evening. The Lord Mayor–honour to him!–has set an example of high purpose and pluck, which I shall unhesitatingly follow. Once upon a time, dear friends, I was a curate, pale and young, ’tis true, but also ambitious and hopeful. I saw the world as a vast wilderness, waiting to be redeemed from its emptiness, to be adorned again with blossoming roses. As the immortal Bard of Avon has told us–but never mind that now! I said to myself in those young days, Here am I, chosen to share in the greatest work that can be done by man. Here am I, dubbed by my fellows reverend. The task I have to do is a great one. I will do it. Gentlemen, I did not do it. For seven months I laboured as I should have done, then adulation and tea-parties made mischief of me. I forgot my early aspirations, lost my young ideals, forgot the sacred character–the responsible privilege–of my calling, and began that long process of careful

courtliness which has brought me worldly appreciation, a large correspondence, many paragraphs in the papers, and a useless life. Behold in me an Archdeacon who has lost the illusions!–an Archdeacon who will find them again!"

Bim waved his wand; and, the Lord Mayor leading, the excited gathering broke into a round of applause. The Archdeacon looked about him gratified: not often did his words gain appreciation like this! The idea that he too should mount the chair the better to speak flashed through his brain. But that was not to be. Archidiaconal dignity is no light thing; even the power of June could hardly have lifted it.

The ruling fairy, reclining on his left shoulder, her head resting against his coat-collar, forgot the present in waking-dreams. In her mind-world she wandered again through glades of Fairyland, sun-lighted, flower-haunted, and shining with dew; and was singing a song to an audience of wrens and squirrels. The even flow of clerical oratory, though so near, seemed to her dream-laden senses merely the sough of the wind through charmed branches, the roll of a distant sea, the murmur of waterfalls drumming on swollen rivers–musical, soothing.

"My friends, we need the illusions: even more than dividends we need the dreams. Have not we, the practical men, lost very much through our mere matter-of-factness? We have been too careful, we have neglected the gift of vision, and the world has lost immeasurably thereby. The time has surely come when Quixote should live again. We want one brave enough and sufficiently unselfish to tilt against the windmills, possibly to destroy the ugly shadows which frighten, certainly to recreate Knight-errantry, and give Mrs. Grundy, the better-half of Mammon, her right dismissal. Ah, brethren, how much I am asking! Convention is the greatest of citadels for weak men to conquer. It were easier to put the Monument into a cigarette-case than remove the formalities, snobbery and narrownesses–due to lack of sympathy, and loss of the touch-faculty, as Ruskin calls it–which hinder man's humanity. What said Tennyson–yes, I must give you this quotation–

"'Sweet St. Francis of Assisi, would that he were here again!'–would that he were here, to sweeten the selfish world of to-day as he sweetened the Middle Ages! And not he only. We want the saints–every one–with their selflessness and rapture, to come again. Oh, that we could once more see haloes about the heads of men. Joan of Arc, too, the lily-maid of Domremy, we want her; would that she could return, bringing the inspiration of her Voices to help us throw off the tyrants of selfishness, lust, foolish formality, and greed, which burden and endanger our beloved land!"

The Archdeacon paused–he was thoroughly enjoying his eloquence–to moisten his lips with wine. Bim touched the golden liquid with the wand, drawing the speaker's purpose fairywards.

"Joan of 'oo, did 'e say? Joan of what?" asked Emmanuel of the Past-Master.

"Hush, friend!" was all the answer he received. The Past-Master meant to say "Shut up!"; but the influence in the loving-cup compelled euphemisms.

"The Lord Mayor, in a moment of splendid inspiration–yes, splendid inspiration–bade us so live and do that London should be rendered fit for the fairies. A delightful idea! Let us live up to that bidding. But primarily shall we pause and think? What are the fairies? What but sweet invisibles, the fruits of happy imagination, through whose influence the buds open and become beautiful flowers, the birds lift their songs, and all of us are kind. Delightful fancies! Delightful fancies! Truly it were well for ourselves and our fellows if we could make this great City, this hub of Empire–may we not regard this bounteous table as the core of that hub?–this influential centre of the wide world, a joy to the dainty denizens of Fairyland? We may make it so; and, friends, we will make it so–I repeat, we will!"

Bim was quite frantic at this bold announcement. To have a real Archdeacon pronouncing benediction on Fairyland was beyond expression delightful. No suburban aristocrat paragraphed in a London paper could have rejoiced more fully. He lost himself in ecstasy, and compelled that audience to cheer for three solid minutes, till they were hoarse and began to feel foolish. The Archdeacon took advantage of the well-spread enthusiasm to eat another voice lozenge.

"The fairies will be with us in our enterprise; the angels also. Both these spiritual forces are on our side. Dear me! dear me! How wonderful it seems! Now to facts! Naturally from my office I am most concerned with the materialism about us, a materialism which finds expression in the hateful cocksure ugliness abounding in this London of ours, as well as in the devil-may-care thriftlessness, the drunkenness and vice, the mean excitements of gambling in its many forms, the squalor, the poverty, the want, which make wide areas of this unequalled Metropolis a Devil's City. Everyone here knows, as well as I do, the shame of it all; and the greater shame which hangs over us, the practical men, for the existence, persistence, continuance of this state of things. It is iniquitous, intolerable; yet it goes on. How much longer shall it continue? For years, or for weeks, or for days? That rests with us. All here, following the Lord Mayor's example, have written down resolutions, which, if they are kept, will modify this evil everywhere, and end it in parts. The more thoroughly we live up to our intentions, and redeem our voluntary pledges, the sooner the end of these iniquities will come. For mark this, gentlemen. The greed or the carelessness–more the latter than the former–of individuals has wrought the havoc. The unselfishness and scrupulous care of individuals alone can undo it. It is no good crying for Government to do the work."

"Hear, hear!"

”The Ministerial machine is a lumbering instrument. It takes the breath of gods to inspire it, to get it to move along the right way, and then is apt to break down suddenly and finally, in an amazingly human manner. The State is a sleepy inconsequent monster, which when it acts is apt to do so like a thunderstorm, with violence and but casual good results. It is individuals–you, I, the man in the street–who can do things, if we will: and now we must do them. We are pledged to it. Our words have been taken down by the Mercuries of the Press to be–within an hour or so–flashed to all parts of England, eventually to reach the farthest limits of the earth. We are bound, in honour, to keep our words!”

After that mouthful of eloquence the Archdeacon was compelled again to pause. But the audience, their due excitement heated and quickened by Bim’s insistence, cried incessantly, ”Go on! Go on!” while June, far away from this effort of prose statesmanship, was dreaming of Faerie.

She was back in the Violet Valley. She saw Oberon and Titania, with their most wonderful court. She heard the silver melody of countless elf-voices, she hearkened with worshipful intent to the trills and throbbings of nightingales, she knew the welcome of the flowers, the breath of a soft wind journeying over grasses; and then, through the joys of dreaming, those influences called to her–called to her pleading, to leave her wild mistaken quest in that world of dust and shadows, and return to the happiness and beauty of the old loved life.

Fairyland, in all its voices, pleaded with her earnestly; it drew her heart with its magic, and made her yearn to go back again; but–no, it should not be!

The Archdeacon went on talking. Bim was satisfied now. He lay down once more to rest.

”I will follow our host’s example in telling you what I shall do. My income is a thousand a year, with a house. What do I want, even after satisfying the calls of necessary hospitality, with more than four hundred a year? I shall have to sacrifice some luxuries, true; but I shall have found a new luxury–the best of all luxuries–of knowing that through the wider use of my income, comforts–impossible before–will be enjoyed in twelve poor clergyman’s homes. By giving fifty pounds annually to each of these deserving servants of the Church, I shall reduce their anxieties, insure that they and their families have a better standard of comfort, and so make these, my comrades of the cloth, better and more efficient workmen for the cause. I shall make it a condition of the gift that every one of them acts cordially with the other priests and ministers in his parish–whatever their denomination may be; because, however much we must and shall differ on points of doctrine–till the truth is found in the world invisible–we all should be soldiers under the one banner, united for the one cause, though in different regiments, to forward right, to end wrong, to raise the fallen, to fight sin, to encourage the weak, to discover and destroy those causes which, unchecked,

lead to the starvation, disease and death of body, mind, and soul. For this purpose all men and women, members of the churches, and those who follow the light without belonging to any organized branch of the Church, should see in one another comrades, united for the great purpose of making the world shine with beauty, love and happiness."

Bim, tired through his past enthusiasm, had gradually sunk into slumber. He grasped the wand firmly, though he was asleep. June, on the left shoulder, was still in fairy glades. This is why the Archdeacon had become so serious, and his style and words more suited to his gaiters.

The guests still followed his speech with eagerness, and were strengthened in their new ideals and brave determinings by his bold, plain speaking. It was the strangest banquet they had ever attended, but none of them thought so; and the unconventional addresses seemed just what should have been expected.

"One more personal word in my concluding remarks. I have had many critics, who have not hesitated to say that I lived up to the meaning of my name. Perhaps I have! Perhaps they were right. But, believe me, I will study to reduce my pride. I can see now, as I never saw before, how mistaken I have been in forgetting humility. For a clergyman to be worldly is for him to be unworthy of his faith. It will be a hard battle to be rid of old habits and tendencies, the results of long custom; but I will try. I will endeavour earnestly so to act that the meanest tramp by the wayside, the poorest child, the humblest old man or old woman, may see in me one like themselves, a comrade and a helper."

He paused and remembered the peroration, laboriously prepared under the study lamp; and decided to abandon it. He ended simply.

"It is the Lord Mayor, by his happy lead and example, who has begun what I believe is to all of us a great revolution. My lords and gentlemen, I beg you to join with me in drinking his health."

They did so.

CHAPTER VIII
MAN AND SUPERMAN

The banquet ended with a buzz of tongues. The guests rose, and, standing in clusters, eagerly gave expression to their views of the evening's happenings. Emmanuel Oldstein, his nature softened by unusual fare and strange appeals, went

with a rush to button-hole the Archdeacon and build a monument of promises. The ecclesiastic, greatly daring, asked him to tea–when the rapturous resolutions were fulfilled.

Such was the beginning of a revolution wrought by one Lord Mayor in league with a fairy. What could not such powers do, if they would cooperate more frequently!

Sir Titus gave a general good-night, and retired to his private apartments, to convert the Lady Mayoress to his views–no light task, as Sir Titus very well knew. June, with Bim–who as he went seized an armful of fresh spring flowers–departed, and the mortals went their ways.

The two from Fairyland stood by the Mansion House railings watching the carriages draw up and drive away, bearing their excited loads of men with purposes. Not till the last had gone, and the City resumed its wonted state of comparative peace, did June and he turn in the direction of Paradise Court.

How to get there? A solitary motor-cab waited by the pavement on the other side of the road, the chauffeur talking of tyres and race-horses to a loafer. The driver was one of the impossible brigade, who mark their superiority to ordinary folk by disdaining to accept passengers save when it exactly suited them. June saw this monarch of the road reject the prayers of five stranded wayfarers for no other reason than that his views on the coming Derby were not yet fully told.

So she acted. She took her wand and waved it. A puzzled expression flitted over the face of the man. He mounted the seat of the cab, moved the steering wheel, jerked a lever, and drove to where the fairy and gnome were waiting. The loafer and an interested policeman who had sauntered up looked amazed at this comedy of mystery.

They watched the machine stop, the driver alight and open the door with a bow of great respect to–nothing. They saw the cab at its best speed pass rapidly into Cornhill and hurry eastward. When it had glided out of sight the loafer breathed an incredulous whistle, and the policeman found words of wonder. ”Well, I’m blowed!” was the inadequate all he could say.

Their astonishment was nothing to that of the driver. He was astounded. He could do nothing but continue his course, steering the car boldly along clattering streets, travelling as if guided by an overwhelming unseen influence, here and there, through tortuous strange ways, until instinctively he applied the brake and stopped beside a mean public-house at the entrance to an alley.

Hurriedly, as if fearful of keeping important patrons waiting, he sprang from his seat, reopened the door of the apparently empty cab, and again made obeisance.

Then, when the invisible passengers had alighted, he shut the door with a

bang, and swore thoroughly till he found relief.

June did not enter any of the houses, but with Bim dangling at the end of the wand–his left arm still clasping the flowers–flew up to the roof, carrying him with her.

At once reaction came. The excitement and the interest of the day's proceedings had kept her going; but now, when the time for quiet had come, she passed into a state of torpor and depression. She forgot her triumphs, lost the exhilaration which success had raised in her, and knew, even more than after her first arrival, the grossness and almost hopeless ugliness which beset her. For the first time in a delightful life, she was visited with the blues.

That was an opportunity for Bim.

The long bouts of sleep had refreshed him, and he proved less sensitive than June to the effects of their environment. He took the flowers, and with rapid fingers wove a fairy-bower about her. The white and yellow cups and one purple violet, refreshed by his affection, revived in sympathy. June, noting Bim's helpfulness, took cheer and courage again. For a whole day she remained harassed and weary; but on the following evening she faced her task again.

She flew languidly to the brink of a chimney-pot and studied the world around. Black roofs, seedy houses, blank windows and glaring lights on every side: over all stretched the haze that had frightened her.

"Poor humanity!" she murmured, "doomed day and night, year after year, from birth to death, to be bricked in like that!"

She did not now waste energy in expressing apostrophe, but made immediate plans. She attended to the flowers which Bim had rescued from death.

She touched the cut ends and strengthened their power of life; then lovingly she arranged the best of them about the dusty base of the chimney-stack. They were precious possessions, treasures to hoard.

Bim had seen in a forgotten flower-box in a corner of the court mould, gathered years before from a lost garden. That would do! He went to get some, while June stood on the flat parapet and looked on the court below.

Darkness, dirt, decay! How very like life in the town! She looked above at the wounded sky. Two planets and the moon shone dimly through London smoke. The fairy yearned to be above that cloud, to swim in the azure ocean of night, to be closer to the stars, nearer the ideals, farther from muck-raking men. Up, up, and up!

She spread wings and climbed the skylark's stairway. Up and up she went, deliriously happy now, thinking the thoughts the laverock sings. For a while she absolutely forgot weariness and heartache, and only knew gladness of life and the passion to be nearer the light.

Her wings did not cease their beating till she was out of the haze, breathing

again the untroubled air which is, indeed, to men and to fairies, life. Then resting on wings outspread, she hung motionless, an atom of light potential, brooding over the miles of lurid city.

Her heart became heavy and sorry because of the burdens of men. To her sight, London was a ruined wilderness, lit here and there with yellow flares. Where the parks stretched was mere blackness, interspersed with dimly shining slabs of pond and lake as the shrouded moonshine happened to fall on them. The Thames, except for occasional gleams of reflected moonlight, was a grey ribbon, a wedge driven through luridness, a forbidding fact.

The red canopy of haze which in Elfdom had oppressed her stretched underneath. It was a barrier between man and the stars–heavy and palpable. The shining worlds which lend magic to the night are so potent an influence for mind-good, bringing exaltation and the high dreams, that what hindered their contemplation was an evil to be banished and destroyed. So June argued, puzzling how to end it. Fairy cogitation! Yet is it so futile?

She was glad to change her gaze and look above her. There it spread–star dust, the firmament, myriads of worlds and suns supremely magnificent, infinite, uplifting, yet, with all the stir of the soul it occasioned, bringing strengthening humility. If men used their eyes and minds and saw more of the shine of the universe; if they watched the constellations in their annual orbits, knew the unique Sirius as a friend, recognized Arcturus, greeted the Pleiades after their summer absence, would not ideals be nobler, hopes happier, tolerance of meanness in its many shapes impossible?

While the fairy rested in her blissful aerial loneliness, she became aware of a gradual gladness, an added sense of joy–more subtle than had blessed her spirits since her flight from the Violet Valley–visiting her. It roused her from reverie to realities.

Fairies–her own people–were approaching, calling her. Their voices and brilliance were better than pearls and wealth.

"June, our June, come back to us! Come back! Come back!"

The appeal was powerful. With almost the swiftness of light the fairies flew. It was the company of knights, half a century strong, who had been commissioned to conduct June after the crowning home to the Land of Wild Roses. She turned with gladness to greet them. Like was coming to like. Sympathies were drawing together. They were her own people, her comrades; they pleaded with her to leave her crusade in the darkness, and return to delight.

Their presence was welcome, but not even then could she forget the children and those others whose plight required the gifts of the fairies. When the elf-world had helped them, she would go back gladly, but–not yet. She could not leave Sally and her mates of Paradise Court or the other dim millions whose need

of beauty and joy and light she knew.

She closed her wings and sank to earth, leaving the knights above the cloud, wheeling and calling to her in vain. They looked through the veil at the world beneath and reluctantly flew back to Fairyland.

She found Bim busy, home-building. He had gathered some ”smoke-dried” moss from roofs and chimneys, wondering the while at the angular world he clambered over, and had beaten it into a bed for her, with cobwebs for coverlet. He was coaxing the newly-planted flowers to feel at home, and all the while was singing, croakingly and cheerily, as if a draughty roof over Paradise Court was as near Fairyland as need be. So it was to him then, while working for June.

She did not interrupt him–his activity and happiness were balm and strength to her–but descended the chimney into the room.

Sally was fast asleep, so were the two men and the mother of the babe. The infant was weakly crying. The two other women were awake and working, toiling by the light of a candle. Their eyes were dazed and weak through its flickering uncertainties, but the effort had to be. All the protest they made was to curse and chide the wailing infant. June, heedless of the economies, touched them to sleep, and prudently put out the light.

She gave the sleepers dreams to cheer and comfort them. Sally was back once more in the land of the glorious waterfall. Bill was tramping along a dusty road with the promise of beer ahead. Then June quieted the baby by kissing its eyes, giving the hungry mite the comfort of slumber.

What was to become of that mortal, born to be blighted and doomed? There she touched our heaviest problem. The fact of life meant misery to that mite. The fairy noted with sadness its sunken eyes, pinched cheeks, and limbs no thicker than firewood, and wondered and wondered what to do. If that child was left so, neglected and starved through the innutrition that was all its mother could give it, it would die. Should that be?

She wished that some of the wasted provender from the Lord Mayor’s board could be given to the children who needed food, and decided forthwith to fetch some for the many infant victims of Paradise Court.

She passed through the window, waving to it to open and shut as she went, and was away like light on her quest.

She flashed along the silent streets, rose to pass over the City, brushed with her left wing the dragon on Bow Church steeple, fluttered for a contemplative moment over the west door of St. Paul’s, came to earth at the Griffin.

She watched omnibuses and cabs go by, and streams of belated people. She looked eagerly into their faces, but found none quite to her liking. So she resumed her flight along the Strand and rested on the railings before Charing Cross.

Two gilded youths came swaggering along, helping and hindering each

other, their arms linked. They had white, empty faces, crush-hats were villainously aslant on their heads, their black cape coats were open, showing broad shirt-fronts with shining diamond studs.

They sometimes sang a spasm of chorus, sometimes peevishly quarrelled, sometimes were uncomplimentary to passers-by. They were adopted sons of Silenus, swollen with insolence and wine.

June descended to the junction of their linked arms, and poked each vigorously, thrice, with her wand, putting good purposes into their muzzy brains.

Their ideas became clearer. They stopped, lurched, and with a fine effort stood upright like manly men. One assumed his monocle, and said, "Jove!" They crossed the road, ignoring the rapid traffic as if it were not, and entered a confectioner's shop, which remained open nightly till the fairy hour.

Each planked down two sovereigns.

"Buns," said one.

"Milk," demanded the other.

"Chocolate."

"Cups!"

The weary waitresses thought the youths were making fun of them, but seeing the gold, and glad to be rid of their balance of scones and buns, they piled all they had before these customers, brought great tins of milk, and packets full of chocolate, with all the chipped, cracked cups they could hurriedly find and spare.

One of these unwitting philanthropists stared at the sixpence-halfpenny change which a conscientious cashier had put in his gloved hand; the other gazed through his eyeglass, startled by the quantity of their purchases. June smilingly approved their deeds and intentions.

"We'll have a growler!" they declared together.

A curious crowd of waitresses and passers-by helped them to load the vehicle, repeated their united command to go "That way"–Eastward–and sped them on their journey with a laughing cheer.

"What have we done this for?" said the one to the other.

"Lord knows," was the answer, "but we'll do it."

Lulled by the closeness of the cab, the smell of the buns, the rattle of the cups, and their innate sense of virtuous doing, the happy couple put heads together and slept, till they were wakened by the rattling and clattering of the cab passing over a granite causeway.

The Jehu came to his senses first. June, who had been standing in his chest pocket, where he illegally kept his badge, stopped him by Paradise Court.

"I dunno why I done it, but I did!" he said to a policeman, who, seeing a waiting cab, had sauntered up.

Bim came scurrying down from the roof.

"Sit on his head," June commanded him. The gnome perched on the policeman's helmet. "Make him help!"

The youths dragged at and lifted down their tins of milk. Then the cabman, policeman, and they boldly entered the court, crept into every room of every house–there are few locks in Paradise Court, and bolts are seldom shot there–and put by each sleeping child a cup of milk, a bun and a piece of chocolate–surprises for their awakening.

The good things were just enough for the number needing them, with five buns left over, which the cabman pocketed.

The human quartet eventually emerged from the court, radiant with kindness.

"I could do a drink," said the policeman, darkening his bull's-eye lantern.

"Same 'ere," said the heated charioteer.

"And so say all of us!" chimed the youths.

The policeman gave a peculiar whistle. An upper window of the publichouse was quietly opened.

"'Oo goes there?" whispered Bung.

"Us, Tim," said the policeman.

"Right-oh, Alfred! 'arf a mo'."

The wearer of the monocle produced some silver.

"My turn," he said; "four whiskies."

While these givers of goodness rewarded themselves, June went to her nest for sleep.

"This is the beginning of the new Fairyland," she said gratefully to Bim, who beamed.

CHAPTER IX
THE PROGRESS OF OBERON

The Lord Mayor's Banquet became history, though in the beginning the newspapers were inclined to pay slight attention to it. If it had happened in the dog-days, when attractive "copy" for holiday idlers is at a premium, it would without any especial effort on the part of the fairies, have been seized by journalists and made the easy rage of a summer season. It would have swamped the sea-serpent, ren-

dered the giant gooseberry an unblown bubble, prevented imaginative pessimists from indulging annual fears of the future of our daughters and the failure of our marriages; would have made the ordinary Silly Season a period of real, recreative, intellectual bliss.

But June, in her decisions, had no concern for any mere editor's convenience, and caught the powers of Fleet Street just at their busiest time. Parliament was still mouthing about the Budget, and adding to the troubles of Tadpole and Taper; a miniature General Election–three by-elections at once–was in progress; the summer worlds of sport were getting into swing; an earthquake had played havoc with the island of Zikki-baboo; the natives of the North-West Frontier of India had been once more at their sniping, inviting a new punitive expedition to be despatched; Gertie Feathergirl of the Gaiety had become romantically engaged to the Hon. Stanley Stallboys, and was making her last appearances–to the delight of a gushing multitude–before she retired to private life and the management of a motor business; the Very Grand Duke of Hotzenbosch had written a postcard, marked private, which necessitated the rapid commissioning of two flying squadrons: in brief, everything that could possibly happen at that crowded time was happening; and news-editors began to wonder why they lived.

Then June came to town, and what had to occur did occur! The Lord Mayor made his speech, the Archdeacon followed suit. A revolution in ideals was blowing up. What was Fleet Street to do? Should the circumstance be made a splash of; or interned in a few facetious paragraphs? What a pity, said they, it had not been kept till the year was in its wilderness!

The facts were too important to be buried and ignored. A Lord Mayor is not original, an Archdeacon not on the heights, for nothing! Editors can do most things; but any attempt on their parts to smother the influence of the fairies is as futile as the broom of Mrs. Partington; it merely demonstrates that they are only human after all.

The banquet and its tendencies had to be reported and commented on, with headlines. So the papers took it up.

Parliament, Gertie Feathergirl, war, actual and diplomatic, with all other matters of passing concern, were compelled to take their proper subordinate places in the daily prints and public interest.

The best of the newspapers, that which you and I support, O reader, began the Press crusade. It gave four columns of description and appeal on its principal page; and this was the heading:

OBERON SHALL BE KING.

And all the while Oberon was in one or other of his castles–in Ireland, in Wales, in Spain, in that dim country where the dreams are made, in Weissnichtwo–living the fairy life, making the birds, flowers, clouds and rivers happier; yet, never for the tithe of an instant, forgetting the madness of June.

The particular newspaper we refuse to have anything to do with, O reader–the newspaper whose opinions we despise and deplore–scoffed at the fairies in its usual cocksure way, as was to be expected! It professed to regard the Lord Mayor's plea as the agreeable sentiment of a well-dined gentleman, and made play with a leaderette in which Titania was called a myth and the fairies fruits of nightmare.

Such conduct on the part of a widely-read journal had to be answered.

June–let it be granted–treated its iconoclastic persiflage with the toleration of contempt. She, too, did not read the newspapers; but Archdeacon Pryde, who recognized that Sir Titus would not condescend to defend himself against such an attack, and remembering that he also was involved in that halfpenny condemnation, called a cab, packed a snuff-box with voice-lozenges, and went with heat and dudgeon to the headquarters of the offending newspaper.

He was welcomed with a military salute by the commissionaire at the gate; snapshotted thrice–when paying the cabman, eating a lozenge, and handing his card to a youth in the enquiry office. When inside the editorial sanctum, he was induced to pose for two flash-light photographs–one showing him engaged in earnest talk with the great man, the other with his hand resting on the tousled head of a printer's devil.

These pictures were to illustrate an "interview"–dictated to a shorthand writer–which explained the Archdeacon's ideas and intentions in connection with his and the Lord Mayor's new determinings, and so gave the Editor an excuse for a *volte-face*.

The Archdeacon was in a rapture of enthusiasm white hot. This prominent usefulness, or useful prominence, was gratifying. He promised to send his menu, that the inscribed resolutions might be reproduced in facsimile for the morrow's issue; and ended by asking the Editor to tea.

He went home more conscious than ever of being a man of influence and work.

So even the paper which you and I, O reader, habitually dislike and ignore, came over to the side of light.

The great organs of the Press, with amazing unanimity, rolled their machines, blew trumpets, and beat drums, in the interests of Fairy Reform. It was no sudden affair, that splendid combination; but a gradual all-round awakening to the benefit, delight, and need of preaching the causes of Elfdom.

The sober weeklies followed with such assumption of authority that they

seemed to think they were leading. They had no hesitancy. The monthlies and quarterlies also, in due time, continued the chorus. It took about four months to bring this trend of influence to perfection, but then the cause went on like a tidal wave.

Oberon and Titania, strangely unconscious of the new-won rage for fairy goodness, became social factors; they left the select preserve of the Folklorists to become magazine favourites, the darlings of Fashion, high and low.

But this is very like anticipation, that bugbear of the sober historian, so we return to the present, as it was.

Emmanuel Oldstein found the keeping of his ideals a hard business. His midnight enthusiasm had strangely waned by the time of the milkman's chant.

The breakfast-table on the morrow morn was very like a battlefield; there were storms in five tea-cups. His family opposed his good intentions with earnestness, broken English, and some quotation of the Pentateuch, and thereby through the rule of contrariness, kept him to his purpose. Their obstinacy strengthened his. He stuck gamely to his guns, and began his course at once by doubling Ernie Jenkins' wages, enabling that young patriot to enlarge his indulgence in bitter beer, to wear three clean collars a week, and to promise Emily–with a few safeguarding "ifs"–that some day she might be "Mrs. J."

Emmanuel's family yielded to his wishes when he bought them over. He gave Mrs. Oldstein a purple silk dress trimmed with jet, a big bangle, and a gold watch so small that its works could never move. Max, who presumed to strange heights of impudent sarcasm on the subject of "the guvnor's flum," was given a minor partnership in the emporium, provided he was not merely just, but generous, in all his dealings.

He quickly agreed, and became a pompous person, forgetful of old associates.

Keeping the resolutions was certainly a hard and bitter business to the old man; but it did him good. He never lost sight of the promise of tea with the Archdeacon.

The hardest effort came when those pious folk next door took the bait, and approached Jabez Gordon of Jermyn Street for a loan–"to extend their efforts for the Cause."

Emmanuel unwisely informed Hannah of the fact. Her eyes blazed with angry happiness. At last! At last!

"Now squelch 'em, Pa!" she pleaded, in her commanding manner.

"Thertainly, my dear!" he said evasively; and hurriedly put on his hat to commune with himself in a walk round the squares. Here was a pass!

The undying remembrance of persecution, endured through ages by his people, flamed within him. Years of petty trading and the practices of sharp

finance had not entirely subdued his inherited racial fire. And of all the Anti-Semite persecutors, none were so exasperating as those infatuated, contemptible sentimentalists–the pin-prick fanatics–who hoped to ”convert” him, asking him to exchange the breadths of his own faith, based on centuries of national sacrifice and fighting history, for their traditionless, unimaginative, sapless sectarianism. It was a hard effort to spare those people at that moment of possible revenge.

Shylock had his twentieth-century opportunity.

When Emmanuel reached home again he was still undecided. An ancient battle was furious in his breast. He slept that night with a pile of the offensive mission notices beside his pillow, and turned and dreamed in a troubled way, murmuring Yiddish.

During breakfast he came to a decision, which he kept to himself.

”Father, I am glad you can punish them,” said Hannah significantly, as she helped him with his outer coat. That was the only remark passed on the subject. Wisely, he held his peace.

He wrote from his office of finance in Jermyn Street–at first view you would think it a place of sale for strong cigars and strange red wines–to the sanctimonious young man, inviting Mr. Lemuel Buskin Junior to call upon Jabez Gordon ”to complete the little matter of business about which Mr. Lemuel Buskin Junior had written.”

Then Oldstein went on to the City, and got from Max a list of the workers–the sweated workers–who gave their lives to the making of his wealth. He would visit them all, and investigate their condition, doing whatever he could–be it little or much–to modify their wants and sufferings. The last on that list of mean, poor ones, was Sally Wilkins of Paradise Court. Already he had arranged or made purposes to pay every one of his employees a living wage, whatever the result might be in the increase of prices and consequent possible loss of customers. It was a bold policy. To Emmanuel Oldstein, even still more to Max, it was very like inexcusable sin. To pay more than need be for anything was to blaspheme against the gods of Economics. But he insisted on doing it, and did it. To anticipate for the last time, the policy paid.

Emmanuel’s blood was up. He kept his written resolutions before him wherever he went. They and the menu reminded him of the Lord Mayor’s appeal, of his own pledges, of his hopes of civic advancement, of the Archdeacon’s invitation to tea. Again that night a battle raged in his breast. Hannah kept watchful eyes upon him.

On the following morning money-lender and victim emerged from their front-doors simultaneously. Neither appeared to notice the other–according to the canons of the unwritten law which rules the no-relation of next-door neighbours. None so far away as at the other side of a party wall!

The heir of the Buskins was less beautiful than good. His nose was the index to his mind. It pointed heavenwards. His thoughts were built of texts and depression. He had a saddened soul, but was never bankrupt of pious hope. He yearned that sinners should walk with him on the pearly pathways, and knew the naughty when he met them. So, in any case, it was not to be expected he should notice Oldstein, who in every respect offended and roused his religious antipathies. Lemuel was one of those whose thoughts reach the heights of the chimney-pots; they soar, yet are smothered with smuts.

Emmanuel noticed him. The Jew's keen eyes with a glance read the story told by the other's clothes. Lemuel was in blacks–his Sunday best. The coat had a tail; the hat was silken. He carried brown gloves and his mother's umbrella nicely rolled. His little sleek yellow moustache had upward twists; the whiskerettes which roused Hannah's ire and contempt were carefully trimmed. He wore a tartan necktie–to gratify that Scotsman, Jabez Gordon.

Oldstein grunted–there was joy in his nose–as they climbed into an omnibus together. The merchant took out his notebook and soon was controlling figures, while Lemuel stared at the advertisements or table of fares, stroked the careful crease in his trousers, and nervously fingered the points of his collar.

The omnibus stopped at Piccadilly Circus; they alighted. Lemuel had to ask the way to Jermyn Street; Oldstein knew it, and was soon in his office eagerly attacking a pile of letters. Five minutes later his one clerk–a magnificent creature whose greatest asset was a capacity for being stylish on very little–brought in Buskin's name.

"He must wait," said the master gruffly, "while I dictate letters. Hurry!"

He solemnly put the pile of mission notices on the desk before him, and closely attended to his correspondence.

Lemuel was waiting with the pitiful patience of a deserted lamb. His little heart was excitedly fluttering. He felt strangely fearful. He was not used to business. He would have given sixpence to have seen himself in a looking-glass, to be sure his hair was tidy, his tie straight. He eyed the dingy furniture of the stuffy room, and felt his courage going. He had expected to see more adornment than this; but he had read that the truly wealthy make the least display.

He fixed his gaze steadily on the door through which the clerk had gone, regarding it with mingled dread and longing. "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate" might well have been written above it.

Twenty minutes passed–Father Time, to spite his impatience, grossly enlarged every one of the twelve hundred seconds–before the splendid clerk reopened the door, ostentatiously closed an untidy shorthand book, and said: "Will ye go in?"

Lemuel Buskin rose trembling. His knees seemed to have forgotten their

strength. But he remembered his mother's counsel, plucked up courage, and repeated mentally the stimulating chorus of a hymn. He was, as he entered the private office and took the offered seat, in such a whirl of confusion that he did not at once recognize the person of the financier.

Suddenly he was aware of Oldstein's identity, and blushed hotly.

"I ca-came to see Mr. Gordon!"

"I am Mithter Gordon!"

"Ja-Jabez Gordon?"

"Jabez Gordon! and you are Mithter Buthkin."

"But you–I–oh!"

"Exthactly! Oh! ith jutht the word. Mithter Buthkin, I'm glad to thee you. We're old acquaintanthes, we are, although you may not know it! You ask my daughter 'Annah 'ow much indebted to you we feel. My 'Annah lookth on you ath a brother, a Christian brother. Thee them billth?"–Emmanuel slapped the pile of mission notices with a dingy hand. Lemuel's last shadow of pluck was evaporating fast; but Oldstein with the question challenged his fanaticism.

"I'm proud to be a labourer in the vineyard!" was the surly defiant reply.

"And well may be! But you're an unthkilled labourer, Mr. Buthkin. Now I'm glad you've called, for I want to talk to you; you're goin' to listen and then we may do bithness."

Lemuel, surprised and unprepared, was cowed by Oldstein's decision and speech. He had bitterness on his tongue, but refrained from any retort.

"Do you believe in the fairieth, Mithter Buthkin?" was the unexpected question.

Lemuel could only stare and wonder.

"Answer me!"

"Certainly I do not!"

"That'th a pity. I do."

"I believe in higher things."

"And do you live up to them?"

Lemuel gasped.

"I didn't come here to be insulted."

"No, Mithter Buthkin, and I don't go 'ome to be inthulted with them things–do you recognithe 'em?–in my letter-box. Who put 'em there? Look at 'em well! You did. Why? Because you're a tuppenny little thkunk–I leave your parenth out of it, for they're too old to know better; they're past mendin'–you're a little tuppenny thkunk who prethumes to think that your belief ith the whole and only truth, and that my belief–which my fathers and their fathers 'eld for thouthandth on thouthandth of yearth, long before London wath more than a puddle, ith–I don't know what you think it ith. You can't compre'end it, Mithter Buthkin, no,

you can't!"

The old man paused and watched his victim keenly. He then burst out with speech of passion.

"You to convert uth! You to wish to make uth such Christians as yourselves–nuisances in the street–thingin', blarin', thpeakin' uncharitably of our neighbourth! To convert uth! Father Abraham! I'd rather be a persecuted Jew, stoned, starved, beaten, 'ated–as we have been 'ated, starved and stoned for thousandth of yearth–than such a Christian! Even if I 'ad to be a damned thoul burnin', rottin', stinkin' in Gehenna for ever afterwardth, I would not be such a Christian! Thit down, Mithter Buthkin!"

Lemuel hesitated, but obeyed. He hated and feared this old man of anger, whose voice had become powerful with passion. Somehow the armoury of texts seemed insufficient.

"I athked you jutht now if you believed in the fairieth, and you thaid 'No.' Well, I do believe in 'em, and it ith well for you I do. I meant to punish you for worryin' us with them billth. I meant to crush you, to end you. There'th nothin' tho easy in bithness life ath for a finanthier to crush a poor man, if 'e likes. I meant to crush you and your people because of your cruelty to uth. I'd 'ave lent you moneys at such a rate of interest, on such artful terms, that you couldn't 'ave paid it back; and I'd 'ave bought you up and broke you, body and soul. But the other night I wath dinin' at the Mansion 'Ouse with the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and my friend the Venerable Reverend Archdeacon Pryde, who's athked me to tea with him. You read what appeared in the papers, 'aven't you? Everyone there made resolutions, and, like the others, I made promises, which I'm goin' to keep. Lucky for you, Mr. Buthkin, that I did. Now I'll begin by makin' you a prethent. I give you back them billth. Here they are. What common paper you do use for 'em! I could put you in the way of buying much better quality at the price you pay, I bet! Burn 'em! Take 'em 'ome and burn 'em! And now, if you like, we'll talk bithness. Mithter Buthkin, I was glad you wrote to me. Ha, ha!" His laugh was not musical. "You must 'ave been agreeably surprithed when you found Jabez Gordon was me! 'Annah would laugh, too, if I were to tell 'er 'ow you looked. But bithness now!"

Lemuel, who had just been feeling limp, made an effort to rouse himself. The genial note in Oldstein's voice was to him as balm in Gilead.

"You want a 'undred poundth–to thpread the cause, ath you call it. Well, I ain't goin' to lend you money to thpread any cause, but I'll be better than my bond: I'll lend you a 'undred at 10 per thent–50 per thent. would be low enough, too low for such rotten thecurity ath you can give–on condition that you pay your family's debts with it. I know about 'em, Mithter Buthkin; E. Oldstein's a knowing one. Also, that not one 'alfpenny of it goes to convertin' anybody. I've

never made such an offer ath this before, and if any man 'ad told me a year ago I'd do it, I'd 'ave called 'im somethin'. You can thank the fairieth for it. But that ain't all! I'll give you ten pound at once–'ere they are, nice fat yellow boys, ain't they?–to buy food and clothin' for poor Christians–Christians, mind!–who need it. I'll trutht you to dithtribute the moneys honestly. Put 'em away carefully, Mithter Buthkin. To-night you can come to my 'ouse–it's next door to yours–number forty-eight, and fetch the loan and sign the document. Jutht realithe thith, Mithter Buthkin, I'm treatin' you wonderfully well–the fairieth 'ave made me do it!–but, mind my words, put another paper of any kind into my letter-box, or let me find you even printin' a bill about the Conversion of the Jewth–and fairieth or no fairieth–I'll crush you!"

Oldstein sat down exhausted. He took a strong cigar out of a drawer, cut and lighted it with quivering fingers.

Lemuel's mind was in a riot of confusion. Qualms of conscience, of gratitude, of fear swept through him. He rose mechanically, picked up and pocketed the ten sovereigns, and feebly squeezed Oldstein's proffered hand.

"Do you thmoke, Mr. Buthkin?" asked Emmanuel.

"No!"

"Does your Dad thmoke?"

"No!"

"That'th a great pity. So good for the 'eart! If you wanted to buy thome cigarth at any time, real 'Avanah, I could get you a 'undred–good uns, mind; strong, with a flavour–for a very low price. Well, theven o'clock to-night! 'Annah will be pleased to see you!"

Lemuel walked the whole way home, and more than once said, "Dash!"

CHAPTER X
THE IMPORTANCE OF BIM

It was some few weeks before Emmanuel Oldstein was able to fulfil his good intention of visiting Paradise Court. Sally was the last on his list, and not till June's name-month was half-way through could he come to her.

Meanwhile things had been happening. The newspaper crusade was going well, and the two from Fairyland were using their efforts to help it forward.

The gnome was becoming influential in Paradise Court. It was in especial

his province. June, with her wings and magic, could visit a wide area; but he, with his poor inches and limitations, was necessarily stay-at-home. Partly through accident he began a revolution which was fated to have important effect in the recovery of London. This is how it happened.

The old flower-box whence he had taken the mould for their flourishing roof-garden was a faded, decrepit affair; otherwise its meagre quantity of wood would surely, long ago, have been broken and used as fuel. For years it had stood in a dank corner, barren and forgotten. Then, in a fit of prankishness, Bim carried down a violet, the only one gathered in the Mansion House posy, and planted it. June had given it power of life; with the tenacity of its kind it had struggled, flourished and come to bloom.

It was the gnome's treasure. He was proud of its being, and looked after it in a spoilt parental way, exaggerating its few qualities, blessedly blind to its defects.

For some days it bluely blushed unseen; and then came into a prominence which half pleased, half frightened it.

Poll Skinner cast her husband-blacked eyes upon it.

"Lor' lummy!" she cried, "a voilet!"

She looked at the flower and thereupon fell in a dream. A violet in Paradise Court! For the first time for years she was out of the ugly present, away from the base life about her.

Memories of old days, clean days, lived again. She saw herself as she was, before sin, want and selfishness had claimed and kept her. As she was! As she was! She remembered her father's cottage, with its garden of pinks and wallflowers. She remembered a wood near an ivied church; and was once again a girl, hunting for primroses, bluebells and violets. She remembered her white pinafore and her cleverness at weaving daisy-chains. How clean in all ways was that maiden life! And now—- Paradise Court! Drink and the devil had taken their toll! God!

Poll found tears in her eyes when she woke to the present. She wiped her face with grimy hands and left traces.

"Blimey, 'ere's old Poll drunk again!" said one of the knights of the place, a hulking fellow who called himself a dock-labourer, but whose idle hands were almost rooted to his pockets. "What yer starin' at, Poll?"

Poll indicated the flower. He saw it and stretched forth a hand.

"There ain't much to blub about in that!"

"Leave it be, Mike!" she cried, fearing his destructiveness. "Leave it be! It's a voilet!"

"A what? Let's 'ave a look! Who are ye shovin'? I want to look at it." She resisted him. "I'll wipe yer eyes if ye don't!"

He pushed forward with all his strength, intending, in sheer debasing mischief, to grab and crush the flower; but Poll struggled like a cat-woman to prevent him. He lost temper and struck her in the face. She, shrieking and shrill, tore his forehead with her nails, and tried to bite him. Her hair came loose. There was blood on her cheek. The animal emerged from Man.

The tumult of shuffling feet and foul speech brought others of the Court to doorways and windows. Women, who knew nothing of the cause of the combat, added their voices to Poll's in vigorous denunciation of Mike. The men–brave fellows!–looked on and grinned. One slunk away from the scene of the encounter; that was Skinner, Poll's natural protector and supposed husband. He went into the public-house and ordered beer.

The battle ended when Mike had accomplished his purpose and grasped the flower. He threw it on the pavement and ground it with his boot. Then he went away leisurely to enjoy refreshment after victory. His thirst had found an excuse. Poll's fury lapsed into noisy tears. She entered her one room, threw a rusty flat-iron on the floor, and nagged at the children.

Bim had watched this commotion from the parapet above. He sprawled on the cement-work, peeped at the tangle of heads below, and felt thoroughly frightened. Deeply did he regret that June was not there. She would have fought on the side of Poll and the violet, and given them victory. Had only her wand been left behind he could and would have intervened effectively. But nothing could be done. When he saw brutality win, he went moodily back to the fairies' garden, and pondered on ugly things.

The blues drove him into a brown study. He decided the affair should not end there. He uprooted a lingering primrose, and crept down with it. He carefully grubbed the mould in the box to freshen its jadedness, and planted the yellow flower–the fairies' oriflamme.

Back to the parapet he clambered to wait and watch.

Hours passed by. Nothing happened that day to reward his patience. The people of Paradise Court are not observant. The primrose lived and shone without appreciation until the morrow, when June magically drew attention to it. Some children first caught sight of it and curiously poked at it with sticks. It was a new wonder to them.

Poll saw the group about the box, and came to look. The wrath of yesterday was requickened within her. The children in their wisdom edged away from the virago, who carried the box to the sill outside her window, dumped it down; and then, in a voice of challenge, screamed out:

"'Ere's a primrose come! If anybody touches this, by Gawd, I'll murder 'im!"

Mike, having won his battle yesterday, was quite good-tempered to-day.

He sauntered up to look at the flower and laughed.

"I won't touch it, Poll. You can 'ave yer measly primrose," and went off for another drink.

Poll hesitated, then followed him: their feud was drowned in beer.

The primrose lived for a week, and held a sort of continuous reception. Bim was as proud as a peacock about it. He got stiff-neck staring over the parapet, straining to hear the compliments and praise. Everybody in the Court paid it a daily visit and undue tributes. The children could hardly be induced to keep their hands from it. Their fingers itched to pluck; but Poll Skinner was a power to be feared. She kept sober in order to be the better sentinel.

Mike suddenly shifted the interest of Paradise Court to his abode by bringing home three flowerpots containing hyacinths–how he obtained them had better not be asked. As at the same time the primrose happened to fade, and its plant had no promise of buds, Poll felt chagrin. The balance of her world was shifted. Mike held the hub of the hemisphere.

She drank herself silly with gin, and beat her children frightfully; but the return of sober sanity brought new ideas. Poll rose to the occasion. She sent her "old man" to a distant churchyard to steal some good new mould; and then bought–actually bought–from the publican's wife, a rose-plant warranted to flower.

Poll bore it home triumphantly, while Paradise Court smiled.

Mike's hyacinths–in comparison with Poll's aristocratic plant–had now to take a second place, very far-behind, in the public interest. And it was no good making reprisals. Neither his wits nor his wealth would enable him to do better than Poll. Moreover, the fashion of flowers was spreading. Three other residents in the colony had put up rough window-boxes, with green things in them; and the children, keen to follow their elders, found tins, jam-pots, pickle-jars, and planted within them anything they could get; grass, if nothing of the flower kind was available.

Bim felt a third of an inch taller; he trod with an airier tread, now that his influence over Paradise Court had become so manifest. He laboured with Salvationist ardour to help the people; supplementing and moderating their energies, and encouraged the flowers to live. For hours he would sit in blest invisibility by one or other of the plants, enjoying the admiring remarks addressed to them, sharing the general satisfaction.

Families came to talk of weedy green things as if they were spreading chestnut-trees; while those members of the community who, having gone "hopping," had actual experience of wild life and woodland facts were regarded as travellers and oracles. Living up to their opportunities, they told vegetable counterparts of certain fish stories. Bim's blessed interference certainly caused some

white stealth and a multitude of tarradiddles.

Nor was the indirect influence of the gnome yet at an end.

'Arry Bailey was the instrument of the next progressive step. He had some nasturtiums and was ambitious of getting them to climb in festoons round his window. He used nails, string, language and glue. At last he succeeded. For a time his nasturtiums were the rage. Their blazing colours and rapid growth made them popular. But Bailey, in whom the æsthetic sense must have been recovering after years of hibernation, felt that something was lacking. He smoked three ounces of shag and scratched his chin for hours on end before it dawned on him what it was.

Then he said "By gum"–that was all he said–and proceeded to surprise the Court by cleaning his window. One of the panes was badly cracked, the mark of some midnight fracas; so–more surprising still–he measured the gap, bought glass and putty, and entertained a Sunday crowd of chaffing, envious lookers-on by mending it himself, making a clumsy good business of it.

Bailey's act of reformation occasioned criticism and imitation–action is mostly imitation in Paradise Court. Before a further seven days had dawned and darkened not a window on any floor in the Court but was washed and polished. In cases where there was no money for mending, new paper–preferably illustrated–was put in broken places, window-sills and doorsteps were whitened.

The inhabitants began to feel proud, to give themselves airs, to wash their necks.

Curtains of all shapes and colours appeared, rooms became tidied: homes tolerable. Men stayed indoors to smoke their pipes and gossip, going less frequently to the public-house. Not that the improvement was so rapid as to seem violent. Paradise Court was, is, and will be till the trump, a home of conservatism. Its motion is that of a glacier. Yet it does move, and did. Though drunkenness and slovenliness, with brutalities of words and of fighting, were still over-frequent, there was real improvement, and a quiet growth of self-respect, which, after the lapse of months, had borne remarkable fruit. Bravo, Bim!

The gnome extended his efforts further afield, and was constantly dropping flowers before children in the alleys and other drearinesses of London, in order that they might be picked up, taken home, appreciated, loved, and wanted.

June, learning from him, was glad to follow his example. She scattered love-bringing blooms and blossoms–gathered without permission from the parks–wherever there were brown plain walls and ugliness. She wanted the fairies to come back to their ancient rights and rule; but felt they certainly would not stay where flowers were forgotten.

She longed–longed desperately–for the return of the elves to their ancient dominion over the town.

One night a company from Elfland made grand appeal to her. It was a full hour and more after midnight, and absolutely dark. No moon shone on the scene, no stars shed brightness from the sky.

Bim was sprawling on the roof-gutter lost in dreams. His head rested on a sparrow's deserted nest. June was in her bower, too weary for visions, even too weary for sleep. She was tired at heart, thoroughly, utterly tired! Her only comfort came from the flowers beaming about her. She felt the loneliness of London. Fairy memories called and called and called to her. She was weary of burdens. This pilgrimage in the dark city was dreary, heavy, grievous and horrible. But still, she must stay.

Her quick ears caught the rustling of many fairy wings in the distance; only one with sympathies sensitive and truly attuned to the wafting could have heard them so far away. She sat and saw elves on the wing. They were haze-shrouded, high in the sky above. Would they penetrate the murky canopy? Had they come in late answer to her appeals, to help with the burden, to share in the task of re-creating beauty in the wilderness?

She watched them wheeling in the upper air in distant luminousness, curving, descending. She grasped her wand and followed their progress intently, hoping all things, yearning to be with them again.

The flowers about June's bed, the flowers in the court below, lifted glad heads in greeting. They freshened visibly. Bim in his slumbers sighed, and comfortably turned as he slept.

The elves alighted on the roofs around. There were thousands of them. Half the folk of the Violet Valley, of the Land of Wild Roses, of other parts of Fairyland, must have been there. They were multitudinous, innumerable, and clustered on rims of chimneys, on angles of houses, on street-lamps and window-sills, making of dull commonplace a remarkable series of pictures. All the while they were singing songs of sweet appeal.

June donned her crown, while they hovered and settled, and stood to greet them. Some sparrows, surprised by the unwonted spectacle, woke and began chirping. It was beggarly music, monotonous the word for it: but it served. London, alas! had nothing better and the sparrows did their best. Fairy kindness overlooked the deficiencies.

Suddenly there was silence: elves and birds hushed.

"Welcome, sweet comrades from Fairyland!" said June. "I am glad you have visited me amongst these shadows. Will you stay and help to restore London to Oberon?"

"Nay, nay," answered a hundred voices, slender and silvern, from here and from there.

"June, our June!" a sparkling knight then cried to her. "Your going has

brought gloom into the elf-countries. Oberon and Titania have been grieved and absent since your flight; all others of us have felt the changes. Come back to us! It is like living in a valley with the sunshine and moonlight always gone; like living in a wood where the flowers for want of blessings and dew are shrivelled. Change this for us, June! Come back, come back!"

"Come back, come back!" echoed the wide chorus, plaintively, pleadingly.

Clocks struck two. A cold wind came from the sea.

"Sisters and knights from the delightful countries," June answered. "To hear your voices is music to a heart which has hungered for melody. To be with you again and for ever is the dream of these days and nights. O Fairyland, Fairyland! But for me that cannot be, until this world-town of vanity and darkness is a part of Fairyland too. Help us, and work with us. Already Hope shines through the misery. Already we have been rewarded–Bim and I. We have begun well. Laughter and flowers bloom where a few weeks ago they could not. We are going to win. Men have listened to our bidding. Elf-rule is leading them. Their puppet limbs are bending to the light. They are beginning again in the darkest parts to live with beauty and love the fairies. Bear with us: and help them. Before next Mayday comes, I must deliver up this crown. Sweet knights and sister elves, so work with us that Oberon may be ruling over London again."

In answer a fairy song went rolling from the assembly, up and up, piercing the cloud overhead, discovering the stars. June rejoiced at the hearing, though still it was an appeal to her–a yearning appeal to her–to be done with her madness, to submit to Oberon, to return. June felt alone.

The new song wakened Bim. He sat up suddenly, ears pricked sharply with eager attention. Fairies in London!

He clambered amazedly up the slanting roof and knelt by the side of June. She laid hands on his shoulders. The two waited and watched.

In twos and threes, reluctantly, the fairies opened wings, and went away. Over the houses they journeyed, a glittering, saddened procession. Higher and higher, and farther and farther they flew. The sound of their chorus gradually diminished till there was silence–the silence of sleep-bound London–again.

Gone!

June gazed on her garden of flowers. The gnome crawled away sadly, and squatted by the chimney-pot, dangling his feet. He felt a solid piece of melancholy.

"That was a very nice dream," he said for comfort's sake; and found the words not comforting.

”Let us be doing things,” June counselled.

CHAPTER XI
A PROSE INTERLUDE

Oldstein came at last to Paradise Court, and two good things resulted–Sally was taken out of her slave-life and sent to a boarding-school at the expense of her former task-master, and June went to tea with the Archdeacon.

Emmanuel had been for six weeks living up to his ideals. It was the hardest of tasks to him, but obstinate doggedness pulled him through. He had come actually to like doing good, and realized the subtle joys which live in generosity. He developed a habit–learned indirectly from the goodly practices of Dr. Johnson–of keeping chocolates and pennies in his pocket, and dropping one or other of them surreptitiously into the laps, pockets, or hands of children. June was proud to smiling-point of this, her least-likely pupil. He was doing the fairies' work so pleasantly.

And virtue brought other rewards–as it must do in a properly regulated existence. Emmanuel gave and gave, and still had a golden reservoir of wealth for capital use and enjoyment.

At last he felt justified in accepting the Archidiaconal invitation to tea. He paved the way of welcome characteristically by sending an express letter of reminder and explanation, and walked from Paradise Court to where the blue tram-cars were running. After riding here and walking there, he arrived at the canonry.

June and Bim accompanied him; the fairy on the brim of his glossy hat, the gnome in the bulging breast-pocket. Bim gazed with insatiable curiosity at the passing phantasmagoria of human shadows. What a strange grey comedy it was!

The London streets were still a troublesome ghost-world to Bim. He could not overcome an unconquerable prejudice against shadows. They were born of the darkness; he liked things to be moonlit at least.

They came to the Archdeacon's garden. Its delicious peacefulness was to June the first thing in Cockneydom reminiscent of elvish glades. Enchantment seemed brooding over it.

The ancient trees and young dusty flowers, with the twittering of sparrows–only sparrows–about them, gave new significance to the hum of the distant traffic. It made the medley music. The old-world atmosphere of blessed

repose brought solace to both of them. It gave June hope. It made her for the first time thoroughly confident of fulfilling her purpose.

Why should not a similar spirit of peace hold governance over every garden and public park in London? Wherever it reigned there would be sanctuaries for tired minds and strained nerves–havens of refuge from uproar and vulgarity. If Oberon's rule returned, anything and everything of the kind was possible; and something was begun.

Emmanuel pressed the button of the door-bell; and, having done so, trembled. A funeral-faced footman appeared and ushered him in.

The charm of the garden reigned also within the house. A silver-tongued clock sang five. It reminded June of Titania's voice when, once, the fairy-queen had surprised a blue-bell valley with a passing song.

June entered with Oldstein. Bim remained in the garden, playing puss-in-the-corner with some sparrows, to their fearful delight.

Evidently the footman did not approve his master's guest. There was an unnecessary air of imitation-lordliness in his demeanour, as he marched before Emmanuel. His body seemed mere idiotic backbone. His face wore an expression of patronage. June, indignant at his sublime churlishness, tossed a handful of magic over him, and watched the conceit shrivel. The pillar of salt turned to man. He was never a mere flunkey thereafter, and in course of time became a Sunday-school teacher.

"Delighted, delighted!" said the Archdeacon, pressing Mr. Oldstein's hand. Had it not been for the fairies the welcome would assuredly have been less cordial; but since the evening of Mayday there had been changes. The ecclesiastic was living up to his creed. He greeted Oldstein warmly, and wondered why he had come.

Emmanuel was awed and enchanted. Never had he dreamed that life could be so clean and precious as here he found it. He felt, poor man in the egoism of humble ignorance, a vulgar intruder; and for the first time in his span of existence, realized that his hands were large and his manners out of polish. Somehow the rings he wore made his fingers uglier.

Tea was brought in on a silver tray. The food was daintily insufficient. The Archdeacon sipped at a cup and talked long words. Oldstein said "Yeth," mumbled at his slices of butter spread with bread, and heard nothing. He mentally kicked himself for having blundered into that Anglo-celestial place. So it went on for a time.

The Archdeacon was bored.

The fairy seeing things awry, hastened to put them right. She hovered before the Archdeacon's head–her moving wings made music which only fairies could hear–and touched his lips with her wand. She recognized that he was the

man to lead the talking. He became at once more sociable.

"Do you golf?" he asked.

"No, but I've thold golf-balls."

"Ah, you should play. You should join my new Association which pledges every member to use one club only–preferably the mashie–on a round."

Golf remained the subject while the tea lasted. The Archdeacon kept the talk going.

"So our movement of fairy reform goes ahead admirably," Dr. Pryde exclaimed, coming to the real subject at last, as he rose, stretched, and posed by the mantelpiece. "We are comrades under Oberon's banner–comrades in a growing and victorious army."

He admired his rolling periods, and took his box of lozenges from a drawer.

"Yeth," said the other, who still felt that his feet were all boots.

"I had a letter from the Lord Mayor this morning. Sir Titus–a wonderful man, wonderful man, truly one of us!–is instituting a new league–Titania's Bodyguard it is called, consisting of all sorts and conditions of old men and maidens, young men and children; to remove the blemishes which uglify–'uglify' is Alice's word, not mine–which uglify London."

He ceased his pompous talk to look pomposity. He caught his reflection in a mirror, and improved his deportment.

"Yeth," again Emmanuel faltered. He wanted to express views, but in that present state of shyness and nervousness his mind seemed mere whirl and pudding.

"Talking of Alice, we could do with a little more topsyturvydom in real life, could not we?" June smiled. Here was proof that she had him. "I wish Harlequin with his wand would transform some of our business men and Bumbles and give them better sympathies and wits."

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"What is generally wanted–almost before anything else–is the power to get out of the ruck of the commonplace, to look at facts from a new point of view. How blind we are to the obvious! It is possible every day to pass by and not notice a view which, if it were in another country, we should travel for days in discomfort to see. And why?–I ask you why?" He gazed at the ceiling, and waved a graceful hand.

"Goodneth knowth!"

The Archdeacon puckered his brows, and looked down at his interrupter with an expression of gentle remonstrance.

"The question was rhetorical, Mr. Oldstein," he said, in mild rebuke. "I repeat, Why? Because we are so used to it. A Londoner will see more beauty in a wood in May or June than the man who lives at its edge; but bring the yokel to

London, and he will open his mouth with awe at buildings of beauty and history upon which the Cockney will strike the cheaper kind of matches. Familiarity breeds blindness."

"Yeth."

"It does indeed! The first thing is to teach the uses of the eyes; the next the joys of imagination. Those are indirectly the purposes for which the Lord Mayor's new movement–Titania's Bodyguard–is instituted. What a work we of the Bodyguard–I am its chaplain–what a work we have to do! To get representatives on the Borough Councils pledged to fulfil the gospel of sweetness and light; to insure that no houses designed and built in the future shall be hideous, or contradictions in style to each other–the brown Victorian age of architecture is past; to insist that exteriors be clean, and, where possible, brightly painted; and advertisements artistic; to take measures to abolish smoke and dust and flies; to distribute bulbs and flowering-plants, and give prizes for the best-loved gardens and windows; to encourage the growth of creepers about buildings; to plant trees, and establish fountains in the streets."

"Dear, dear! it'll cost a lot!" thought Emmanuel.

"There is much to be done even at the beginning. Then the next stage. To remove monstrosities in houses, courts, and slums; and generally to undo Mr. Jerry Builder. What a work! All but a few of the statues which frown on our squares and gardens must be chipped into little bits for road-mending. Throughout London, throughout England, there are statues not worth their weight in mud. They are mere blackened bathos–futile memorials to the generally forgotten: tasteless, obstructive, stupid. Down with the bronze gentlemen in mutton-chop whiskers and Roman togas who pose like sorry Pecksniffs."

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Mr. Oldstein, who was beginning, at last, to feel at home, though who Pecksniff was, bless you! for his life he didn't know.

June had indeed used her wand with effect. Host in his eloquence, and guest in his appreciation, beamed on each other, mutually pleased. The Archdeacon was delighted with his flow of words. The fact that his new elf-induced ideas were fresh to him increased the interest and respectful admiration with which he always heard his own utterances. He actually forgot the lozenges in his excitement; and noted the admiration shining in Oldstein's eyes. He felt a reformer, a builder of progress, a force and a light on the side of the angels. He was pleased with himself.

The fairy was satisfied with her work. She fluttered, singing the while, through the open window, to quicken the slumbering joys of the garden. She lingered among the flowers, giving them refreshment and radiance; and hovered about the branches of the trees, studying their conditions, admiring their long patience.

She called Bim to her, gave him her wand, sent him out to the world wandering. The sparrows chirped good-night, and went their ways to rest before another day of struggle, squabble and feasting.

Meanwhile, the Archdeacon continued happily in full swing.

"All forms of stone memorial are futile," he declared, pushing back his hair. "The day must come when they are mere lumber, commemorating foolishness. The builders of the pyramids are now but names. The Pharaohs hoped, by constructing those colossal tombs, to buy themselves eternal glory; but we, remembering the cruelties–the blood and the suffering–which went to their building, think of them only as colossal mementoes of shame."

The Archdeacon frowned, shook his head, and felt the artistic call for a significant pause.

Oldstein was fired by the reference to the first oppressors of his People. He forgot his awkward shyness, and broke out with vigorous expressions of approbation and agreement. He was not rebuked now. Applause is tolerable even to the elect. The Archdeacon graciously beamed.

It was then that June returned to the room, and realizing that the privilege of speech had so far been made a monopoly, threw a spell at Emmanuel.

Her will was a law obeyed.

The Archdeacon found himself not merely mum, but verbally besieged. He tried to make sorties, to resume the thread of his argument; but until June's spell was worn away, Oldstein's eloquence proved irresistible. His host could only fumble about his desk and pockets searching for the lozenge-box which was on the mantelpiece behind him, and occasionally agree with "Yes."

"That wath a great evenin' at the Mansion 'Outh," he declared. "I shall never forget it; and, Mithter Archdeacon, nothing throughout the proceedings imprethed me like your appeal for charity among workerth for the cauth of right. I thaid to mythelf, 'That'th a man'–I thaid–'and thith ith a lethon! If that dignitary of the Church ith brave enough to thay thith, there's 'ope.' I altho thaid to mythelf, 'It ithn't many parsons with the pluck to make such an appeal to people who would most thertainly take 'em at their word.' But you did it, Mithter Pryde! you did it! At my synagogue at all events your words 'ave been acthepted."

"Yes?" This tribute to his influence was delightful, flattering. It compensated for the interruption of speech.

"Yeth! Our pastor went out of 'is way to order some coals from the local churchwarden last week, and expressed the 'ope that before long some prayer said in churches against Turks, Jews and Infidels might be left unthaid!"

"Ah!"

The Archdeacon sat in his chair, and hid his face in his hands, thinking.

"Make your appeal again, Mithter Pryde; and again and again. It ith, I as-

sure you, very poor fun being the under dog, as we Jews 'ave been for ages! Even nowadays it ith only necessary to be a Jew to know what it ith to be despithed. Not that thome of uth mayn't detherve to be despithed. We 'ave black sheep among us, as you 'ave, and it'th easy to be 'orrid when you're 'ated. I've been 'ated and struck"–there was fire in Oldstein's glance–"and I've 'it back, and taken good care to 'urt. Well, I'm sorry for many things. I wath a 'ard master. I worked 'ard mythelf, and worked others to the uttermost. I took all the shekels that were due to me, and would have taken more if I could 'ave got 'em–yeth, I would. People theemed to expect me to plunder 'em; I did my best not to dithappoint 'em. And why was I so 'ard? Why did I 'ate all Gentiles? Why was my 'eart full of bitter malice to all exthept my own people?"

"Ah, who knows? who knows?" the Archdeacon said to the ceiling.

Oldstein, carried away by the passion of his own words, glared at the questioner.

"The quethtions were rhetorical, Mithter Pryde," he answered softly. "Why? Becauthe I was fighting the old old battle which my fatherth and their fatherth 'ad to fight since sin made my people subject." He raised his voice. It was as the voice of a prophet. The Archdeacon, listening, wondered, and forgot to notice the slurred words and broken pronunciation which proclaimed this Jew a stranger within the gates. "Yearth ago–in the dayth of the Pharaoh you mentioned–the Curse was fastened upon uth; even now the yoke ith not removed; we are tortured with its barbs and burdened with its misery. We are, even now, regarded by many as rogues and thieves and money-tyrants, but with all our faults as a race we do not detherve it. It ith ath a race we are judged, and ath individualth of a race we are punished. We are regarded as unwashed foreigners, as unclean beasts. The whole tone of religion is in this rethpect againtht its true thelf. In teaching love for all men, it alwayth forgeth the foreign Jew. Mithter Pryde, will you preach and teach and act so that we–the poorest and the 'umblest and the worst of us–may get the tolerance and fair play which is every man's right?"

Oldstein had exhausted the spell. He had said his say, had spoken for his people, with warmth and earnestness. His burst of eloquence was done. He was again one of the rank and file of Judaism, conscious of his pride of race, conscious at the same time of an incomprehensible sense of inferiority to this large, clean, pompous, well-intentioned Englishman. Why was it so? Was it because, for years upon years, he and his forebears, though inheriting the responsibilities of agelong aristocracy, had forgotten their inheritance, and been content to cringe before the powerful and wealthy, pleased to pander to their vanity and vices, for the sake of the shekels of trade?

There was silence–almost noisy with thought–for more than a minute.

June with her wand had stirred deep pools. The insoluble problems of Israel were for awhile alive again. Another stage in the long-drawn opposition of Gentile and Jew was manifested. Can that antagonism ever be ended? Is such a fact to be numbered among human possibilities? Questions, questions!

The Archdeacon, touched by Oldstein's earnestness, lost his pomposity, and forgot his poses. He leaned forward; put a hand on his guest's shoulder.

"I wish we could all of us get hold of the larger charity," he said earnestly. "When I spoke at the Lord Mayor's table, I confess to you I did not quite know all that there was in my words. I gave rein to ideas I had never allowed to have expression, even in my thoughts, before. The fairies–we put it all down to them, don't we?–the fairies must have made me speak as I did. That was a strange night. Reform was in the wine-cups. We built Quixotic dreams, and pledged ourselves to abide by them. Well, I won't repine. I am heartily glad I spoke as I did. You remind me of the obligations which fall upon every responsible religious man. I will try harder to live up to the ideals. Never again will I, by thought or implication, judge or condemn the honest opinions of others; but will believe that all in some measure or degree are pushing forward God's progress. Our differences, at their greatest, are trivial; in much of our work we should unite."

They shook hands, confirming the pledge.

The clock sang six-thirty.

"How the time has flown!" cried the Archdeacon, glad to be out of a scene. "Will you excuse me? I must hurry and dress. I dine at eight with the Duchess of Armingham. I was going to say such a great deal to you about cemeteries. But another time! So glad to have seen you. Good-bye!"

Oldstein went. Good-bye to him also, so far as this historical work is concerned!

June decided to accompany her ecclesiastic to the Duchess's table. She had seen the under side, now for the over side of human life. Sing Hey! for the *haut ton!* as a suburban poet would put it.

She sailed upstairs to the dressing-room and helped. Never before had razor shaved so smoothly, or valet been so perfect a machine.

When the Archdeacon drove westward, he was in the happiest condition of mind. He had become the compleat optimist. Everything was for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

The dear fairies!

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT OUT

Gnomes are notoriously irresponsible; but town-life and a high purpose had brought changes to Bim. He crawled under the dark green gate which bounded the carriage-drive, and strode into the world with something of that air of responsibility which hedges the dignity of a newly-elected alderman.

Bim had no illusions as to his present capacity. June's wand made him a power, and he knew it. He was able to control mortals; and confidently promised himself happenings.

He wandered through streets and passages, indifferent and ignorant as to where they should lead him, indeterminate as to what he should do. He saw a hansom crawling. This would help as well as anything. Imitating June's action on the night of the banquet, he waved the wand, and by elfin will-power compelled the cabman to rein in his drowsy steed.

Bim clambered up the horse's off hind-leg, and ran along the dragging reins to the roof. As soon as he was comfortably installed there, the driver, who took things quite as a matter of course, gave the necessary click with his tongue, and started the many-times great-grandson of Bucephalus and Rozinante.

Bim "did" some main streets. He controlled the man, and induced him to drive along the more ambitious ways and where there were shining shops. He watched the coming and going of people, and made up his mind what to do.

He was touched to see the streams of poor women and children shopping and errand-running. His sympathy exaggerated their seeming fatigue. They looked to him so weary that he commanded the cabman to invite some of them to accept lifts along the way.

"Tired, mother?" the driver–good soul!–would say to an old lady, toiling along with her evening burden of parcels. "In yer git!" Or to a child, "Jump in, ducky! I'd like to give *you* a ride. Where do you want to go?"

So it went on for an hour. Cabby felt like Christmas.

Then the unrewarded horse began to move wearily, and show other signs of having done enough. Bim removed the spell, clambered from his seat on the roof down the back-way of the cab, and left the driver fastening the horse's nose-bag to its business-place.

"The time of my life," said Jehu enthusiastically to a surly colleague. "I've had a most enjoyable time. Now you 'ave a shot, old chap," and explained in detail his actions and happiness.

"Eh?" grunted the other, contempt, incredulity, and refusal expressed in the interjection.

That was enough for Bim. He smote the churl sharply on the boot. Conversion followed immediately.

"Well, suppose I do," he said, as he wiped imaginary froth from his lips. "I 'aven't done so badly to-day. I will for an hour–blowed if I won't!–then I'll pass the job on."

Bim found himself on the Embankment near Cleopatra's Needle. He took careful hold of the wand, and clambered to the head of the sphinx which gazes eastward. Seated there, he tried to think out a programme of activities, and watched the grey river journeying on slowly, silently; different, so different, from the flood of traffic, the lighted tramcars, hooting automobiles, dashing carriages, with their freights of mortals, which rushed noisily by. Oh, the restlessness of man! The gnome was impressed with the wisdom of the water. It bore seaward, silently, the thoughts of the sphinx, which with wide-opened eyes watched London.

It was then that June saw him. She was driving westward in the Archdeacon's brougham, and shone, a little being of light, gladdening the gloom of the carriage. Bim waved the wand triumphantly to her. She threw him smiles. Happy gnome! His earnestness took fire immediately. Then altruism merged with mischief. He threw his plans and programme to the eight winds. He would paint the town a fairy red. Why not run amok?

He jumped from the sphinx, plump on to the peaked cap of a passing police inspector, and flooded the official with magic. A sergeant came up and saluted.

"Good-evening, Baines," said the inspector. "Tell the men to be extra kind to all poor chaps to-night. Tell 'em to have blind eyes for the homeless and hungry. The fairies would wish it. Tell 'em to pass this order on; we must please the fairies."

The sergeant stared. This was unprecedented. What was authority coming to?

"Right, sir," he answered, and saluted again. "I'll see to it," and did so.

The inspector marched on to Scotland Yard, more than usually pleased with himself.

Bim happened then to notice a strange creature sprawling at the end of a seat. Curiosity compelled him to spring. He alighted on a lap.

Everyone in Fairyland is naturally partial to poetry and in love with love. One of the purposes of the elves is to help the affected and idealize the sentiments of lovers, making them worthy of their privileges. They fulfil this purpose faithfully. When the courses of Cupid run smoothly the elves have been helpful. Unhappy love-affairs are invariably those unblessed by Oberon's people. They keep sharp eyes ready for the hindering of the plans of worldly-wise parents.

Bim studied a strange-looking beast. It seemed to consist of a large, much-

ribboned hat, several arms, and a sprawl. Lovers! The nose of Her was in His neck. There was an occasional move and tremor, followed by a sounding kiss, one of the kisses that hit. Passers-by were many, but Love cared not a jot for anything–but Love! The curious and contemptuous had a hundred opportunities for cynical judgment; which they used, only to be entirely ignored.

Throughout the parks and places of London, similar exhibitions of vulgar bathos, flopping and unashamed, were to be witnessed; every pair of some hundred thousand lovers being splendidly indifferent to all else but their own sufficient selves.

Meanwhile, the gnome sat on the lap, and wondered, awed and troubled: listening eagerly, waiting impatiently, for honeyed words of love.

Silence brooded. Big Ben struck.

"Eight o'clock!" said Strephon to Phyllis, and kissed her.

The silence brooded again.

Bim fled in dismay to the next seat, where another love-bitten couple happened to be sprawling. He witnessed a similar feast of brazen bathos.

Stupid silence still gloomed over the rapture. He waited.

The great clock chimed again.

"Quarter-past," said she, and a kiss flew skywards.

From seat to seat Bim went; every move was marked by the chimes of the Parliamentary clock. "Half-past." "Quarter-to." "Nine."

Such was love's dialogue. O time! O manners! Where are our raptures, our sonnets and rhapsodies?

Bim became furious. He ran at full speed along the Embankment, viciously poking with his wand every love-lorn pair: and on, through Story's Gate into St. James's Park. As he went he passed scores of strolling lovers. He put his spell on every pair of them.

Through the Green Park he hurried, and across Piccadilly into Hyde Park. Wherever he went he carried magic, and produced its consequences. Love's multitudinous tongues were no longer tied. Thoughts hitherto dumb found glowing speech.

The gnome had run amok with a vengeance.

"Darling, darling, darling, darling!" said one young man in an ecstasy increasing with every syllable.

"Darling, darling, darling!" came the feminine answer, in tones that thrilled.

Then another sweet voice was gently borne upon the westering wind.

"I know where there's the teeniest duck of a saucepan set which will just suit our wee little homey."

The stars twinkled.

"Does-um!" was the masculine answer.

Still the stars twinkled.

”Ted,” said Emma, ”do you love me, love me?” She had been to a series of popular melodramas, and saw herself languid and rapturous. She asked questions emotionally, with the emphasis that comes with repetition.

”That I do just, old gell!” came the reply.

”And will you, my heart, always love me, love me?”

”S’welp me! old gell, I will!”

”Then another, Ted.” There was a noise as of machine guns barking at a blue distance. Emma seemed satisfied.

Bim was pleased. He had not been looking for words in purple, and so was unable to feel disappointed. But as he worked from chair to chair he could not help accumulating the wish that more of the minor poet had been born in the common people. The prose that came was better than a mere bald narrative of time; but, surely, was not worthy of Aphrodite’s doves.

Gradually the better came. It was the work of unconscious imitation.

Examples were being quickly followed in many directions. Several cabmen, having earned their day’s requirements and a little over, were now using their cabs and still unwearied horses to convey for short distances fares too poor to pay for a ride. Motor-cabs and private cars actually buzzed with philanthropy. Policemen, carrying out and carrying on the inspector’s orders, were urgently helping down-at-heel gentlefolk to be as comfortable as out-of-door conditions permitted.

So, too, lovers on that blessed evening, influenced by Bim, began to be worthy of Juliet, and their fellows of the Heaven-kissed company to whom passion has become sanctified, and the possession of love is a joy crowned, a power enthroned, making of its votaries queens and princes—- Ah me, and so on! The series of lovers multitudinous gradually became ashamed of their ungracefulness. They walked now, or sat with some better sense of picturesque propriety. Sprawling and hugging were postponed for the armchairs at home. The parks became tolerable to the married.

Here and there a joyful swain reclined at his lady’s feet. The methods of musical comedy were fittingly applied to the prose of life. Ernie Jenkins was one of these recumbent swains. It was his weekly evening with Emily, who sat on a chair under a chestnut-tree steadily absorbing acid-drops. His red hair was stubbly, but he brushed his brow as if it were thick with love-locks.

”Emily! Emily!” he murmured repeatedly. Never had his feeling for her been so romantic as it now seemed. His narrow chest expanded with rapture and contracted with sighs. He knew himself fortunate. Bim had nearly prevailed on him to make the plunge. Though unable to go that length, Ernie mentally vowed to reduce his weekly allowance of bitter beer, the better to provide a nest-egg for

furniture–which sounds like a mixed metaphor, but isn't; and if it were, can be put down to the fairies, who may do anything grammatical they please, even to the extent of splitting infinitives, which mortal authors may never do.

Hyde Park grew more and more delightful to Bim during that evening of bliss. He flitted about as if wings were on his feet, and with June's wand helped flowers, birds, grasses and winds to become more fairylike. Those blessed existences behaved as if they realized and enjoyed the change; and, to their credit be it said, no leafy, green space in crowded London had so much in accord with Falkland as the flowers, birds, grasses, winds, in Hyde Park then. Nature is, after all, a jolly good poet.

A new moon made its appearance. It peeped from a cradle of clouds. Venus and Jupiter gleamed underneath it. Other stars in their places shone. That was the first night to gladden London since the Mayday of June's madness; and as for the long, long time before that–oh dear! oh dear!

June, peering through a ducal window, realized the improvement, and was delighted with Bim. She knew it was largely his doing–his and the wand's. Her sympathy grew radiant towards him. He was a good gnome, and when they had returned, victorious and forgiven, to the Land of Wild Roses–as she had no doubt they would do eventually–he should be rewarded. Perhaps she would kiss him.

Slowly, but all too speedily, the time went by. The band which for three comfortable hours had been stirring the hearts of hundreds, played the Goodnight National Anthem, and put out its lights. Two by two the lovers turned homewards, each couple happily emotional, joying in the enthralment, delightfully subdued. There were more marriages determined upon, more attachments confirmed and made love-affairs during that evening, than ever before–with the possible exception of the last of the supralapsarian days.

The author of this splendid improvement sat, smiling and tired, on a discarded cigarette-box. He joyed in the wide silence and the dewy grass.

The park became more and more still. On every side of it there was the eternal hum of the traffic. Solitary wayfarers passed silently along the walks and faded into the darkness. Now and then the shadow of laughter was heard, occasional cab-calls, one distant bugle sounding the last post, a man's voice giving a hail. Slowly even such sounds as these were lost in the all-engulfing silence; the night was very still.

There was room for fairies here, thought Bim, but no fairies were there. There ought to be rings of them, lightly laughing and dancing; making merriment for the stars. Hyde Park in its loneliness longed for them. They, only, were needed to make it the perfect garden.

The places of the elves had been taken by creatures of a very different clay. An hour or so ago, and the park was thronged with youth, hopeful, happy, con-

fident. The difference now!

In all directions there slept or grumbled on the grass the human waste of our social system; the aged, the ugly, the hopeless, the infirm and unfit; the thriftless, workless, worthless–worn remnants of all manner of miserable humanity. Poor wretches whose days had long been damned! Their backs are weak with burdens. They have not even a hope in their pockets. They have sinned and suffered; have learned the many lessons of bitterness, and been crushed. They have hungered and had to continue hungry; have been wet, cold, and, in their shivering, had no better shelter than some broken penthouse or windy archway; their only friendships have been with members of their own dismal fraternity. Fortunate was Lear! They have touched desire with crime and been compelled to pay the law's and the world's penalties. There is short shrift for such as these, the drift of the cities. Born are they to suffer, to endure; to know only shame; to die.

The gnome resumed his wanderings, and gazed wonderingly at the many sleeping faces. It was the most amazing of all the sights he had seen. The marks of meanness and want were stamped on them. Yes, June was right in her madness. The fairies ought to have prevented this. Tragedy is permissible when it is romantic, but such tragedy of squalor as was lighted by the starshine then was ugly, evil, the first and last of the shames. The gnome came across Lazy Tim, who stretched on an open newspaper, fast asleep, snoring with his mouth wide open.

Tim was a ne'er-do-well. He had not one scruple, hope, ambition, or blessing. His father and mother had been ne'er-do-wells also. Beyond them he had no history. He had never been inside a school, or known what discipline–other than that of the gaol and casual ward–meant. He had never formed a taste for work, but, thanks to sharpened half-wits, had here and there earned many crooked pence. He had been taken on as a farm-hand and a factory-hand times out of counting; but the monotony of the one employment and the prison-like character of the other had always driven him into the free-lance world again. Tim was unmoral and incorrigible. He had known no guidance whatever in his ways. He had an idea that it was wise to dodge any man in uniform, and that was about all.

Experience had, however, taught him many of the tricks of cheap cunning. He could, when in the humour, pitch a yarn about his non-existent wife and children and the bronchitis, which would make a stone moist with sympathy. He had even on one extraordinary occasion obtained sixpence from a local secretary of the Charity Organization Society, and frequently had charmed the generosity of not a few religious ladies with his sighs and aspirations. He would have taken any religion you liked for a course of square meals. Once there was, possibly,

good material in Tim; but it had run to seed and been lost. He had not enjoyed one fair chance. He had come into the world inopportunely. The fates were sleeping when he was born. Ever since infancy he had starved, stolen, sinned–if such as he can "sin"–been punished and neglected; and so was wrecked.

Bim, studying the sleeping face, was stirred with fairy's pity. He knew nothing of Tim's past experience, of the opportunities grudged, denied, and lost; but could see the man was inherently unhappy. That was enough. Poor wretch! Something must be done for him at once. He wished June had been there to prescribe the remedy. But there was no use in fruitless wishing. Such is not Elfland's way.

He marched up Tim's body, and felt the wasted form under his feet. Bones and hunger, that was the story; bones and hunger and rags. He stood by the tangled beard, and with the end of the wand gently stroked the lined and scraggy face. Tired, ugly face! It looked so weak, ay, and so brutal in the night's dark light. Scars were cut into the cheeks and forehead; the nose was debased, and bore the marks of drink and fighting. The hair, in a grey and filthy tangle, streamed from under a broken hat. Here was a man in the prime of life, finally ruined.

Tim would wake presently. What was the use of his waking? Better always to sleep and dream than to live again for the day's despair and a life's long misery.

Bim laid the point of the wand on the sleeping man's forehead, and thought of these things.

Suddenly Tim awoke, stretched, rose, shook himself, burst out into laughing. He took off his hat and looked carefully at it. "A kingly crown!" cried he. He stroked his rags, and was joyful. "Ermine and purple." His hunger was forgotten; his thirst–his only ever-faithful companion–no longer made pleadings. "Feasts in plenty!" he exclaimed, lifting arms delightedly to the stars. "What a palace I have! What a kingdom! Oh, my royal heritage! It is good to be alive–to be king, king, king!"

Tim had found happiness. Never again could he know the evils of bitter reality. Henceforward he was blessed with the illusions. He was "touched." Bim and the wand had wrought the marvel.

Blessed are the poor whom the fairies have touched. Hats off to them, gentlemen! They are far beyond life's miseries. They are kings in their own right–happy kings. We who have the blue and yellow worries, even though we can jingle coins in our pockets, are far less happy than they.

Bim climbed a chestnut-tree, and found slumber in a throstle's nest.

CHAPTER XIII
IN SOCIETY

As the Archdeacon's carriage rolled westward, June watched the people in the crowded streets, and made some estimate of the task in front of her.

Already she and her squire had done much. They had speeded the efforts of the good folk always at work. They had guided the benevolent and beneficent along the wise ways. They had done much–very much, but it was as nothing in comparison with the need. North, south, east and west, she had flown in her peregrinations, only to find much the same problems, similar squalor, selfishness, ugliness and want–unhappy legacies of past carelessness and misdoings–prevalent in all parts. Slums and indifference abounded wherever she flew. It was the indifference which particularly troubled her. She rested her head on the Archdeacon's watch-pocket and wept.

The prospect before herself and Bim seemed appalling. Only the gnome and she–two, when what really was wanted was an organized army from Elfland of gentle spirits with magic besoms and enchanted swords.

But it was no use sighing for the unavailable. She must go on as well as she could, making the most of her own powers, intentions and Bim.

Armingham House stands in a dull respectable square. Two stone armorial beasts keep guard of its ugly gateway. They are legendary monsters, not wyverns, or griffins, or unicorns, or mock-turtle, but something of a combination of all of these. On the arch of the gate is a broken motto, which means something heroic in very bad French. It originated from a martial medieval incident; nobody remembers what. One of the advantages of long descent is a convenient haziness as to certain events and beginnings.

The Duke of Armingham possessed every one of the characteristics of extreme aristocracy. His blue blood, high nose, arched eyebrows and slender hands could only be improved on by an idealistic portrait-painter. They were the sure marks of class and culture. He had the gentle voice, deliberate manner, and a habit of waving his pince-nez when he was speaking, which mark authority. Throughout his life, whenever he had spoken, others had to be silent; it was therefore unnecessary for his voice to be raised, or his tones to become strident.

His fashions were those of the early seventies. Until that period he had out-dandified the dandies and been glorious in the forefront of his time. Then his style stayed still. Any more recent order of dress than that which Louis Napoleon affected was out of date, he declared. He was, in these later days, a dear old thing, kind and as perfectly happy as a duke can be. He bore the disadvantages of his wealth and position with wonderful lightheartedness, and was able by taking thought to avoid being envious of his inferiors. He feared nothing except lightning, mud in Piccadilly, and his Duchess on a Court day.

His wife was even more assuredly an exalted being. Rumour said that in her young days she had been a nursery governess; but those who ought to be authoritative on the subject declared that rumour lied. Anyhow, the gilt and scarlet books which tell the tales of the titled, gave her a colonel for father, so that her blood was likely to be something blue. In her gowns and graces she certainly looked every inch a Duchess, and there were many inches.

Her influence in the world was worthy of her station. She had eyes which commanded, and could make presumption feel like a doormat on a rainy day. She never forgot her coronet and was not genial; indeed, she looked on mankind through diminishing lorgnettes, and saw it small. She was one of the two hundred and twenty-three ladies, all the world over, who know they are Supermen.

When June and the Archdeacon arrived at Armingham House, the fairy had not quite recovered from the dumps. She had for a little while lost confidence in herself, and felt no longer militant. She clung to the Archdeacon, and was borne by him up the white and blue stairway between footmen with heads of silver. The scene where the guests were welcomed was magnificent. The servants in their yellow livery, the ladies with their jewels, the sparkle, the laughter, and the flowers, made splendid circumstance.

The picture, beautiful though it might be to mortal eyes, could not win June from her state of weary self-consciousness. She listened to the talk, and watched the movement listlessly. It was all the matter of dream. In comparison with the wealth and royalty of Fairyland, it was mere shadow, noise, nonsense and tinsel!

She was certainly feeling unappreciative and depressed.

The Archdeacon passed through the business of greetings, and fell into talk with Lord Geoffrey Season, the Duke of Armingham's third and youngest son.

Lord Geoffrey was a golden youth of twenty-seven. Since his sixth birthday he had been destined for Parliament. There was a county constituency waiting for him to accept its suffrages at the next General Election; while family influence and the way he wore his clothes made it certain he would be entrusted with office early. Up to the present he had done little more than always the proper thing. He had the statesman-like quality of never being original, could express the obvious with an air of profundity, and gave promise of not making any mistakes, which,

after all, is somewhat less than the heaven-sent destiny. He was moreover–at present–something of a prig.

June awakened from her lethargy to take an interest in him. She liked his wavy hair and china blue eyes, but still her energy was sleeping. She would keep her eyes on Geoffrey. She saw in him possibilities.

Watching the guests, idly studying their brightness of mind, and evident bodily content, noting the luxury of the surroundings, she, perforce, must come to the building of comparisons and contrasts. Different this from the squalid misery she had witnessed and endured since her entry into London! It was not Paradise Court alone which formed the great contrast, but slums innumerable in all parts of the Metropolis; and, linked with them, those dun habitations of struggling respectability, the hundred thousand ugly houses in dull inglorious streets, occupied by drudges, who, day after day, through the years, toil in shops and offices, selling their God-given lives for a little dross, a little patronage, and some spells of conventional happiness.

(This is the Fairies' judgment.)

After those years of little-profitable labour–away from Nature, away from the large reality–and after the faithful practising of ritual, according to the gospel of Mrs. Grundy, the poor things become brothers and sisters to the vegetables and die. So drift their lives away!

And here–at the very other extreme–was this great ducal casket of luxury and laughter, giving welcome to a limited select circle of people who need, if so they willed, do nothing but be happy and enjoy themselves. Heigho! paradoxes a hundredfold abide in the shadows by every street corner.

June remembered the phantoms of Paradise Court, and, in a different manner from the Pharaoh whom Moses chided, hardened her heart. Oberon, or no Oberon, the fairies should come back to London town! For the sake of the so-called rich, as well as for the sake of the very poor, they must re-create Elfdom within the seven square miles, and carry their blessed influence through Suburbia. If this could not be before she must yield up the crown, then it must be after. In any case, it must be. That was certain, flat, absolute. London should be reclaimed.

The Archdeacon's table-partner was Mrs. Billie Thyme, a small pink, flaxen lady, whose over-rich elderly husband financed her fads, and in consequence gave her ample opportunity to shine in the personal paragraphs of evening newspapers. Mrs. Billie was not the least bit *blasée*, although even she was sighing for new excitements to conquer.

She was always in an infinite vein of flutter and chatter. Most exalted personages were glad to talk nonsense with her; at bazaars and garden-parties her skirt-dancing drew the crowd. She was a prime favourite of the Duchess, and

kept the dinner-circle well entertained with tinkling talk.

It was she who began on the fairies. They were seldom left out of the conversation of these times. June was still dreamily inert, throned on a large silver salt-cellar, watching and indifferently wondering, not yet vividly interested enough to use these puppets for the march-forward of her ideas.

”And what are we to think of this fairy craze?” Mrs. Thyme asked of the company generally.

There was no immediate response. The Archdeacon left the question for someone else to answer. In Society he tried habitually to sit on the fence.

”A nine-day’ wonder!” said Lord Geoffrey. ”Mere nonsense, as ping-pong and diabolo were.”

”A folly to-day; forgotten to-morrow; and afterwards a sad reflection”–this from a novelist of the moment–”democracy is a baby which quickly breaks its toys.”

”It has already lasted nearby nine weeks,” answered the Duke quietly. ”It is strange; I don’t understand it. That Mansion-House fellow, the Lord Mayor, began it. The movement seems spreading. Most movements do spread nowadays. We didn’t do that sort of thing in the seventies.”

”Indeed, no,” agreed the Duchess, in her best commanding-officer voice. ”When I was a ’gairl,’ belief in the fairies lingered amongst the Irish and nowhere else. Those Board Schools and Trade Unions have caused this nonsense, I’m sure.”

”There is one encouraging fact, Duchess!” cried the novelist, of course an egoist, who called himself Douglas le Dare, though his patronymic was Barlow, and his father had christened him William. ”It is that in our literature–the test of our minds–we keep to sane life and the plain truth. Fairy tales are not written nowadays; such originality is futility. We weave our romances round every-day life, we adorn dull truth, and what’s the result? I sold fifty thousand copies of my last book.”

”Did you really?” said Mrs. Thyme, opening her blue eyes to their widest. ”I think I will write!”

”Ha!” he said, as he shook back his iron-grey locks–his hair was an advertisement–”you should write, but deal with facts–facts–the fairies–pah!–they are merely a sort of mental fungi. The public wants prose. Always please the public! That is the root of literary success.”

June was alive now. Her wings quivered with indignation. The crown on her head blazed with elf-light. She was angry, angry. But she made no movement, only sat upright on the salt-box, keenly attentive to what those clay creatures would say.

”If you do start author, Katie,” said the Duke to Mrs. Thyme, ”you must cultivate an eccentricity or two, mustn’t she, Mr. le Dare?”

”Oh, I don’t know, Duke!”

”Oh, must I?” she exclaimed, eagerness alight in her eyes. ”Do tell me an eccentricity or two!”

”Sorry I can’t, Mrs. Thyme. All my spare time is occupied with thinking out my own eccentricities, what few I indulge in. No; what you really require is to be earnestly business-like, and to see well after the advertisement of your books.”

Then a bearded Baronet, who wore a sparkling monocle, and thought it humorous to be interfering, joined in.

”Talkin’ of fairies and the Lord Mayor,” he said, ”weren’t you mixed up in that little business at the Mansion House, Mr. Archdeacon? Eh? What?”

Eyes turned to the person addressed, who, finding his theories not promising to be popular in that company, was willing to remain silent while the tide of depreciation flowed. All his life he had been on the side of the cheers. June looked at him. She was eager to see how he endured the test. If he failed and proved faithless, the power of Fairyland would be lessened thereby, for faith is the strength-giver. She did nothing to influence him. Though, in her indignation, magic emanated from her personality, it was not to affect him.

He sipped his sherry, and answered with deliberation, while the others hearkened with all their ears.

”I was there, Sir Claude. It was a wonderful occasion. The place seemed charmed, enchanted. Everyone of the company–City magnates, practical men, merchants, and so on–made resolutions for the good of our fellows. Under that influence of enchantment I made resolutions also. I believe we have all of us kept them.”

There was a little while of silence only interrupted by the slithering of the knives and forks.

”Archdeacon, do you really believe in the fairies?” asked Mrs. Thyme, in her tingle-tangle voice.

June, piqued by the doubt in the question, wondered whether the colour of Mrs. Billie’s hair was born or made.

”I do, absolutely. I am proud to be positive that they exist.”

”Tush!” said Douglas le Dare.

”They exist,” the Archdeacon re-affirmed.

Victory! June slid from the salt-cellar and began a dance of rejoicing, of triumph–a *pas-de-seul* among the wine-cups. None of the company could see her; it was loveliness lost to mortal eyes. Only the Archdeacon, who possessed some store of fairy faith, had a glimmering of the gaiety and beauty of the motion-poem then being made. It nerved him to do battle for what he would have called Oberon’s cause.

The room became filled with magic. Spells of pure joy were woven from the tracery of June's feet, and governed all but one. The butler and his men, waiting with the imperturbability of grenadiers on parade, were inclined to dance in chorus; but discipline and the knowledge that the Duchess's eyes were upon them kept them prim.

Still the fairy danced. Here and there she tripped over the damask, flitting airily round the epergnes with their young summer flowers; then up and about the heads of the guests, stimulating their ideas, giving them delightful poetical fancies, poising now and then, with dainty foot and wings outspread, on the brims of the glasses, making all of them glad, all of them glad but–the Duchess.

She alone, during that period of enchantment, remained unimpressed and obdurate. Fashion is a petrifying influence. Her Grace, who regarded it as her duty always with stiff lips to overlook the unfashionable, was at present beyond even the softening powers of June. She remained as stone, unsympathetic, uncomprehending. Conversation was dumb during that terpsichorean spell.

June rested at length, and flew, well-pleased, to couch among the flowers.

"Bravo!" cried Lord Geoffrey.

"Eh?" inquired the Duke, putting on his pince-nez, and peering through them at his son. The word of applause seemed to fit in with his mood exactly, but he did not understand its applicability.

"I said 'Bravo!' bravo to the Archdeacon, who, with characteristic courage, is going to justify his faith in those essences, the fairies."

"Ah yes, of course, of course! Please instruct us; we are attentive, Mr. Archdeacon."

It is not easy to make any detailed expression of opinion or justification of faith over well-cooked food. That is an occasion for wit and brevity–epigram was born at a dinner-table. The Archdeacon felt his disadvantage, especially as the eyes of the Duchess, like the orbs of a mild Medusa, were expressing disapprobation.

"I cannot pretend, your Grace, to be able, under the circumstances, to justify my faith in the fairies," he declared, while thoughtfully cutting his *poussin.* "I can only assert that faith, and prove its truth as I live by acting up to its principles and helping to make the world more beautiful and happy."

"Ruskin and soda-water! Eh? What?" murmured Sir Claude, glancing round for the laughter which did not come.

The Archdeacon, to whom flippancy was more than a venial sin, felt inclined to crush the Baronet; but succeeded in effectually ignoring him, which was worse.

"Imagination is, without doubt, required to realize the existence of the fairies. They are not tangible, as are, say, bricks. But is that a difficulty? Imag-

ination is requisite before we can appreciate the existence of ether, and several other essences–to use Lord Geoffrey's word–which we know well are about us, and affect us, though we cannot see, smell, taste, handle, or otherwise comprehend them."

"But surely, Mr. Archdeacon," the Duke intervened, for no other reason than to give his guest opportunity to continue his meal. "Surely you would not in any way put together the results of scientific inquiry, the fruits of the research of physicists, with–bogies and other dreams?"

A murmur of agreement ran round the table. A ducal host is certain of support in any argument he undertakes.

"I don't see why not, Duke. They are obviously different in kind as you broadly state them; but I believe they are really linked closer than we yet know. The fact is that every certainty is merely a drop in an ocean of uncertainty, an ocean of unplumbable depths. Science is always on the edge of new discoveries, which can only be bridged at first by the imagination. Without imagination Newton would have seen nothing more than an apple falling, when that simple fact–as common as raindrops–brought to him revelation of the all-compelling law of gravitation. Without imagination Watt could not have built his 'Rocket' out of a kettle and a puff of steam. Imagination is a necessity in all departments"–Le Dare sighed audibly–"except perhaps in some modern books."

"A kettle! a kettle!" said the Duchess to herself–*sotto voce*–yet very well heard. "What may a kettle be?"

A judge who sat next to her hastened to instruct her, while the ensuing course was served.

"Even the law of gravitation," the Archdeacon continued, after a period of general conversation, of mixed comments and further challenges, "cannot be absolutely proved, though we all accept it. Nor can the dogma that three times seven are twenty-one be proved, or the assertion that a line is length without breadth, or–to come to a different kind of example–the statements of historians that William of Normandy lived, conquered and died. Nothing can be proved to some people. It is a matter of faith. Why do we believe that William fought with Harold at Senlac? Because we are told so, and our imagination appreciates the details of the narrative. We accept the Saxon Chronicle as essentially a true story, and Matilda's Bayeux tapestry as representing real people and actual scenes. But they wouldn't convince a determined sceptic, or a school-boy faced with the authority of the text-books, if he were sufficiently original, obstinate, incredulous, and without the imaginative gift. They may be regarded by some people as fraudulent tales, or forged representations of the truth, and to any extent as partial and prejudiced stories–(No more wine, thank you)–and who could convince them otherwise? So all these accepted assertions–scientific, historical,

personal–may be refused by one who has no imagination. Just in the same way the existence of the fairies may be believed in or disbelieved. I admit it is beyond my capacity for demonstration to prove that they exist. I have never seen a fairy. If you asked me whether it was the size of a needle, a horse, or a haystack, I could not say; and it would not matter. Enough that, though invisible, they are lovely and beneficent, and that their influence–be it illusory or not–tends towards the betterment of human life. I am content to assert that I believe in these essences by results. The facts of the Lord Mayor's feast were beyond ordinary comprehension, yet they actually occurred, and caused some hundreds of prosaic business men–as staid and reliable as any human beings can be–to make resolutions to be less selfish and more socially useful; and actually to keep those resolutions. I am sorry to bore you with such a long discourse, but it was necessary as the subject is so important. I believe in the fairies, and wish their governance was potent to-day."

"So do I," said the enthusiastic Mrs. Thyme. June instantly forgave her past offences.

"Bravo!" cried Lord Geoffrey again.

"But do you know–I'm not referring to yourself, Mr. Archdeacon–do you know for a fact that they did keep them? Is that fruits of the imagination too? Eh? What?"

The doubter was, as usual, the annoying Baronet. June looked at him, a tiny glint of anger in her eyes, and gave him twinges–the promise of gout.

"Sir Claude, I do! Only to-day I had a visit from a Jew, a City tradesman, who had, throughout his long business life, sweated his people. This man–I need not mention his name–was a guest at the Lord Mayor's banquet. He is now a model employer; tender-hearted, generous and scrupulous. He ascribes his wonderful change entirely to the influence of the fairies."

The pause which followed these words was testimony to their effect. June began to dance again. She was as pleased as Punch with her protégé. The Archdeacon had turned up trumps.

But the Duchess was not pleased. Her old friend Archdeacon Pryde was becoming dreadfully plebeian. To talk at her table about a kettle, and then about a Jew tradesman, was very like exceeding the social limit, so she gave the hostess's signal, and the ladies withdrew; while June flew to the window and gained strength, inspiration and hope from the brightness of the skies and the young

summer moon.

CHAPTER XIV
CONVERTING A DUCHESS

The fairy found the cigar-smoke abominable; and as the conversation of the men, possibly because of the tobacco, lapsed towards dulness–it was mostly about guns and turnips–she flew out of the dining-room to the salon upstairs, to sit on the great piano and watch the Duchess and her feminine friends enjoying coffee and Chopin, while the more ardently idle of them babbled of nothings.

June seemed transported to a languid, lazy world, peopled by disillusioned descendants of the lotus-eaters. Except for the Duchess, who always sat bolt upright–Mrs. Pipchin was, in that respect, her democratic parallel–the ladies lounged in the luxurious chairs, slowly waved fans, and drivelled. During that period of supineness nothing vertebrate was said, with the exception of one pious wish expressed by Mrs. Billie Thyme.

"I wish those fairies would bring the men along!"

At that remark three ladies feebly smiled. The others–with the exception of the Duchess, who never forgot her dignity–lounged lazily, thought sleepily, and, when they spoke, drawled.

June yawned. For the first and last time in the history of Fairydom she did so, and knew herself bored utterly.

That yawn roused her: it annoyed her. She would endure no more of that overpowering influence of laziness. She flew straight to the Duchess, circled thrice about her chair, and then, standing on the grey coiffure, wantonly disarranged the tiara, dragging it back to put in its place the crown. She dumped the symbol of sovereignty down with a shadowy thump.

Her Grace of Armingham blinked. Something had happened. What? Strange thoughts began to bubble. Her brain was a maze of topsy-turvydom. She wanted to laugh aloud and laud the fairies. She fixed her mind on her present amazing irresponsibleness, and tried to banish the demon of discord that prevailed. It was no good. The more she endeavoured to fashion her ideas according to their customary crystallized pattern, the more they resisted. She possessed a burning desire to make a pun. She wrestled stubbornly with the horrid inclination. Setting her brows in a frown, her lips in a thin red line, she determinately

withstood the mocking influence that held her.

June settled on the top of a large ottoman, whence she could comfortably watch the battle. It was magnificent, and it was war. She determined to bring an expression of light-heartedness to that handsome stubborn face. She bent her powers of mind and magic to the proper subduing of the stately dame, and had by no means the best of it. The crown was potent. It held the best magic of Elfland; but against that particular example of pride, coldness and contempt, it was ineffectual as yet. It was like melting a glacier with lucifer matches.

Meanwhile the mind of the Duchess was in a buzz of contradictory humours. She was uncertain of herself. She wanted to express ideas the very opposite of her age-worn convictions. For the first time she saw herself as not quite the most important creature amongst the stars. Beyond all else, above all else, at that phase of the conflict, the insatiable desire to make a pun beset her. Horrible! Horrible! The better half of her mind, the predominant partner of her will, bravely and silently exclaimed against its dreadfulness. But imps seemed playing pranks with her, giving her a thousand opportunities for some infamous punning. The propensity had hold of her like neuralgia; it needed all her firmness and stolid prejudice to counteract the tendency, and prevent the commission of that lowest form of verbal play. During the whole of the battle Strauss and Chopin were supplying their melodies; and June was feeling fiercely unmerciful.

Then the men came drifting in. The ladies woke from their languors. Bridge was mentioned.

Geoffrey, seeing the frowns and energy in his mother's face, wondered who had offended. He looked sharply at Mrs. Thyme; she was evidently not the culprit. He found her smiling at Sir Claude, and making room for him by her side on a settee. The Baronet had always some entertaining ill-natured tattle at the end of his tongue. He was the Autolycus of tinted gossip. June, in sheer puckishness of spirit, touched the Baronet with a spell. His stories became Sunday tales. They were dilatory and improving. Mrs. Billie frankly told him he bored.

It was the Duke who noticed the tiara out of place. He sauntered over to his wife, wondering how this could have happened. He saw new wrinkles about her eyes. Her face had an east-wind expression.

"Edith," he murmured, "look in the mirror. Your tiara."

The pained look went. Her fashionable callousness for a moment melted. She raised her hands to the tiara to mend the mischief. A pun–the only pun possible under the circumstances–was on her lips. It came to the edge of expression; she to the brink of defeat.

She rallied her forces desperately. She would not be beaten. But the magic was potent. She had to say it, and did–to herself. Her lips moved mutely. That was the beginning of the fairies' victory.

Suddenly June felt pity for the *grande dame*, who, in her solitude of station, knew no better. Already with her keen susceptibilities she could see the real aspect of sadness in that golden scene. Paradise Court had its hopelessness, its waste and poverty; so had Armingham House–hopelessness, waste, poverty, as actual, if not worse, though different, very different, from what the poorest know.

Nothing in all London had struck her as more pitiable than the barrenness of interests and fetters of wealth which starved and prisoned those unawakened rich. The more she saw of them, the more she felt for them. Their selfishness was mainly the selfishness of ignorance. They needed to know; they needed to do. It was the fairy's function to give them opportunities for knowledge and for helpful deeds. To quicken their atrophied usefulness must be her work. Then Fairyland would have flown closer to the fireplace.

June released the Duchess and recrowned herself. Weary of lotus-eaters and emptiness, she crept out through the opened window into the garden to recreate her purposes among the shadows under the stars, but some of her influence lingered behind and was effectual.

It was not quite the same Duchess who governed her guests that evening and guided the party along its dull, appointed way. Again and again the Duke, Lord Geoffrey, the Archdeacon, noticed in her touches of unusual geniality. They were only occasional gleams; but those who knew her best saw the difference. The inconsequent pun had shifted a load of stratified self-conceit. Out of irresponsibility sympathy had come.

The fairy, when her wearied strength was renewed, for the strain and the atmosphere of London still weighed heavily upon her, revelled in that garden. She sang as she flitted here and there, helping the helpable. The moonlight glimmered on her rapid wings. The stars became still brighter for joy of her eagerness. The flowers, parched and starving for fairy-love, turned towards her, listening to her songs, inviting the gifts of her hands. She lighted their jaded lamps and gave them happiness.

Then she felt sad because of the waste and the need. Where were the elves for this garden?

She looked towards Fairyland, and wished with all her powers. Was it a waking dream, or was she really aware of mimic voices, far, far away, in the glades of Elfland answering her–promising to break the indifference of Fairyland and to come?–or was the wish foster-mother to the fancy? Had she merely imagined the desired reply?

When, returning, from her own world, she re-entered Armingham House, the party was over. Its livelier members had gone to other staircases. The Archdeacon, as became his office, went straight home to bed. Lord Geoffrey, caped and hatted, strolled quietly to "Liberty Hall," the town-house of an Angli-

cized American, Mr. Barnett Q. Moss, who had fifteen millions and dyspepsia.

The very last ball of a lively season was there in full swing. Geoffrey enjoyed watching the plutocracy at play, and sharing their wildness. It was tonic to his well-bred nerves. After three hours of a perfect mother, it meant a bracing change.

June went too.

Meanwhile Bim had tucked himself up in the throstle's nest and slept like a top–however that may be. He did not stir till the morning was white. Then he rose–a mite refreshed–and came down from his fastness with a run.

He found Tim, and listened to him talking in his sleep. The royal tramp in his dreams was addressing legions. Bim awoke him. Tim continued his oratory to the trees. He was Cæsar and Buonaparte–two gentlemen in one. He seemed from his description to be wearing a laurel wreath round his neck, and trousers of imperial purple, ermine-lined. Every woe which wandering mankind suffers from was instantly and absolutely abolished–so far as mere words could abolish them–by autocratic decree. His Majesty Tim!

He stood up, wiped his feet on the grass, and looked about at the park. The pride of ownership shone in his eyes. All this belonged to him. His face had a new expression containing something of noble gentleness, a very pale reflex of the divinity that doth hedge a king. He wiped his lips with his sleeve and smiled. He settled his battered hat–his diamonded golden crown–daintily on the forefront of his head, and shambled towards Oxford Street for the tramp-man's breakfast, which, thanks to Bim of Fairyland, would taste henceforth as some delicious repast on a golden dish. His future tasks–poor casual ward businesses–would be noble services performed to aid mankind.

Being a king incognito, Tim did not advertise his estate. He and the fairies–they alone–knew of his royalty. There are more such monarchs amongst us than we wot of.

Bim was contemplating the tramp's retreating figure when happiness came to him. June would enjoy the delights of victory yet.

Her appeal to Elfdom had been answered. Here was one to help. Down from the skies and over the grass a fairy was hurrying. It was Auna of the Violet Valley; her purple wings fluttered wearily. There was no happiness in her mien. The oppressiveness of London was upon her.

"Gnome!" she asked weakly, "where in this horrid world is June?"

So saying, she drooped her limp figure on the wet grass and waited awhile, mute with disillusionment and weariness, stricken with the sorry prospect before her. Auna had no more dignity, then, than a broken butterfly. She had come to the wilderness, sharing the madness of June; and now, knowing its dreariness, remembered the deserted happiness. She was the first recruit to the glorious

company of the disobedient.

Bim had not time to frame an answer to her question before his delight received another delicious shock. Here actually was one more fairy from Elfland–Laurel of the Golden Uplands–where the broom is in its glory and the brave gorse glows. She, too, had flown thither in obedience to June's appeal, and brought smiles with her. There was bravery in her eyes, but the influence of the elfless Metropolis affected her as it had affected June and Auna. She, also, drooped on the grass.

There followed others. Bim's eyes and mouth opened wider and wider as the numbers grew. It was a wonderful morning. One by one the fairies came, until seventeen of all degrees–knights and sweet presences–studded the grass beside him. He was flabbergasted. His wits, through this feast of joyous surprises, were stunned and groping, until, with a long, long pull, he got himself together again.

For a full half-hour the fairies rested. Bim felt the flattery of fine company. He forced himself to sit severely upright, as if he were one with them, as indeed he deserved to be, and kept the wand prominently forward. He felt towards them somewhat as a longshoreman does to the week-end tripper. He could speak with uncontradictable authority. He knew London; these, his masters, were novices.

The sun rose, swathing every dew-burdened grass-blade with light. An elderly starling and several sparrows gathered about the fairy circle, curious of these new-comers. Bim, seeing the gaping wonder of the drab creatures, "shooed" them; but back they came, and always came, to chatter with many twitterings about these mimic immortals, whose existence in that jerry-built world they had learnt to be ignorant of. More and more sparrows arrived, with a few larger birds–draggled thrushes and shabby blackbirds, but no smaller birds of beauty. The sparrows had taken care of that.

It was the chattering of this inquiring concourse which roused the fairies from stupor. One of the knights–Felcine of the Silver Wings–addressed himself to Bim.

"You are the gnome who accompanied June?"

"I am," he replied proudly. "I am her servant and companion. What London was before we came–ah!" Bim drew a sweeping line with the wand, in gesture expressive.

"Then tell us what you have done," Felcine commanded.

Bim in his best voice told his tale to the hearers. It was, doubtless, a lame epitome of recent history, but it served to quicken their interest in the new departure, and to intensify their shame for having been so long in coming. He spoke of Paradise Court and Sally, of the want and the sweating; then of the improvements wrought in that colony of the very poor. He enlightened them about the

world of commerce, the Lord Mayor's banquet, the Oldsteins' emporium; told of the Archdeacon's efforts; of the visit to Armingham House; of innumerable other episodes and experiences, many of which have necessarily been excluded, even from this chronicle and history. Not a word did he say of the coming of the fairy host to Paradise Court, or of its going again. Bim–tactful fellow!–knew how to dodge the disagreeable.

The gnome was not an orator at this period of his career; but his tale, to those hearers, was highly interesting. It brought home to them–as possibly the perorations of a Member of Parliament would not have done–the need for fairy-work, for elf-reform, in the city of cities.

They, too, had not forgotten the coming and going of the fairy host.

"And where is June now?" asked Auna, when his story was ended.

Bim turned to point vaguely to westward; and, doing so, saw June herself on the brim of Geoffrey's hat. His lordship was walking homeward through the Park. He was tired and very thoughtful. Fairy influence and the excitements and scenes of the party at Liberty Hall had set him thinking.

Of a sudden June saw Felcine and his companions, and gave a glad cry.

Bim then knew the meaning of absolute happiness. He turned turtle with a whoop, and balanced himself on his head. That was how he found expression for his feelings.

CHAPTER XV
LIBERTY HALL

As Geoffrey Season wended his way from Armingham House to Liberty Hall, June kept his thoughts busy. That was an opportunity for profitable self-examination, which she took care should be well employed.

Geoffrey was habitually frank with himself and others. It had never been necessary for him to suffer the least degree of self-deception, or to imagine certain human beings were angels, when they were only themselves.

So, with June on his hat-brim, and the Archdeacon's homily fresh in his memory, he began to measure established facts with new purposes, and found that in several directions the two did not fit.

He felt as he sauntered through the silent streets to his noisy destination something like a pioneer landed on a virgin shore. New possibilities–vague and

unformed as yet–loomed before him. These new possibilities at once attracted and repelled him. It was not to be easy for him to get out of the comfortable ruck in which circumstances had placed him.

Ordinarily, the way for him to take would be through sober squares–oases of iron-railed respectability–given up at that dull hour to cats, drowsy cabs, and constables. Now the splendid dulness and shuttered dinginess of the great houses under which he walked oppressed him, and the impulse came to wander by more devious ways, through that network of slums which all but touched the back-doors of the rich.

Never before in his easy-ordered life had such an impulse come to him. He had–as became his mother's son–instinctively refrained from looking on the unpleasant. Squalor and want existed to be avoided; they were so hopeless and–oh, so ugly! Unconsciously he had cultivated the happy, blind eye, and habitually overlooked the obvious. There was no callousness in his case, but merely ignorance. There are many like him. He was one of a multitude unawake.

At last he was ripe to shed his priggishness. June vigorously spurred his purposes. His latent power for real social service was suddenly quickened into life.

Marching into an area of meanness, which hitherto had been the Forbidden Land, he was at once face to face with heavy problems.

He passed a public-house, as a drunken woman, a baby in her arms, was put out from the portal. A whiff of hot air went with her. The potman who had turned her out–"chucked" is the word–talked to her in dingy scarlet, and then returned to his damp altar of a decadent Bacchus.

Geoffrey gazed at the woman curiously.

The horror of it! She was undivine, bestial, bloated; the victim–a greedy victim–to gin. She stopped and turned clumsily to stare stupidly at the lighted windows; then angrily, with hoarse voice, returned the potman's compliments. All the while the fragment of humanity was wailing, cradled within her shawl.

The threats of this demoralized Venus merged gradually into a pitiful whine–ah, the woes and wrongs she suffered from!–as she staggered hurriedly along the causeway, came to the door of her dwelling, and lurched over the step. There was the home of that English child!

June flew after the infant in service bound, leaving Geoffrey weak and numb with indignant horror and helplessness. Here were problems indeed!

He awoke of a sudden to a sense of his responsibilities. What had he been living for? A shock of icy coldness swept through him. That was the beginning of burdens. He looked with new eyes at himself.

He was wealthy, leisured, destined for a prominent career in Parliament. Till now he had contemplated a life of enjoyment, tempered with a variety of

pleasant experiences–sociability, applause and public activities. He had seen himself on platforms, happily eloquent; standing before a green ministerial bench, banging a treasury box, while men of note listened and cheered.

That had been the game as expected. Now things were to be different. Realities had challenged him. The drunken mother and the doomed child represented thousands. He was to work for them and for such as they.

June rejoined him. The mother and the infant were both asleep. One drop of elixir of fern-seed, a thousand and three years old, made from Merlin's ancient recipe; and the deed was done.

Fairy and lordling passed through human rookeries. Geoffrey, eagerly observant of facts on this shady side of life, was indifferent to danger. He was reckless. Again and again a policeman sternly warned him, and frequently accompanied him through the darkest, least savoury parts. He laughed scornfully at the need for caution, turned up his coat-collar, covered his shirt-front, and went on, feeling more and more reckless and angry as he went. This was revelation! He clenched his fists, and writhed at the manifold evidences of past indifference and neglect. But the anger went after a time, or was tempered with wisdom.

Children, children everywhere! Always there were children. Wherever he wandered, late as it was, during that westward pilgrimage, he saw them–the innocent, chief sufferers–bearers of the heaviest burdens. They were born to woe; nearly always were to die of it. Where was the justice, where the justification of their pain? Let comfortable sociologists prate; but why had they those hours and days of want and suffering merely to die? They had not offended. They had not broken laws of thrift, duty, love; yet they must endure evil and reap great harvests of the sins their forebears had sowed. It was pitiful, shameful, appalling.

He saw little ones weary to death, forgotten, learning iniquities. The infinite waste of young humanity appalled him! Something of the nation's life was decaying there, and so few seemed to care.

He came abruptly to the square which had Liberty Hall at its corner. Before proceeding to the enjoyments awaiting him, he must calm and recover himself. He walked slowly along the three sides of the square. He was still agitated by the disclosures that slum-experience had brought him, so he walked again right round the inner circle of railings, and forced himself into the guest-man's mood.

He came, at last, to the crowded portal, begged and pushed his way through triple lines of packed spectators–for the most part women who had forgotten the lateness of the hour and their weariness in wonder and curiosity at the costumes of the guests–and joined the procession of the invited up red-carpeted steps.

June was troubled. Liberty Hall gave her dismay. Armingham House had been stately, though somewhat oppressive; the loudness and glaring brilliance of this assembly–this over-painted caricature of what is splendid–bewildered her.

It reminded her–unjustly–of prosperous public-houses.

Geoffrey surrendered his hat and cape to a footman–the livery of the Mosses was moss-green and gold–and passed on to be received. He was welcome. Scions of the aristocracy had master-keys to that house, as also had the over-rich.

The lady of Liberty Hall greeted him with heartiness.

"Very glad to see you, Lord Geoffrey; come right in!"

She was tall, thin and bony; framework *décolletée.* Her face was not happy. It was heavily lined, and bore the marks of ambition and strain. Head, neck, arms, and corsage were ablaze with diamonds. Three fortunes gleamed and sparkled upon her. A picture of the woman of the slums and the neglected infant flashed through Geoffrey's mind. June, to whom always human beings were merely as shadows burlesquing reality, became actually afraid. Her wings were constantly quivering.

There was a surging mob beyond this lady of jewels and angles–no less a mob because its members were prosperous and expensively dressed. Already the fairy had a foretaste of the vulgarity within, and feared and trembled with hate of it.

Geoffrey said some small smiling nothing, and passed on to a second effusive welcome–from his host, a man of restless eyes and heavy mouth.

"Barnett Q."–as his cronies called him–had made the best part of his millions out of biscuits, the balance from high finance. In his home-place Barnett Q. was genial and hospitable; but put a deal in his way, and he became on the instant keen, unscrupulous, inexorable, flint-hearted.

"It's a real good pleasure to see you, Lord Geoffrey. If you don't jolly some, you mustn't blame the wife and me. This house is named Liberty Hall, and I guess it's got to live up to its cognomen."

The dancing had started. It was already very like a whirlwind. Young folk, hot and flushed, were romping round like mad to the rhythm of a two-step. Geoffrey was caught in the riot. A demoiselle who giggled and called him Herbert seized his hand and began the gay canter. He threw himself into the spirit of the revel, neither pausing nor thinking till the band with a crashing finale stopped, and his partner had hurried him off to a refreshment-buffet.

There was perpetual laughter, peals of it now and then. Humour was cheap; mirth was easily aroused at that party. A man with a false nose was a great favourite, and when he suddenly startled a dowager and caused her wig to shift there were shrieks of delight. The catchwords of the streets were popular and appreciated in Liberty Hall. Champagne and cocktails shed a genial influence over everything. There was no lack of liquid wealth in that bountiful establishment.

June, while the dancing lasted, escaped to the gallery where the band was

playing, and sat on the matted hair of a flautist, who forthwith went flat. Her thoughts for a while were far away in a night-world of green shadows.

"Hello, Season!" cried a puffy, sleek young man, clapping Geoffrey familiarly on the shoulder. "See my new mo. yesterday? I'm Harris, you know! Met you at Monty Dizzler's."

"No, Mr. Harris, I fear I didn't see the machine."

"Don't call me Mister, Season! There's no side between gentlemen, hey? She's a beauty! Light, and as for power and speed–well, I'm no orator! Passed you in Sloane Street by Cadogan Square. You were with a specially nice little piece of frilling–girl with a hat all over her. Gave four-fifty for her–the mo. I mean. Don't laugh. T'other side of Hounslow sent her along like blazes. The bobbies couldn't get ready for me. Rushed past three of them–traps and all–like a greased eel, before they could doctor their watches. Nearly knocked over one cop. Ha! And not more than a mile further on went over a boy's foot. No business playing in the roads, those kids! You should have heard him squeal. Talk of Wagner, and that rot! This is private between you and me, y' know. Fortunately, the mo. made such a dust they couldn't see my number. I–oh, if you don't want to hear any more, you needn't! Shirty dog! Just because he's a duke's son, gives himself airs. What's a duke nowadays? Pauper rats! Hullo, Gertie; come and have some sup. Liberty Hall's a rotter, but his cham's worth drinking! Then I'll take you home, little gell. You must see my new mo.—-"

Geoffrey did not dance again. The pause had given him an opportunity for recollection. He had since entering Mrs. Moss's hospitable abode somewhat forgotten his better purposes; but was already ashamed of his recent excitement. Though he started from Armingham House with the full intention of getting as much enjoyment at Liberty Hall as possible, he felt he ought to have remembered better the contrast of conditions between this revel and the sordid misery and nakedness of the slums.

He stood underneath the gallery watching and beginning to wonder. More than one of his companion-guests chaffed him for his grave face and preoccupied airs. He answered their badinage with repartee good enough.

The dancing became still more violent. Certain ladies, flaxen-haired and well-complexioned–footlight favourites–punctuated the step phrases of a barn-dance with high, high kicks.

Barnett Q. laughed with happy tolerance at the lace display, winked archly at some elderly cronies, babbled that things were somewhat slower in his young days, and went about murmuring to all and sundry, "Liberty Hall! Liberty Hall!"

Geoffrey felt the beginning of an angry shame–of himself first and foremost. Everything jarred on him now. The fairies had hold of him; but June, just then, was doing nothing. She was far away among the happy shadows.

The excitement had come to seem feverish, unreal; the laughter rang untrue–a mockery of gaiety. But still they laughed, as if they were fey. Geoffrey had been at such gatherings four or five times before, and had found them, with their colour, movement and irresponsibleness extremely amusing. They had sent him back to his world of ennui refreshed, a restored superior gentleman. But to-night he was restless, tired of the glamour; its gaiety was repulsive.

He put it down to the scenes of the slums and the sight of weary children; of course, having no idea that a fairy was perched but a little above him–that his state of dissatisfaction was mainly due to her.

He could not help overhearing occasional snatches of conversation from old and young; it was always loud-voiced, and invariably told one of these tales–the pleasures of extravagance, the rounding of idleness, the smart acquisition and showy expenditure of wealth. Braggarts were many. Vanity Fair! Vanity Fair!

June, awaking from her dreams and seeing his restlessness, sailed down and throned herself on the silken lappel of his coat–a fairy as a button-hole is a pretty sight, when we can see it. He felt a sudden increase of impatience: he must go. He wandered through the rooms, hunting for the way of escape.

He met his hostess. The poor lady looked thinner than ever. Her face had become white with excitement. Her diamonds accentuated the ghastliness.

"What is the matter?" she asked, with the drawl she sometimes affected. "I hope you're finding enjoyment in this country-cottage, but if your face is telling the truth, your thoughts are pretty near the tombstones. Now that won't do! I reckon I must find some sweet young thing to bring you back to Mother Earth. You're looking just too angelic for anything."

Geoffrey, realizing the discourtesy of poor appreciation in a house so over-abundant with hospitality, hastened to set her social fears at rest, and returned to the corridor leading back to the dancing room.

Suddenly there was tumult beside him. A girl had been imbibing cocktails carelessly. She slipped, and to regain her balance, grabbed at the arm of a man who was conspicuous in kilts. He, too, had been enjoying the flowing tide of champagne, and being a proud MacCoolicky, the chief of that ilk, was apt to be angry in his cups.

He steadied himself by clutching at some tapestry, and then, hearing some laughter and seeing a man broadly grinning at him, viciously jabbed him a blow on the arm. There was at once the prospect of a scuffle. The veneer of good manners on some of the guests was generally exceedingly thin. Geoffrey sprang between the scowling combatants; so did two other men. They seized the MacCoolicky's arms, and forced him against the wall. He began to sob, while the girl, the cause of his mishap, restored by the excitement to her true self, amused the crowd by describing his possible ancestors with their tails.

The MacCoolicky, for his part sobered too, writhed under the ridicule, and went away furiously muttering elementary Gaelic.

Barnett Q. came hurrying up, pushing his way through the crowd like a police-inspector. His little grey eyes glittered, his thin lips were pressed together in a very decided line. The millionaire was a man of flame and granite.

"You can do every blamed thing you like in this establishment," he said to them generally; "but I'm darned if I'll have any fraycars, and that's plain truth!"

"It's all right, Barney; only a little high spirits. Boys will be boys!" said a tiny old man from the edge of the crowd. And so the trouble ended.

The tumult took place near the door of a large room, which throughout the evening had been a haven of great interest. Geoffrey, parting from his host, entered the room.

June flew ahead, curious to see what was doing at the green tables. She noted the faces which fringed the games, and was shocked by their expressions. Greed, cupidity, selfishness, weakness, brutal excitement, sordid delight, mean disappointment were pictured there. Horrible! It was the card-room. The place was packed to stifling. Roulette, baccarat, and bridge were hard a-swing. Gambling was no new sight to Geoffrey Season, but never before had he seen such greedy rabble as that, or such extravagant, reckless stakes.

It was an occasion of unscrupulous business. Old and young, men and maidens, crowded round the tables primed with the one desire–to make. Mammon was their king. There was no refinement or enjoyment about that business; it was mere greediness on a very large scale. Eyes, fascinated, followed the running of the ball, the placing of the money, the turn and manipulation of the cards, the sweeps and pushes of bankers croups. The excitement was tense. Now and again hurried murmurs, excited comments, soft hysterical laughter, contradictions and brief disputes, broke the general silence.

Heigho! It was a sight for the cynical. If the devil has no humour, he misses a lot of fun.

Young girls, hardly old enough for their education to be "finished," were fingering piles of gold, and placing coins with calculation, according to some "system." They had completed their education at Monte Carlo. An elderly man was the lucky one–if luck is really the word. He neither smiled nor frowned, whatever his fortune might be; but calmly paid his losses and as calmly took his gains–his calmness, either way, was absolute.

Footmen came and went, carrying trays and glasses, but were not especially welcomed.

A young man with waved hair and a pose–a forgotten ballad-writer, his fame had flickered and gone out–happened to be standing beside Geoffrey. His eyes were alight with monetary desire.

”A sight well worth sinning for, Season,” he said, with a nod at the piles of gold and paper scattered about the board.

Geoffrey nodded in idle agreement. The wealth displayed represented thousands of pounds. June kissed his cheek.

”Yet with all that wealth there is actual starvation not an eighth of a mile from here,” he said in obedience to her kiss, her command.

The poseur turned and stared. He gaped with surprise.

”Good Lord, Season! You ought to be a curate.”

”It is, unfortunately, only the truth.”

”Perhaps so. Why not? Anyhow, it’s no good talkin’ about it. People who starve have only themselves to blame. Haven’t they hands to work? Show me a poor man, and you’ll point to a fool. That’s truth, too, if it isn’t an epigram! Everyone with wits can get a good living if he likes. And if not–well, let those who can’t get take; that’s my motto. I’m no high-priest of ordinary morality, I can tell you. But–look, Sir Gussie’s won again! George! the luck of that fellow! Let me come; I must put a yellow boy on *impair*.”

The yellow boy was not at once put on, for a climax had come. A charge of cheating was shrieked out by an excited woman playing bridge. Chaos came again. Men and women sprang to their feet to look, and crowded to the centre of trouble. There were words of eager accusation, of fierce denial, of hot anger. A table was overturned. Gold tinkled to the floor. Two women–those chiefly concerned–had almost passed beyond words. It seemed, so agitated were they, and so fierce their looks as they glared at each other, as if they would actually be fighting; but cooler counsels urgently intervened, and the disputants were led away, each grasping her stakes or winnings, each still making angry assertions. For a little while the inherent vulgarity of the company had violently broken out; it had set at defiance the thin varnish of conventional politeness most of them wore.

Geoffrey turned, and pushed his way out of the room, out of the house.

A cold breeze blew on his forehead. The stars were shining.

”Never again!” was his resolution. ”Never, never again!”

At that moment the prig in him finally went. He was humble now and burningly sincere.

He realized his personal responsibility. In the future it must be his duty, in and out of Parliament, to modify the hideous inequality that had been exemplified that night. To have this waste, idleness, and vulgarity–this undisturbed triumph of Moloch and Mammon–by the side of extreme want and its manifold iniquities, was preposterous, humiliating, intolerable. The matter must be mended, if that could be. He would devote his years to the business.

But how to touch those extravagant idlers, the mischievous human butter-

flies, the Smart Set? Ah, how?

Dawn had succeeded night. Its greyness was shrinking under the promise of the sun. The Park gates were being opened as he came to them. He passed in to walk over the grass, preferring to return that way to Armingham House while his brain strove and wrestled with teeming problems.

Sudden inexplicable happiness seized him. He felt momentary lightness of heart. His mood of depression went. He felt surprisingly hopeful. There must be a fine ending to all these quandaries. But why was he so hopeful? He could not tell.

The reason was sufficiently simple. June, in her hour of deepest gloom, was encouraged by the sight of the fairies; and her joy at seeing them there had permeated–had glorified–him.

CHAPTER XVI
PROGRESS

Fairyland had begun to return to London.

The meeting of those elves with June was historic–an occasion for joyance, and they rejoiced. With songs, dances, and laughter they expressed their happiness. They ran gentle riot for a time.

Hyde Park took to them at once. Birds congregated; park-keepers, wondering why, came too. But none so blind as park-keepers. The bewildered creatures scratched heads, tugged at moustaches, and tried to reason it out; but of course they could not, so they weakly went away and forgot the wonder.

The fairies, after their excusable interval of rings and roundelays, winged to their headquarters in Paradise Court. Bim, unblessed with powers of flight, had to follow at the leisurely pace of a dray-horse, which was contentedly dragging barrels of beer eastwards. He slept and dreamed peacefully in a nosebag for most of the way.

June speedily decided how to use these her recruits.

There were the pillar-boxes. Their scarlet bravery, punctuating the drab shabbiness of the streets, had been to her something like inspiration, glad breaks from London's wide-flung monotony. She would rather their hue had been less crude, and not always red; but never mind that! They carried colour, that was virtue in such environment.

She decided to use every pillar-box as the centre for one fairy's activities. On its smooth convexity a magic dwelling should be built, round which fairy flowers would flourish. No men would know of the wonder; but that was their fault; they should use their minds and see. From every such oasis of light and sweetness the power of Elfdom would radiate, spread in larger and wider circles till Oberon's reign in London re-existed. June enjoyed brave visions as she led her pioneers eastward to the beginning of triumph.

Weeks went by.

The summer grew sultry. The Clerk of the Weather, ensconced in cool cloudland, harried old England with heat-waves. Streets, courts, and alleys became almost intolerable. John Bull, with bovine heartiness, grumbled, swallowed iced drinks, gasped and sweltered. Children whose playgrounds were the narrow courts and streets endured as best they could.

The new-come fairies, during those weeks, went through a severe ordeal. It was a bad business, that dull grind amongst ugly ways and dead ideals, when the birds and the flowers out in Fairyland were calling. June watched them, fearful lest they–on whom so much depended–should falter and return to joys that would welcome them; but they were true; they did not fail.

What a work they did! To describe it were to write volumes! The Lord Mayor's new organization–Titania's Bodyguard–was rapidly getting into being, testing its cog-wheels, preparing to buzz. The fairies helped it with wands and will.

There was everywhere infinite need for elf-work, therefore the effects of that little company seemed by comparison but limited. It was, however, great and real; so great and real and gracious that mayors, aldermen, and councillors, responsible for the welfare of the districts blessed, found their heads swelling. They thought this state of betterment was due to them–the blockheads! June, for reasons, was content they should enjoy what they could of the credit. She was nothing if not politic.

The fairies, giving the lead to the Bodyguard, which went to work with the zeal of idealist youthfulness, made a dead set against unhealthy houses. Jerry the builder began to feel uneasy, and serve him right!

Leaky roofs, sinking walls, warped woodwork, and other results of the jobbery of Jerry, the fairies touched with destructive wands and hastened the decay. The scamping engineer was hoist with his own petard. Ill-built houses, good only at the best for a few uncomfortable years, became at once so outrageously bad, and obviously so dangerous, that Studge, Snodge, Hopkins, and the rest of the gowned brethren on the Borough Council, were compelled for a time to forget prospects of pickings and the interested grinding of axes, in order to insure that Jerry's offensive structures were demolished to be reconstructed promptly with

conscience and workman-like bricks and mortar.

"If these shadows must have shells," said June, "let them be worthy and pretty shells!"

That is the spirit in which the fairies approached contracts and quantities. They carried their influence abroad.

Jerry had the grey time of his life. His pocket was suffering so conspicuously that his conscience became pricked and tender. He lay awake o' nights thinking copy-book mottoes. He was haunted by goody-goody ghosts. He wriggled, struggled–surrendered, coming reluctantly to the conclusion that honesty was, after all, the best policy. He acted accordingly. Hopkins, Snodge and Studge, now becoming passionately possessed of civic righteousness, kept eyes upon him, and realized for themselves the blessed compensations of disinterested public service.

The fairies made war on ugliness. They made a dead set against hideousness in all its aspects. Whatever was bad and depressing in public and private buildings went rapidly to decay. Practical men were puzzled. They attempted to solve the mystery by rule of thumb, as usual, and were always at fault. There was more scratching of contractors' heads during those summer and autumn months than had been since the building of Babel.

Men whose whole lives were an experience in joists and concrete, whose favourite field of talk was estimates and specifications, were utterly perplexed at the seemingly unreasonable circumstances which suddenly beset their trade. They asked each other desperate questions, and spread bewilderment. Why was rottenness so soon exposed? Why did that cornice which pleased them, though its adorned ugliness would have infuriated Ruskin, begin to fall away in slabs? They could not answer; but–it was!

A paradox lurked beside every doorway. The curious thing was that whatever was simple and beautiful lasted longer than usual, while the ill-adorned, ugly and drab went speedily to bits.

The fairies' policy was fruitful. Mean streets slowly ceased to deserve their adjective. Slums disappeared–were transformed with wonderful rapidity. With lighter rooms and prettier houses laughter came! Jerry called himself Joseph, wore fancy waistcoats, and felt a patriot. The business of artists boomed.

The extraordinary transformation which splendidly uprose was, in truth, an abiding, complete mystery to purblind practical men–they who measure facts with foot-rules, and look at life through theodolites. They could not understand the true reason why they had to build better. But the fairies knew; aha! the fairies knew.

June's company went about brightening what they approved with invisible paint, and gave cramp and spasms to folk with wilfully low ideals. They enjoyed

themselves thoroughly. Bim was indefatigable in his efforts.

It was not only in the building-world that the fairies did so well. Active as they were in arranging for the demolition and reconstruction of certain districts of London, they also looked after humanity in many other ways.

Here are a few instances of their manifold activities culled from Blue-books on the subject.

Workhouses were made worthier, less frightening, more homely; they became honourable retreats for the aged and unfortunate. Workhouse masters wore coloured shirts, encouraged the old men to play senile games of cricket, called every old woman "Ma'am." ...

School-teachers had the happiest faculty for periodically ignoring the timetable and telling the children unexpected fairy tales at hours officially dedicated to sums. The children came to school eagerly, charmed there by this delightful uncertainty; and then in their homes retold the tales to brothers, sisters, and parents. The school-songs and games became most joyous; elves helped the children to sing and play....

Street-corner speakers grew wondrous gentle to each other. The old uncharity disappeared. Temperance orators tried the effects of geniality, and began to make progress against the enemy. Time-worn political opponents invited each other to share the top of a common tub; and there, while differing, praised each other's tolerance and sincerity....

The front-door to Utopia was opening.

At a bye-election, politicians found themselves scrupulous; canvassers stuck to the truth, took no unfair advantages, left personalities coldly alone. The Buffs, always well-provided, lent their enemy, the Blues, whatever carriages and motor-cars they could spare. Partisans of either side went to chair the rival candidate, and in the friendliest manner possible wished him to lose....

The causes which you, O reader, are opposed to fizzled out.

Roofs of city houses were covered with green plants, and turned into gardens, enabling employés to do their business better because work was punctuated with restful visits to the flowers....

Soap was vigorously used. Cleanliness became a creed and a passion. Morning faces, floors and doorsteps shone. (Five fortunes would not induce me to divulge the name of the favourite soap.)

All British birds in cages were taken into the country and released. Gourmets started a league to prohibit the eating of larks. The woodlands, therefore, rang with happier songs, and Fairyland advanced with seven-league boots....

Bean-feasters devoted evenings to the practising of glees, reviving folk-songs, so that country roads were no longer rendered wretched with the crude strains of music-hall choruses. Delightful concerts were organized for Londoners

among the green fields. England once more began to be merry with song....

Vulgarity lost its flavour. Rudeness was cold-shouldered. Jokes which were not nice were not laughed at. They fell flat as recumbent tomb-stones. Humour–the real article–lived again. It was pleasant to hear the persiflage of office-boys, which began to be original. Omnibus drivers and cabmen were sometimes really funny. As for judges, they always joked in the right places....

The elves and the Bodyguard looked to the hoardings, which became more pleasant and effective as the artistic charm of advertisements increased. Colours were chosen which combined harmoniously. Passers-by no longer suffered toothache and heart-spasm because of some militant eyesore. Those pestilent bobbly lights, that reiterate a trade-name at night-time, were torn down by righteous raging mobs, hammered and drowned....

What else the fairies did I need not detail here, for the reader who has come to this page has proved perfectly capable of adding to the series of their good effects. It was all just splendid.

London surely and rapidly recovered itself; and as its appearance and manners progressed towards perfection, more fairies, encouraged by the brightness, came; more pillar-boxes were settled upon; the circle of influence was still wider spread; the march of amelioration went on.

When a hundred fairies had arrived, and forty-three gnomes had followed them–which was not until October, the sere of the year, had arrived–June decided to give a garden-party on the roofs of Paradise Court.

Bim was appointed major-domo, lord high-butler, and general factotum, something like fifteen officials in one. He swelled visibly with proper pride. His energy in making the preparations was so intense–he managed so successfully to be in two places at once–that not a few of his fellow-gnomes thought him blessed with invisible wings. His dignity and importance were unquestionable. He wore the superiority, won through being the first gnome to brave the rigours of London, so openly that his brethren of the democracy became more than a wee bit envious. Perhaps Bim's head had become very slightly swelled.

Meanwhile June was wondering what Oberon was doing.

That October night was an occasion to be well-remembered by fairy and by man, though man remained blind to its doings, albeit benefiting by its effects. The moon, which since the affair of the Violet Valley had disguised her interest in the rebellion of June, shone openly, and looked with all her seas. That London night was alive with vivid beauty, every angle and chimney-pot of those decaying hideous houses being beneficently illumined by her beams.

The roof-world was no longer a black and grey wilderness. Elfin wands, gnome labours, and many ingenuities had covered it with tiny lights and fairy flowers, making it a piece with the dream-world.

June–hostess and heroine–wore her lustrous crown. There were songs, dances, and much great joy. Gnomes, sitting in rows on chimney rims and along the edges of stacks, sang and applauded. Only one well-known song in the anthology of Elfdom was not heard during that night of revel–the triumph song, the chant reserved for the May-day crowning.

Mankind was still blind to these celebrations. It really seemed as if men must be trying to see with their noses. Such wonderful things were happening just under their very eyes which they could not see, and in their purblindness would not imagine. It is a heart-breaking business, the open-eyed blindness of men.

Later on, of course, they had better than glimmerings–but sufficient for this chapter is what we have said.

One old woman, and one old woman alone, had glimpses of that revel. She was Irish.

Bridget Malone had oftentimes, in her young days, seen fairies round an empty hearth in Connaught; but when she came to London, forty years before, she had forgotten the precious faculty, and lost the power of seeing the unseen. This sight of triumphant elves restored the gift.

Bridget woke out of sleep. Her bed was on the floor, but her bones were accustomed to hardness, so that not want of warmth or any Sybarite troubles caused her to wake.

She saw a strange light reflected on the tattered wall opposite the window. She breathed a prayer to Mary, and looked for the supernatural, for this was not moon-rays or sunshine, but something of both blended and idealized; something of the light which never was on sea or land.

Bridget, in her half-asleep wisdom, guessed it was the little people. Her thoughts flew back in a flash to the days of childhood. She thoughtfully thanked her stars, and felt religious.

She had it in mind to wake her daughter and three grandchildren, all sleeping in the same room, that they might share her good fortune, but refrained. If it were the fairies, they might not be pleased. She remembered the jealous secrecy reputed of the little people in the old country, who could not bear their meetings to be overlooked. So Irish!

Bridget, therefore, saw those revels alone. She crept on her knees to the window and watched, resting her chin on the sill. It was so good a sight that she did not know she had cramp, and quite forgot the rheumatism from which she had made her family suffer for the last five years. She was lost in a rapture.

"'Twas a soight to make ould eyes shparkle," she related afterwards. "On the tip-top of that chimney-pot was a little rhound man for all the worruld like a shwollen dumplin', but as rid as holly-berries. That was a turr'ble important

little gintleman. He looked like the settin' sun full o' twinkles; and the way he would come down and bless the others, rhound lumps like hisself, as if he was cock o' the dancin', was a wonder! And there, on a t'rone, made out of all sorts of fer-rns and flowers, was a leddy-queen fairy. She had a cr-rown on her head that would buy Ireland's ransom; it shparkled and it shone, like the sun, moon and shtars all togither, whan glancin' on a lake in Connaught. Her face was a pictur' of kindness. Her eyes and her mouf were smilin' like blessin's. I'd have made her a cake for luck if I'd known how to get it to her, and I didn't want to frighten them away, the darlin's, a-leppin' and a-rompin' so prettily. So I put my daughter's petticoat round me and kept on lookin'. There were hunderds and hunderds of fairies. They danced like anyt'ing; and waved about and looked so beautiful–it was a pictur'! Hev ye iver heard nightingales in an Irish wood? Hev ye iver seen moonbeams on an Irish river? No! Dear, what can I say to ye? Well, you've seen mother's love in a woman's face, so you'll get some ghost of a notion of the music and the poethry, and the ma'nifishence of that dancin'. The light which came from the little people–it all came from them, with a little moonlight t'rown in–was br-right as fire on Tara.... And ye don't belave it? ... Ah, ye makes a mishtake, young gintleman! If they weren't fairies that I saw, and if I didn't see them, there's no hope for you nor for me naypher, for as thrue as Cuchulain killed his son they were there–as thrue as thruth they were there. I saw thim with these ould eyes.... See them? Of course I did! 'Twas plain as ugliness, only 'twas beautiful as light could make it. They kept on, they kept on, I tell ye, till afther the sun was up, and the lasht I saw of thim was the fairy with the cr-rown on shmilin' and shmilin'!"

So much for the testimony of Bridget Malone. Strangely enough–although the newspapers, thanks chiefly to the Venerable Archdeacon Pryde and Sir Titus Dods, now in the last month of his mayoralty, had made Oberon popular, and it was a beautiful commonplace to have faith in the fairies–no one treated Bridget's story with proper respect or even with simple common sense. Paradise Court–her own country–was packed with disbelievers, and–is it not always so?

Indirectly, however, her story had one good effect. It set others telling and inventing fairy-tales–spreading a fine fashion. So June, seeing that result, forgave the incredulity. The imagination of the people was awake.

Yes, Bridget had told the truth. The fairy with the crown was "shmilin' and shmilin'." The last moment of the revel brought June its crowning happiness, a great unexpected cause for joy.

As Bridget has told us, daylight was abroad, and the sun had risen, before the fairy dancing ended.

A white cloud–or it may have been a gulp of white smoke from an awakening workshop chimney–came sailing in the direction of the roof-garden. June

watched it, wondering; it seemed charged with mystery.

As it passed overhead, she realized its burden. The magic of the crown gave her power to pierce its secret.

Hidden in the little white cloud was Oberon flying. He had come in disguise to spy out the land; had seen, had passed on his way.

Thus there was a fine full-stop to the revels.

Some notes of interrogation were added by June–"Would Oberon come to resume his reign? Where might Titania be? Was Fairyland at last on the way?"

Not yet. Not just yet!

CHAPTER XVII
THE ARISTOCRACY MOVES

As soon as the campaign of the pillar-boxes had well begun, and fairy progress was rapidly marching, June settled down to the siege and taming of her Grace of Armingham. That was a difficult fortress to reduce! For weeks the fairy was baffled.

The Duchess, as we know, had many great qualities, which need no advertisement here. Her main defect, which does matter, was a sublime indifference to certain most important sub-lunar things. She had at this time no sympathy, imagination, or gift of genial make-believe; there was nothing for the fairy to fasten to. It was much like trying to grow orchids in a vacuum.

June did not repeat her prankish experiment of the night of the party. Now and then the Duchess of her own accord thought a pun–habit had begun to pale the lurid hideousness of the thing–and actually came to regard herself as possessing some sense of humour–in this case a hopeful sign. June was merciful and not unwise. Never again was the Duchess urged by any invisible spirit of mischief to the brink of a breach of decorum.

The fairy was tactfully careful to do nothing to lessen her Grace's self-respect. The prize must be won with all flags flying. A discredited victim would mean no worthy–and possibly no permanent–victory. So the best order of diplomacy was required. June wove her spells, and brought magic to bear. These influences had some effect from the beginning; but it was to be a very lethargic conversion. For a time the Duchess gave no signs of submission.

The Duke was more malleable. June found it easy to influence him. He

became quite a champion of fairydom over the dinner-table; and, when the men were left to their cigars, toasted Titania daily, in the good old-fashioned manner, with an apt quotation from the classics.

Nor did his enthusiasm and efforts finish there. Twice before the session ended he drove down to the House of Lords to move a resolution which would lead England elfwards; but, alas! on both occasions the warmth of the Gilded Chamber and the influence of ministerial explanations sent him to sleep. He awoke each time to find the Woolsack untenanted; the House adjourned; the opportunity gone.

The fairies took the will for the deed; and, after all, in those still unregenerate days, it came to much the same thing.

It was Geoffrey from whom Elfland came to hope most. He was young, capable of enthusiasm, and was already, though only in a shadowy way, on the side of the fairies.

He had thoroughly awakened to facts, and begun to take life very seriously. He went at his problems with a will. He immersed himself in Political Economy and the study of social problems, and sat at the feet of the Professors. He went for miles tramping through mean streets, studying conditions and people. He marched along country roads and noticed the empty and wasted fields, weed-choked streams, and infinite other opportunities for national well-being lost.

Frequently Bim went with him. For his own rest and comfort the gnome furnished Geoffrey's Homburg hat with a fairy hammock and gossamer sleeping-suit. His lordship became a walking bedroom, entertaining for hours, just over his brainpan, a distant cousin of Puck.

Geoffrey became eager to do something, to create something, to make life richer for his having lived. He thought of many possible occupations, chiefly mechanical; he felt he ought in his circumstance to do something quite contrary to his rule, something grimy and disagreeable. It ended–after some loose-ends of effort–by his remaining satisfied to prepare for Parliament. So he continued to absorb fustily-immortal works on the sciences of wealth and government, and practised the writing of pithy pamphlets and the delivery of orations–addressing "Mr. Speaker" and mighty demonstrations in the solitude of his bedroom.

In November the seat he was destined to, became vacant. The writ for an election could not be issued till after Parliament had reassembled in February; so, meanwhile, he must wait, and woo the suffrages of his future constituents.

He went to Armingham Castle, canvassed and took tea with several and sundry, kissed babies, opened bazaars, delivered a series of addresses of a pleasant Buff colour. The fairies were not with him then; they left that particular campaign alone. The burgesses he was to represent liked him well enough. They regarded him as a nice, handsome, earnest youth, whose speeches might well

have contained more personalities and fewer figures, but who was safe and his cheques generous. He would do, was the burden of general opinion.

The fairies knew well that he would–when he was wanted.

Life drifted on, till signs of the approach of Christmas began to appear. June saw, in the window of the public-house by Paradise Court, a bill which advertised Peace, Goodwill, and a Goose-club. That set her thinking. She put on her crown and considered.

She sent out a trumpeter and called a fairy-conference. Every elf came from his pillar-box to sit on her roof and consult.

Three more recruits from Fairyland appeared at the assembly. The stars heard the ring of their welcome.

A plan of campaign was decided upon. The elves became still busier. They spent more time perched on human heads, stimulating good thoughts during those Advent weeks, than ever before. Men and women began to think of Christmas as Dickens did–but without the hot brandy.

The great occasion was approaching. The Clerk of the Weather took it into his official head to send something seasonable. It became cold and bracing; roofs, walls, and the roads–so long as the traffic would let them–were elegantly robed with snow. Ordinarily that snap of cold would have roused a wail and a grumble; but not this year–thanks to June and Company. The seasonable weather was taken as a further excuse for human kindness. The wail was not heard because the want, its cause, was removed. As for the grumble, there was so much good-nature in the improved world that to grumble was impossible, except for old soldiers who had made a habit of it.

There was to be no hunger in England during that Christmastide; and for the poor who tramp, none but actual marchers in the wooden-leg brigade were to be without a pair of comfortable sound boots.

Such facts as these prove better than any mere words of pen with what reality the purposes and ideals of the fairies had been accepted. And–this to satisfy rigid economists and the mighty individualist–it was all done by voluntary subscriptions. There!

Houses and streets were decorated as they should be. There were archways of flags; but paper flowers were properly tabooed. No fairy could tolerate that kind of drivel. Lamp-posts were wreathed with holly; bunches of mistletoe hung at street-corners. Kissing became popular again. Old maids, whose hearts had been starved for years and years, grew gracious and watched for bearded policemen.

Every window and window-sill was decked with laurel and moss. Chinese lanterns were hung over gates and under porches. Lighted lamps with coloured shades shone through uncurtained windows, so that when night fell every street

and roadway became an illuminated avenue. Next-door neighbours, who for years had taken obvious pains to be mutually indifferent, exchanged greetings of good cheer, and admired each other's decorations.

June, who had felt some awe for the high-collar pride of little Londoners, seeing this triumph of geniality, this evidence of the lessening of two-penny vanity, sang joy-songs, and encouraged her comrades. They followed her lead with whoo-whooping! What a time!

Then the newspapers and the pulpits began to speak. A great project was evolved and set in being. There must be in every district–the press panjandrums declared with elf-induced unanimity a Christmas supper, after the good old jolly style. Funds were started to save any call upon the rates. Gifts of edibles, drinkables, and current coin rolled in.

Mayors and councillors, workers in churches, chapels, conventicles of all sorts, and of no sort; political women and plodding housewives; dukes' sons, cooks' sons, sons of belted earls with their sisters and their cousins and their aunts; my Lady Bountiful and my lady who scrubs–these with all and sundry came together in a spirit of splendid camaraderie to consider ways and means of establishing the Christmas joy-feasts.

Town-halls, village rooms, and other suitable places in all parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were made ready for the great celebration. Mountains of food and rivers of delectable liquid were prepared. Chefs, professional, amateur and very amateur, went to work with a will. Localities bragged of their poultry and puddings. Small boys walked about with glistening eyes; small girls, telling their evening toll of fairy stories, got into the habit of ending their "happy ever afterwards" with the assurance that not a year passed without the wedded prince and princess having a Christmas supper with their people.

'Twas bliss to be alive. Scrooges a thousand-fold were converted wholesale. The fairies, all were working during the entire twenty-four hours of the day; and somehow–somehow they actually managed to squeeze into that ordered period of time an additional twenty minutes. How it was done they only know. Really, they are wonderful–those fairies!

Nevertheless, despite this general agreement of feeling, and unprecedented flow of goodwill, a few exalted persons and their imitators had managed to keep apart from it. They were but a few here and there, but the fact of their silent opposition was painful. There were blots on the jollity.

The Duke of Armingham was not one of them. His Grace, during that period of preparation, seemed to return to youth. His energy was wonderful. He became adept at hammering tacks, and probably nailed up more Goodwill mottoes than anyone else of his years. It was he who devised the plan of plastering dead walls with red and green cartoons, representing prominent men and women

of all parties, sects, and classes united in the goodwill of Christmas.

His posters added considerably to the brightness and humour of the streets. But the Duke went just a little too far; though, in the Pepysian phrase, it did one's heart good to see him scuttle round a corner, after having pasted a picture to the front-door of a leading militant suffragist.

He used to come home after the midnight hour, as trembling and wide-eyed as the triumphant Brer Rabbit; his hands and clothing a-muck with bill-stickery. No mischievous bad boy could have been more happily guilty than he; and the way he put on his pince-nez to brazen it out before the Duchess, would have been a picture for Keene.

Certainly the Duke was not of the ungracious elect; but, alas, just as assuredly his Duchess was! Mrs. Barnett Q. Moss and her glistering circle of human dross also remained significantly apart from the general rejoicing and good-fellowship.

June determined to concentrate her attentions on the Duchess.

It was the week before Christmas. The fairy preened herself carefully, for who would conquer must wear nice clothes. Bim placed the crown upon her head and then clambered to the tip-top chimney-pot above Paradise Court to watch her, as a flash of flower-light, journeying towards the vanquishing of that opponent.

As June flew, she rejoiced at the sights beneath her. London was now rich with areas of sweetness and light–the reward of her influence. Old blemishes and ugliness were for ever removed; colour and beauty reigned. It was a sight for tired fairy eyes. The great metropolis was positively handsome.

One by one, fairies who felt they deserved a holiday flew up and followed her, so that by the time she arrived at Armingham House a train of twenty attended her. The more the merrier! They were a jovial company.

The fairies settled on the steps by the great closed door. June opened it. One touch of wand and it swung back obediently. The Armingham butler, then coming down the inside stairs, gaped with amazement.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "Them fastenings are done for."

He shut the door with a slam, reopened it and examined the lock. All seemed in trim. He tugged at his left whisker–sign of wine-cellar perplexity. "The world nowadays is getting that rummy," he soliloquized. "I dunno! Those bloomin' fairies, I suppose."

So it was. Many a true word is spoken in bewilderment. The elves–delighted to hear this tribute, however involuntary, to their effectiveness–joined hands, raced and sang in a ring about him. They were mad with happiness, jollier far than legendary grigs and sandboys.

The butler stood in the centre of the marble hall in a maze of indecision,

yet at the same time strangely pleased, till their romp was ended. Then with a shriek of joy, which his clay ears were incapable of hearing, the fairies clambered about him. From his waist upwards they clung to him; made him their vehicle. June sat enthroned on his baldness. He was an honoured man.

As he went upstairs, Sparks, the Duchess's maid, happened to pass down them. She saw his smiling face, and crowsfeet of kindliness, not often visible, about his eyes.

"La! Mr. Gootle, what's this?" she asked.

"Company for her Grace, Sparks," he answered, pompously.

The lady's-maid stared, then ran on giggling. "Gootle's got 'em!" she murmured, not untruthfully. She saw possibility for sniggering gossip when she reached the housekeeper's room.

The Duchess was in the library going through her visitors' list, deciding on the guests to be invited to her next dinner-party, writing the names of the selected on a large half-sheet.

The butler entered the library. At once the fairies descended from him and clustered about the Duchess and the writing-table.

Gootle was suddenly aware of the fact that his entrance was purposeless. The object that had taken him there had departed. He struggled with his brains to think of a reasonable excuse for the intrusion.

"Yes, Gootle?" the Duchess inquired.

"Ahem, your Grace, the–front-door flew open."

The Duchess laid down her pen and–looked.

"Really, Gootle! Should I have been troubled with that?" Her glance was ominous.

"Very sorry, your Grace, very sorry," he mumbled, fluttering his hands like flappers, and withdrew. He felt slapped. He wanted to kick himself. "Mass! hass! hass!" he soliloquized. "What did I do that for?" He paused on the stairs. "Them bloomin' fairies!" he said again.

June and her companions were ripe for their form of usefulness. They did nothing for the time, but sat silently, perched picturesquely on the table, mantelpiece, chandeliers and bookcases, while the Duchess continued the selection and completed her list.

She drew a line to indicate that it was ended.

June touched the pen. The Duchess scrawled through the line, in effect deleting it, and wrote an additional name.

"Mrs. Barnett Q. Moss." Then she drew a second line.

She frowned and wondered at herself. She ran her pen along the intrusive name to cancel it, but made no mark; the ink was dry. Her frown was repeated.

The Duchess jabbed her pen into the inkpot, dipping viciously; and then,

instead of using it to complete the cancelling of the offending name, wrote a letter. She did not even use the form of the third person.

"DEAR MRS. MOSS,

"I have not exactly the pleasure of your acquaintance, but my son Geoffrey has on more than one occasion enjoyed your hospitality, and has spoken to me about your kindness to him. Will you give me the pleasure of knowing you? If you could spare the time to take tea with me here to-morrow at four o'clock, I should be very glad.

"I shall look forward to seeing you then, unless I receive a note or telephone-message to the contrary.

"**Yours sincerely**, "EDITH ARMINGHAM."

She found the address in the Red Book, sealed the envelope, rang for Gootle, and despatched the invitation.

Then she rustled to the fireplace and looked at the flames.

"Now why–why did I do that?"

There was no answer. The fairies looked at each other and laughed. Then they made slides on the lid of the piano.

The Duchess was angry.

CHAPTER XVIII
A COMPACT

The brougham which bore the delighted but highly nervous Mrs. Barnett Moss to Armingham House set her down before the door at two minutes to the hour. To be two minutes better than punctual was one of the iron rules of the millionaire; his wife remembered it when paying an advantageous call. As the clock in the boudoir struck four she entered the presence.

June also was there. Her companions of yesterday had returned at dawn

to their posts of duty, the pillar-boxes; but Bim she had fetched, in measure to supply their places.

The elves had made a night of it, and what a night!

Every room, corner and cranny in the great establishment had been visited and explored. The butler's pantry they exulted in–to this day Gootle does not know who put the salad-dressing into his particular whisky. The conservatory was for a time transformed. The flowers within it lost their lethargy, and knew again gladness of life. The fairies played hide-and-seek among the shelves and statuary of the library. The dining-table, whereon June had danced on the night of her début at Armingham House, was in the evening used for many series of fairy rounds–the full score of princely people tracing triumphant dances around and about their leader and lady.

Only Geoffrey Season and his mother were dining at home that night, so there was ample room for the elves to disport in. The butler and his footmen four, looking solemnly at the damask emptiness, were puzzled by–they knew not what! There seemed to be things there, filling the emptiness, that never were there. O dear! A strange world!

Geoffrey was the person most strongly impressed by the atmosphere of enchantment. His conversation shone with unusual brightness, it bubbled with happiest effervescence; but the Duchess, conscious of the amazing invitation to, and certain coming on the morrow of, the millionaire's wife, was far down in the glooms, weighed down with the dumps. She could not bring herself to tell even her son of that incomprehensible accident; and went to bed early, giving Sparks an unheavenly time.

The hours of Faerie came. When the moon was throwing a silver bar over the blue silk coverlet; when stars peeped through the windows; when the night-light's tiny flame was modestly gleaming; when her Grace's breathing made music in the room; then fairies, a score and one, might have been seen flitting about the bed and before the mirrors, swinging on silver fittings, clinging to tapestry hangings, sleeping placidly, sharing the laced pillow with the Duchess of Armingham.

And so for the night we leave that company of immortals and their quarry, and come to the important to-morrow.

The Duchess woke with a light heart; and, when Sparks brought the morning tasse, was inclined to carol.

The maid saw the unwonted gleam of geniality, precisely at the moment when her mistress remembered Mrs. Moss. Sparks watched the glow of kindness fade, die, and the Duchess become herself again.

The state of high-born sulkiness did not last long. June, except for the hour of siesta wherein she returned to Paradise Court to fetch Bim, was constantly

beside the Duchess. She spent the whole of that day in preparing the atmosphere for a great conversion. Her magic permeated every part of and person in the great house–from boudoir to boot-boy. Her influence, so real and sweetly haunting, affected the Duchess deeply. She still kept a proud face, but inwardly was sorely inclined to surrender and give herself to the fairies. Her heart was converted already, but still she steadily resisted the new tendencies.

The Duchess was one of the obstinate company who insist on dying in the last ditch.

Acute dislike at having to entertain Mrs. Moss was the obstacle which blocked the fulfilment of her good intentions. Yet that involuntary act of hospitality was an essential step in the progress of Fairydom. It was necessary for June to govern the will of the Duchess in an affair that mattered, and to conquer a great prejudice; but at this stage of progress the prospect seemed retarding the march. Her Grace fought hard against the better inclinations. She was afraid of vulgarity. That was the principal fear. She had heard so much of Liberty Hall and its parties–though not in an unkind way–from Geoffrey.

Mrs. Moss, for her part, also was fighting a battle–against strange nervousness. Ushered in by Gootle, she smiled painfully, mournfully shook her head, and said "How-do!" The Duchess received her with icy graciousness.

The tea in the beginning was a commonplace festival; June knew better than to make her puppets talk seriously during its earlier stages. It was necessary for the Duchess to thaw somewhat; for Mrs. Moss to recover confidence. They must have pause.

They had it, and discussed nonentities and silken politics.

At last June felt the opportune time for action had come. She popped her crown upon the Duchess's head, while Bim, armed with the wand, made himself comfortable in Mrs. Moss's narrow lap.

December was suddenly turned to May. Awkwardness went, geniality prevailed. The Duchess no longer wondered at having given the invitation, or spent suspicious thoughts on her visitor. Everything was natural, kind, and proper. June had won at last.

"I am very glad you came, Mrs. Moss," she said heartily; "there is so much I want to talk to you about."

"It's very good of you to say so, dear Duchess," was the enthusiastic answer.

Bim flourished the wand to stem a current of gush. Mrs. Moss pursed lips and waited.

The Duchess in her brain was wondering what next her tongue would say.

"Have you ever wondered," she asked, "how strange it is that people should go through life, and wilfully refuse to become better acquainted? Why should there be barriers between us or any people? Caste, class-distinctions, are merely

artificial. 'The rank is but the guinea stamp,' said Mr. Burns, the poet–it was quoted by the *Morning Post* yesterday, in a striking article on 'The Aristocracy of Elfdom.'"

"Was it?" said Mrs. Moss, who was puzzled at this line of talk.

"Yes, and it is true."

"Oh, Duchess, if–if a Duchess says so; but I shouldn't have thought—-" was the stammering reply.

The poor lady was bewildered. Armingham's Duchess had been in good report and ill, especially ill, the proudest of the proud; fair game and a favourite target for the derision and admiring envy of the merely smart. A thousand stories, increasing with piquancy as they aged, had been set afloat in illustration of her arrogance. Thousand-leaved fictions had blossomed about her. Her origin and upbringing were the kernels of many pretty tales. If rancour wished–as rancour frequently did wish–to hurl epithets at the coroneted caste, five to one the Duchess of Armingham was its pet Aunt Sally. No one in Society had been more pilloried, abused, and envied. The spite and verisimilitude of the attacks were quickened and strengthened by the supreme, unaffected indifference with which her Grace had disregarded them.

Mrs. Moss, although she made social use of Geoffrey, had taken her share in throwing the garbage of scandal. She had often seen the Duchess on her drives through the Parks, and would have given much for a bowing acquaintance with her; but as that was not to be, she, in sheer chagrin, helped to increase the yellow stream of disparagement.

And now the longed-for impossible was happening–this great lady, this enviable aristocrat, this butt for the diatribes of the little, this queen of the exclusive few, was seated familiarly with her, entertaining her, talking easily of democracy, aristocracy, equality.

No wonder Mrs. Moss was bewildered. She pinched herself to be sure it was not one of her dazzling dreams. Bim, to fortify the reality, pinched her too. Yes, there could be no doubt. She could feel it was true.

"A Duchess, you say?" and the hostess smiled sadly. "The world is mistaken when it thinks a woman of rank is to be envied."

"But the privileges!"

"The privileges, Mrs. Moss? The responsibilities of station, I assure you, outweigh them far. Familiarity is apt to render them mere nuisances. What privileges do you particularly refer to?"

The guest in her turn smiled. It was something of a pitying smile–ah, the wisdom of the worldlings! How much the dear Duchess must have been misunderstood!

"Why, the entry everywhere. I guess the folk who shut their doors on a

Duchess would soon be inmates of Bedlam. You can talk as a partner with any of the people at the top, can't you? The wealthiest, proudest houses welcome you."

"Is that a great privilege?" she was answered. "I confess I find the social round dull–unutterably dull, with its receptions and dinners, when you must attend them."

"I wish you and the Duke would honour my house one evening," Mrs. Moss ventured to say. "I warrant you wouldn't find our parties dull."

"Ah, my son Geoffrey"–she remembered only the milder stories about Liberty Hall–"has told me of some pleasant little parties at your house."

A pang went through the lady of Liberty Hall.

"So that is how he described them!" thought she. Praise so comparative stabbed her. She was aggrieved and nearly brought to angry tears. Only a few days earlier a weekly paper without a circulation had–for a consideration–filled two columns with an illustrated description of her latest affair, giving a long list of invited guests with swollen names, and now–now–now! to have it referred to as a "pleasant little party"! It was galling!

Bim, thinking she needed it, pinched her again.

Meanwhile, the Duchess was calmly talking pure democratics, to the much amusement of June. The crown was working with a vengeance. Its impotence in that particular case was ended. Six months of incomplete success, commencing with absolute failure, had ended with this result. No wonder the fairy and the gnome were feeling cock-a-whoop! Victory–absolute Victory–was advancing.

The Duchess became serious. She arrived at the fairy's purpose, and believed it to be her own.

"Are you a democrat, Mrs. Moss?" she asked, and put her lorgnette to her eyes in order to see, as well as to hear, the answer.

Every nerve and atom of the vain and selfish lady quivered in protest at such a question.

"No, madam, that I am not," was the decided answer.

"Dear, dear!" sighed the Duchess.

"I left all pretty fancies over yonder. Mr. Barnett Q. Moss and I are emphatically not anything so silly!"

"You left them over yonder?"

"Yes, we did!"

"In the United States?"

"In the U-nited States of America!"

"Dear, dear!" said her Grace again.

June was now on the Duchess's shoulder, nestling in soft folds of Irish lace. She sat up eagerly, the better to hear the discourse.

"I am a democrat, Mrs. Moss!" the remark came sharply, like a shot.

”No, no, Duchess! Impossible!” The poor lady, in sheer amazement, nearly shrieked the protest. Her appeal made the teacups shiver. In her mind’s eye she saw the Duchess waving a red flag, and bawling for rights for somebody.

”Yes, a democrat!”

Mrs. Moss shuddered, and squeezed her mimic handkerchief into a ball. She pressed her lips tightly together, and listened with horror.

”Yes, a democrat–one who believes that all human beings should endeavour to give each other equal opportunities. I did not always think this. Dear me, let me confess, I did not think it even yesterday. Something has happened, something is always happening. The world seems getting topsy-turvy; no, not that; but certainly nearer the stars, without being farther from the flowers. Mrs. Moss, I was a proud and unkind woman until yesterday. But from the instant I penned my invitation to you, my old pride, my old–yes, I must say it–arrogance, obstinacy, emptiness of heart, gradually went from me. It is like a conversion. I am changed, and–a humbler woman. I recognize now, as I have not done hitherto, my personal limitations, and the wrong I do my fellow-creatures when I enjoy great good fortune without making any return to mankind for it.”

The Duchess was dreamily silent for a little while. A mist was before her eyes. It seemed as if a cold mist had been removed from about her heart. She was no less the great lady for having discovered her older isolation to have been a condition poorer far than this realization of sisterhood with the rest of mankind.

Mrs. Moss did not venture on any answer. She was in a curious condition of mixed emotions. Now and then, while her hostess had been talking she had wondered whether some of the words used were intentionally barbed and edged. Why had the Duchess’s old pride begun to diminish when she penned the invitation to her? Was that Miching Malecho? Did it mean mischief?

Mrs. Moss fell into a brown study pondering this littleness. She was no fool; her personality was not quite all vanity, joy in wealth, and greed for pleasure. She had a methodical brain, and possibly a heart somewhere under her corsets. The words addressed to her were effectual.

”You have not been negligent,” at last she remarked gently. ”Your name and the Duke’s are on all charity lists. You help good objects with what they ask for–money.”

The Duchess shook her head.

”It was always a proud giving. That charity did not come from kindness, it came from pride.”

”No, Duchess; you are taking an unfair advantage of yourself.”

”I think not, Mrs. Moss. But I need not talk penitence now. If this–this tendency holds me to-morrow, as I can truly say I hope it will, I shall do better by expressing it in deeds. I want now, if you please, to speak with you on a more

serious question, and to invite your co-operation."

Mrs. Moss wriggled. "It is coming!" she told herself. This sounded so like the familiar prelude to a begging appeal.

She was agreeably disappointed. The Duchess did not even look the word purse-strings, but still required something that involved sacrifice.

"You have, of course, heard of these municipal Christmas festivities?" she asked.

"Only vaguely!" was the airy answer.

"But the papers have been full of them!"

"I only read certain pages of certain papers–in Society one must be careful; but, yes, I have heard something about them–sufficient to know that they are amusements for the many, not for the few. I belong to the few."

"They are for all," murmured the Duchess.

"Then I fear I can take but little interest in them."

Bim raised the wand vindictively; June motioned him to wait. He obeyed.

"I am sorry to hear you say so!" The Duchess was shocked at this amazing indifference, being herself possessed of the convert's earnestness.

"Oh!"

There was a weight of meaning in the interjection. Not for the eighth of an instant had Mrs. Moss dreamed that the supremely exclusive Duchess of Armingham could truly sympathize or co-operate in those corporate efforts. She knew, only too well, that the "certain pages" she condescended to read had mentioned the Duchess as one of the dissentient minority, and because of that very abstention had herself refrained from joining the movement, and had infected her followers with a similar intention.

Now had come a new change. Her keen, shrewd wits were absolutely bewildered. What should she do? She answered her question by doing nothing, by listening.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," the Duchess repeated, "because it is a unique effort on the part of all. Never before have we had such a union of people of all degrees and classes, as are joined in making this effort."

"But–but–forgive me, Duchess–surely you?" The question was not verbally completed, but it shone in the lady's eye.

"Were recently not in sympathy with the movement?"

"Yes, Duchess, that is my inquiry put into plain English."

"I confess that is so. It was wrong of me to decide as I did, but it is never too late to mend. I am going to help now with all my powers, as my husband has done. Will you join and help too? My request to you to come and meet me to-day was directly due to my zeal for the movement. ('Dear me!' thought the Duchess. 'Was that so?') It seemed such a pity that so noble and practically unanimous

an effort should be ignored by anyone who could help it–especially by people of standing." The flattery, though unintended, was not without effect. "I knew you did not purpose to participate in it; neither did I. I have changed my mind, and given up my unsocial intention. Will you, Mrs. Moss?"

"No, Duchess, I cannot!"

"I am sorry you say so, but why?"

"It would make me the laughing-stock of my set."

June motioned to the gnome. He clung to a hanging watch-chain, and held the wand to the recalcitrant lady's lips. She resisted its power. Her mouth was obstinate.

"Surely not, Mrs. Moss. I have heard you are the social queen of an influential following. Those people, whoever they are, would surely come with you, and so render our festivity representative and complete."

More flattery, insidious and unintentional–such tactics being as foreign to the Duchess as grease-paint. Oh, those fairies, the diplomatists!

"It seems so unreasonable. So like–so like a scene in a pantomime or fairy-play."

"Exactly, that–that is the joy of it!"

June, delighted, kissed the Duchess.

"It is against reason and common-sense!"

"Oh no, Mrs. Moss. It is the best kind of reason, and is absolute common-sense!"

"But, please tell me; it's beyond me–what good can the meeting, in such manner, of all sorts of people–noble and shady folk–do?"

"Every kind of good. It will teach the reality of human brotherhood, and tend to make the shady folk–and the noble folk–nobler."

"To be utterly forgotten on the morrow!"

"I think not. I hope not. Once get representatives of all classes and conditions to meet in considerate fraternal intercourse, dining together fifty at one table, and gulfs of mutual suspicion, indifference, dislike, will be crossed never, I hope, to be completely divided again. It is a great idea, hazardous at first, daring always, but now reasonable and most promising. A real step forward in human progress. A large fact of hope."

Her Grace was eloquent. The fairy crown had certainly worked wonders.

Mrs. Moss hesitated still, and Bim lowered the wand with despair. A thick crust of vanity and pride in material things had to be dissolved. She pursed her lips obstinately, and looked at the fire. June thereupon flew across and dumped the crown on her head.

It worked.

"Yes, on consideration, I agree," was the declaration. "I shall be delighted to

co-operate. It will mean money–never mind that! My husband and I can afford to give. It will mean service–devoted service. That, too, shall be gladly given by both of us. It is an object worth living for! I will come, and make my friends come, too; but, Duchess"–June removed the crown, and herself donned it–"I must make one condition, please."

"Yes?"

"That you and the Duke come to my New Year's party!"

"If you will invite us–with pleasure!"

"I do invite you–now!"

"Then I accept."

So the compact was made.

When the Duchess and Mrs. Moss were at last alone, each asked herself this question: "What is the world coming to?"

June knew. Bim knew. Oberon in Fairyland had an inkling.

CHAPTER XIX
NEW YEAR'S DAY

Croakers croaked, of course, but the Christmas Festival, accomplished, was a great success, and no one enjoyed it more than the croakers–when they knew themselves unnoticed. It was a roaring win for optimists. The expectations were everywhere excelled. The dinner was worthy of the intention. The conversations, music, songs, and games, went with a ring. Not a dissentient note was heard. High and humble, rich and poor, met for that occasion as comrades, and the good effects of their coming together remained. The world was, henceforward, better humoured, gentler, more considerate than ever it had been.

It was a triumph to fairies and to the less fortunate folk who are human. There let us leave it!

New Year–the Feast of Good Resolutions–arrived with its loads of customary high intentions. That day brought an opportunity which the fairies meant to make the most of. But the task was not entirely easy, for old habit would be potent.

A New Year's resolution in the past had generally, almost invariably, two necessary distinct parts–the making and the breaking. That was its history. If New Year's Day was the Feast of its Creation, Twelfth Night might certainly be

called the funeral day, belated. The building and the forgetting of good resolutions had become such a time-honoured process that each of the stages was as easy as breathing. Lightly entered into, the intention could be even more lightly lost. That was the fairies' difficulty. It would be simple enough to get people to resolve well; but to prevent their having a Twelfth Night of forgetfulness would be a task Titanic in comparison. Still, they must try.

June, by means of her myrmidons, hunted up the ex-Lord Mayor, Sir Titus Dods–now a baronet in the courts of Edward and Oberon–and caused him to come from his retirement at Hampstead to lead in the particular effort.

He induced every newspaper as its special New Year supplement to give away an attractive card on which practicable good resolutions could be written. The cards, inscribed, would be preserved until this New Year was old and out. It was the Mansion House procedure of last May-time repeated, spread over a very far wider area, destined to be similarly successful.

A change came over casual converse. Instead of using such old phrases and time-worn tags as "How d'ye do?" or "Cold day, isn't it?" people greeting each other asked, "Resolutions going strong?"

It was surprising how much more interesting meetings became, and how invariably the answer was "Yes." Self-respect struggled to attain the affirmative answer.

So there was progress in all ways, splendid progress.

June's company was growing so rapidly–every hour of the night and day bringing at least one recruit–that her mighty mimic ladyship was able to concentrate attention on the so-called Smart Set. She remembered the New Year's party to be held at Liberty Hall and went to it, taking a regiment of elf-folk with her–Bim the only gnome.

The fairies clustered about the door and stairways, and made fun of the white-headed footmen.

"Why did these voluminous mortals wear that mess?" The night was bright with their satire.

Regularly and rapidly the company of guests arrived. They came with their usual boisterousness, and then–and then—-

The influence of the elves had a curious effect on hosts and on guests. It proved strangely restraining. Barnett Q. felt like a Sunday-school superintendent at a too-French French play, a humid pink of uncomfortable propriety. Mrs. Moss was, as usual, nervously fluttered with a new anxiety frightening her heart–how would her guests, destined to bask in ducal radiance, behave?

Liberty Hall was metamorphosed. The noise, display, and wildness which heretofore had made its functions famous were rapidly replaced by a superfine straightness–a Bowdlerized bonhomie, self-conscious and constrained. The rab-

ble of Comus was muzzled.

Hoary sinners and flaxen-headed *mondaines* were prim, simpering, moralizing, painfully on their goodily-good behaviour. They were nerve-fettered, with spirits weighed down. They knew it, they felt it, and could not comprehend or complain. The fairies held them in thrall. From the elves' point of view it was supremely funny. Those spirit-masters of the revels laughed till many of them became bright scarlet.

The Duke and Duchess of Armingham, accompanied by Geoffrey–who had done his best to induce his mother not to go–arrived at ten. Mrs. Moss breathed a sigh of relief. Now, come what might, her party was justified. Whatever the ultimate verdict might be, Vanity Fair must approve something. She had got the Duchess!

The new guests, followed by the fairies, trooped into the ballroom. The band struck up a barn-dance, which was footed with decorum. Everybody was surprised, the Duchess agreeably so.

The Duke put on pince-nez, and went in search of the prettiest possible partner he could find. He had come to his second youth, and meant to enjoy it. He found himself murmuring complimentary epigrams to Lalage and Chloe, written by himself during college days when under the glamour of Horace. He wondered if they would do.

Geoffrey talked of New-Year reforms to Barnett Q. with the seriousness of a budding legislator, and remembered his previous experience at Liberty Hall. What a difference! Then had been riot; this was the other extreme. Where was the reason why?

The company consisted–he saw–mostly of the same people who previously had wrought vulgar tumult there; every face was more or less familiar to him; but their manners, hitherto blatant, were now positively mealy-mouthed. Roaring lions expressed themselves with the modesty of penny whistles. What did it mean? Bounders, ninnies, minxes had left off their meannesses and become decently human.

Any attempt at vulgarity was instantly hushed and checked. Lame efforts at ostentation were remorselessly snubbed. Geoffrey had learned several things during the last few days; his eyes had been better opened. He put this condition of strained propriety down to its right source, the fairies; but her Grace, his mother, had also something to do with it. Mrs. Moss was positive it was mainly due to the dear Duchess.

The coming of the Arminghams was certainly an event in the social history of Liberty Hall. If it had not been for the strange sense of constraint which held her, Mrs. Moss would have exulted, pleased as a young redskin with his first scalp. As it was, she fluttered like a nervous hen round an ostrich-egg, knowing

she had not lived in vain.

It was the Duke who, the fairies willing, broke down the barriers of undue restraint. The elf-atmosphere, which subdued the loud rich, roused and awakened him. He was inclined to rollick. Breaking through the established order of things, he induced Barnett Q. to start an old country dance. The experiment took. Feet which earlier in the evening had been lamely waltzing or half-heartedly two-stepping became lively with Sir Roger de Coverley. It was a revolution, transformation complete.

Clean simplicity came to people who had always deemed it folly to be simple. Whole-heartedly the guests joined in the dance–they hurried to take places in long laughing rows–the Duchess herself came down from the proud mountains to go trotting through a smiling avenue with her partner, Barnett Q. The fairies, too, made shimmering lines, and improved on the movements of the human-folk. There were no more unsocial or ugly dances that night. The party was for all the world like one played by happy children.

Girls of blasée eighteen became young for the first time since they left the nursery; gilded youths resisted tendencies towards brainless talk and inelegant posing; oldsters, whose dyed hair and waxed moustaches whispered grey stories, forgot affectations and selfishness; ladies of middle age declined to be wall-flowers longer. They asked idlers to partner them in a natural feminine way. Hilarity was alive. The card-room was abandoned. Fairies were helping lovers along the happy pathway. The clock most musically clanged twelve in sympathy.

"My love," declared Barnett Q., panting, to his wife, "this is the best we have ever had."

"The dear Duchess!" said she. There was little credit for the fairies from her.

The dance and the party went on, and momentarily grew brighter with joy.

Supper-time came. The meal was to have been a series of snacks, fizz and rushes as usual; but June ruled otherwise. She had learned that the time men are more likely to be serious, and are certainly most easily influenced, is meal-time; so she ordained that the whole company of guests should go to the supper-room together, and although this necessitated some give-and-take and a great deal of squeezing–borne by young couples with a patience beyond their years–it was managed. Plates and cutlery were soon a-clatter, and the hum of happy conversation arose. Meanwhile, the elves distributed themselves amongst the company. Their time had come.

June, with Bim marching behind her, went along the tables to make sure that her helpers were in their places. Wine-glasses were touched with magic. The champagne sparkled with extra enchantment.

June danced back to her place at the head of the chief table, and rapped the

knuckles of Mr. Moss. He rose, raised a glass, and proposed a loyal toast. It was drunk with cordiality. The company, sipping their wine, absorbed magic.

"Now," he said, as June put the compelling crown upon him, "I'm going to ask you to drink another toast, what I will call the toast of the evening, 'The Fairies'!"

The outburst of enthusiasm that followed reminded June of the banquet at the Mansion House. New wine, enchanted, was poured into glasses wand-touched. The liquor carried fresh inspiration to the human lips.

"The Fairies! The Fairies! Oberon! Titania!" the guests cried.

June and Company–all except wingless Bim, who perforce must stay squatting on a bunch of purple grapes–flew above and about, pouring charms on the mortals; singing a song whilst flying which the men-things nearly heard.

The flying procession went gaily trailing thrice round the room; then the fairies dropped back to their proper places. The shouting now must wait a while. June gave Barnett Q. a peremptory command. He was obedient as a marionette.

"May I make a speech?" he asked his guests.

"You must!" was the unanimous answer.

He struck the attitude of oratory, and successfully overcame his lingering tendency to Yankee mannerisms.

"As we age," he began sententiously, "not many of us really grow wiser. So, if you please, we will–every one of us–be young again–and immediately. That way, and that way only, can we do what the fairies demand of us. Those careless youths, the children, have amazingly good opportunities, if only they knew it."

"Go right on, Barnett!" counselled his wife, who, even in this swelter of excitement, was keeping anxious eyes on the Duchess, hoping she would not be bored. There was little fear of that happening, however bald the new Moss philosophy might be.

The Duchess was, indeed, a fine picture of genial benevolence. She beamed and, practically a presiding presence there, enjoyed something of the satisfaction felt by a patron saint. Her former enemies would not have known her had they dreamed of scrutinizing her in the old cruel way.

"Are you in the mood for elf-wisdom?" the millionaire asked.

"We are!" Geoffrey answered, voicing the general feeling.

"Are you willing–ladies and gentlemen both–to be knights-errant, to go on a quest for the sake of the fairies?"

"We are! We are!"

Every one of them–men and women, boys and girls–answered this time. Would-be Britomarts and Calidores were plentiful as mushrooms in October; but the Blatant Beast they were to pursue was their own vanities, selfishness, vices. "Very well. The first requirement is that you at once write on your dance-

programmes some such resolution as this: 'Not a day in this new year shall pass without my having made someone in the world happier by my works.' Phrase it as you please, my friends, but don't mistake my meaning."

"But what kind of works?" asked Sir Gussie, the calculating and precise, as he screwed in a heavy-rimmed monocle, to stare at this re-maker of manners.

"Use your eyes, my boy, and decide for yourself," was the prompt answer. "Look at the every-day sights of London, and then carry comfort to those who need."

Barnett Moss was in his element. He was the born manager. He ruled that assembly–by gracious permission of June–as effectually as he would have dominated a Board meeting. He would carry this thing through.

The pencils attached to the programmes were busily inscribing the fine promise. The butler and footmen attending the table supplied cards to those without them, and themselves surreptitiously wrote down similar good intentions. June, gratified by this pleasant spirit of theirs, made them a little better-looking–rather a good form of reward.

Enchantment was potent everywhere in the large excited room.

"Is it down?" Barnett asked. His little eyes glittered with excitement, as they always glittered when he was governing a masterly transaction.

"It is," was after a while the general answer.

"Now how to keep it. May I ask the Duchess of Armingham to assist the fairies in this?"

The Duchess bowed assent. The company clapped hands delightedly. Her Grace seemed changed. Could that smiling presence be she who had for so long been their bugbear? Many of that company, had they not been caught by the glamour of the occasion, would have doubted their senses as to her identity. The Duke poised his glasses and pursed his lips, studying her. He hardly knew his own wife.

"Good!" commented Barnett Q., confirming her assent; "this is how the Quest you knights are to follow shall be kept. Once every month, by call or by letter, every person here who has made and signed this promise must report to the Duchess its fulfilment; and let no one"–his voice took on accents of tremendous seriousness–"let no one who, by breaking this exacting resolution, proves unworthy, presume to darken the doorsteps of Armingham House!"

There was a great flutter and babble of talk as the serious words and their full purport sank into the minds of those addressed. To these worldlings, even in this sublimer mood, no more acceptable bait could be offered than the opportunity of a visiting friendship with the Duchess. The front-door of Armingham House was to them as the entrance to Paradise. To consort with such as she–a real leader of high-placed people–was a passport to supreme society, worth achiev-

ing, worth enjoying, worth retaining–the thing they most desired. It was the best effective means for securing good behaviour and destroying vulgarity that could be devised. But the Duchess, what did she think of this definite proposal?

The Duke, in his shrewd mind, had a good deal of doubt about it. He leaned forward to study the Duchess's face, to read her intention; and was amazed. She rose to her feet to make pronouncement.

"I shall be willing and glad to do what Mr. Moss has asked of me. He is the mouthpiece of the fairies, I understand that. I accept the task from them; and shall be proud to number amongst my personal friends the kind ones here who, by inscribing and signing their cards, as bidden, have taken what may be called a vow of personal service, following the quest of a social purpose. The first Tuesday afternoon in every month will be my reception day, when in town or at Armingham Castle. Will my new friends remember that?"

She resumed her seat. The interlude was ended. With new zest the assembly returned to the ball-room, and enjoyed their games and play. The artificial restraint that had held them earlier was gone. They had become gentle.

Some of them began their Quest that very night.

Sir Gussie, to whom gambling had been a profitable passion, and cards the first of pastimes, resolved in future to play for counters; and, as amends for past misgains, went along a dingy street and dropped a sovereign into five-and-twenty shabby letter-boxes.

Ladies'-maids, who, yawning and jaded, had waited till dawn for their mistresses, were greeted with smiles and thanks–a welcome change from the wonted shrill-tempered crossness which almost invariably had been their recompense hitherto.

One bright youth–with the earnestness of a beginner, which even when misguided is something splendid–devoted his powers to helping a drunken man homeward. Another sparkling boy at once totted up a list of his debts and made plans of economy whereby he might redeem them. Another went off post-haste to write an apology to a family he–through selfishness–had wronged. A fourth–Mr. Harris, a motorist, with whom Geoffrey Season had half an acquaintance–vowed to walk five miles daily for two months along a car-infested road, to see for himself what road-hog tyranny meant.

And so on, and so forth, in all manner of ways, wise and unwise, but always sincere and determined, the beginnings of the amelioration of the Smart Set began.

It worked well, after a little while, as every movement launched by the fairies is bound to do. The coming together of the sudden plutocracy with true aristocrats had good effects–broadening and strengthening–on both. It taught restraint, consideration, responsibility. Social organizations increased in num-

bers, sway and influence. No hospital or charitable purpose was now hampered for lack of funds. Processions of the unemployed ceased to be. There were fewer children in the streets of poverty: the childless rich had adopted them.

Humanity was linked closer, with cords of great kindness. No one was better affected by it than the Duchess of Armingham. She remained genial, a power persuasive; and grew in bounty, charm and kindness. She felt something of a fairy queen herself.

So June won the stronghold. The poor and the rich, the weak, the proud and the great, were with her now. She was leading a host, human and immortal. Her madness was justified.

CHAPTER XX
IN PARLIAMENT

February arrived, succeeding a period of immense elf-activity. Mankind was rapidly waking up to the improved condition of things; more and more recruits were coming from Fairyland to keep men's purposes kind and bright; the metropolis was cleaning itself vigorously, and putting on colour, so that from all parts of the world people journeyed to its streets, to gather æsthetic inspiration and delight.

Londoners realized at last that they were people of a majestic city, that the grime and sordid ugliness which for ages had shrouded their buildings veiled a world rich with poetry and beauty. With their civic soul requickened, they studied and were proud of the thousand years of living history–their heritage. They wore their hats with a cock. Their stride lengthened. Their chins showed disdain for the gutter. The ancient Romans, the Venetians and Florentines of medieval Italy, were not more truly town-patriotic than were the inhabitants of the rediscovered London.

February had arrived; and midway through the despised, misunderstood month, the Houses of Parliament met. Writs to fill vacant seats were moved for. Geoffrey Season was back at Armingham Castle, strenuously electioneering, pursuing the last lap of his candidature.

The newspapers describe elections so well that it is not necessary for this poor pen to tell the story of that particular battle between the Buffs and the Blues. It is enough to state that the foreseen took place–it is, despite the Disraelian

dictum, nearly always the expected that happens–Lord Geoffrey Season was put at the top of the poll, defeating his Blue opponent, Mr. Tutherman, by a few less than seven hundred votes, which was rather better than the average in that constituency.

He arrived at the House of Commons, the youngest, and, therefore, the most sanguine member of Parliament, ten days after the session had commenced. He purposed determinately to carry into effect the projects of the fairies.

When he was introduced to the Commons and took his seat, the Debate on the Address was still proceeding turgidly. Progress struggled feebly against a stream of talk.

June and Bim entered the House with Geoffrey; and as nowadays she went hardly anywhere in public without the accompaniment of a self-appointed bodyguard, full fifty fairies grouped around her. Queenly was her state as she surveyed, from the vantage-ground of the clock, the languid, sprawling gentlemen who comprised the House. For quite a time the elves watched the proceedings. They were amused and puzzled by many things; it would be inappropriate here to detail precisely what these were.

Then gradually the fairies grew bored; the infinite stream of talk went on and on. The light of their presences faded. Their glory was dwindling. Their strength, which is expressed in brightness, was gradually diminishing.

This wouldn't do! June roused herself, and gave Bim a push which sent him spinning and then sprawling on the floor of the House below. He rose indignant at this treatment, strode with his stiffest dignity to the table, and, with a spring and some effort, perched himself astride the mace.

From that moment the Commons began to be transformed. The fairies resumed their brightness, and shone with light which would have dazzled humanity had eyes of clay been able to realize immortal glories. The clock stopped–its mechanism was more atune to elf-influence than that of the prose-builders below. Members–for no particular reason that they knew–came trooping in; and within ten minutes every green bench on the floor of the House and in the galleries was packed.

June spread her wings, and flew over the heads of the legislators. Her companions followed her example. With wands they tapped the mighty brows of legislators, and prepared their minds for obedience. Members wearing hats were poked in the nape of the neck. All–without exception–were inoculated with magic. The Irish party became a little uproarious, and effectively facetious.

The stream of prose went on.

June gave Bim her wand, and bade him take the chair. He gravely clambered along the Treasury table, came to the trio of clerks, and, after bowing with due respect thrice, according to usage–his seat on the mace had touched him with

Parliamentary decorum–the intrepid adventurer climbed the Speaker's robes and squatted soberly upon his wig. The dignity of Parliament was enhanced.

The gnome knew he was making history, so he took care to keep awake.

Mr. Speaker began to feel strangely nervous, to have forebodings–as if an unexpected precedent was about to be established.

Meanwhile the stream of prose went on. The present malefactor was —-, but his name shall not be immortalized! This is all I will say, O reader: he was of the opposite school of politics to you. Even members on his own side of the House began to be impatient. A few cried "'Vide!" but only feebly. His misdoing was condoned by the general indifference.

He went on lamenting and lamely protesting that the Government in the King's Speech had not included a Bill to regulate Charity Bazaars, and was endeavouring to institute a comparison with the social system of the ancient Assyrians. His peroration had been misplaced; he had begun with it. He had reached his seventhly. There were no signs of the approaching end, no means whatever of computing when that might be. He merely went on. His speech was like a long and muddy road on a splashy wet night.

June crowned Geoffrey. Obediently he rose.

"Mr. Speaker," he said, with the gesture that practice in the bedroom had made perfect. "This intolerable flow of drivel—-"

"Order! Order!" cried a hundred voices.

The interrupted orator turned round to stare at Geoffrey with eyes of angry surprise.

Intervention came from the proper place. The Speaker was on his feet. Bim clung to the wig to prevent his displacement.

"The noble lord," said Mr. Speaker, in his most conciliatory and compelling manner, "is so young a member of the House that he merits every indulgence; but I must remind him that to interrupt an honourable member in any other way than by rising to a point of order is a serious breach of the procedure and order of this House."

Geoffrey had, of course, resumed his seat immediately the Speaker rose; but, authority having spoken, the crown would no more let him sit still, acquiescent, than it had allowed any of its human wearers to remain their normal selves. He rose again.

A tornado of cries of "Order!" greeted Geoffrey's further involuntary breach of obedience.

June flew across to the Speaker.

Old Parliamentary hands turned to look at their new colleague. His further breach of order was done with perfect manner. There was no shouting vulgarity about his interruption, but a definite purpose, pleasantly expressed. They rapidly

summed him up. He was well-looking, well-dressed, good House-of-Commons form, yet with a refreshing look of determination in his eyes. Far within themselves the veterans began to admire and to wonder. Geoffrey's début, they felt, was full of promise; it marked a man of the future as surely as the Hartington yawn had done.

"He will do," they said; "impudence and brains." That was their verdict in the beginning. Shrewd were those front-benchers, but they did not quite know Geoffrey.

"May I apologize, Mr. Speaker, and explain—-"

"I decline to give way," declared the important person whose pomposity and portentous drivel had provoked the elves' interruption.

"'Vide! 'vide!" cried a Labour man, merely in mischief.

June kissed the Speaker. Without blushing, yet with perfect grace and modesty, in the interests of true progress, she kissed him; while Bim, lying full length along the top of his wig, pressed the wand against his forehead, and willed him to do as the fairies required. Could any man successfully resist such powers? No! Even the first of Commoners could not.

The Speaker, as he stood waiting to deliver judgment, knew he was, though dazed through the brightness, even clearer-headed than usual. He was on the awesome edge of a precedent. He wondered how the decision then to be given would be received; ordinarily it would have filled the House with amazement, but the earlier inoculation with magic had already begun to take effect. The Speaker was aware of strange powers and presences about him.

The person of pompous prose, realizing that his dignity was endangered, again cried a protest; but he was so far away from the sympathies of his fellow-members–he had bored them so severely–that with clamour they shouted him down. Thanks to the fairies, every single member in that House hurled "Order!" at him.

Though technically quite in order, he was forced to subside. He felt badly treated; he was badly treated: and serve him jolly well right!

During the whole of the subsequent scene–a glorious page in the new English history–the nonentity sulked. Bim after a while went to sit on his knee, endeavouring to charge him with the elixir of elfdom; but it was difficult, at that stage of chronic self-esteem, for any good influence to pierce the crust of prejudice, jealousy, and indignation which bound him.

But the gnome went on making effort, and eventually did soften the pride of that creature of grandiose pomposity.

June's kiss was momentous; it bore with it power. The Speaker throughout his being trembled at her intangible touch; a smile, which would have been seraphic had it not been for the wig, brightened and gladdened his face.

The old Parliamentary hands glanced with swift inquiry at each other; then centred their gaze on him. What was coming?

"This is an exceptional occasion," he ruled, in level, serious tones. "It is an hour wherein a precedent may usefully be created. The noble lord may make his explanation. The House will listen with attention."

To their own surprise, the members cheered. What they knew full well was utterly wrong seemed to them then utterly right. Geoffrey was encouraged in his fairy courses. The crown, pressed on his smooth locks, filled him with elation of purpose. He felt as light-hearted and confident as a skylark–as powerful as a steam-engine; potent, joyful, energetic, controlling.

"Mr. Speaker," he said, "I must and do apologize sincerely to the honourable member for interrupting him in the manner I was compelled to do; but the protest I was forced to make was done in obedience to some superior power. I feel–we all feel–that in these latter days new and admirable forces have become effective in the national life."

"Hear, hear!" said the Leader of the Opposition.

"Ideals, opposed absolutely to many popular fixed opinions, are prevalent. The reign of ugliness, selfishness, materialism, is threatened by new and admirable influences. Old forms must modify themselves to suit younger and nobler purposes. It was, and is, as the spokesman of those powers that I have ventured so soon to intrude on the attention of the House."

A murmur of approval ran round the benches. No party was quite silent; the only individual who regarded Geoffrey with suspicion and coldness was the victim whom Bim was sitting on, trying to melt.

"I do protest," Geoffrey went on, "and I shall continue to protest, on behalf of progress and humanity, against the waste of public time through mere talk. The House has listened for three-quarters of an hour to the honourable member; and, I venture to say–with a further apology to him–was in no way inspired or benefited by what he was saying. His speech merely occupied time which is urgently required by the country for the fulfilment of practical, national business. In the name of the fairies, I assert–and the House will uphold me–that whenever an honourable member, no matter where his seat may be, obstructs or even wearies the House with a dull, dilatory, or unnecessary speech, I shall move that some Bill which makes for social progress, whether it appear on the paper or not, be immediately considered, shelving at once the subject under discussion at the time. This will insure that, in a very little while, what is publicly said will be worth saying, worth listening to; and that true legislation will march. For the purpose of preparing the House for this new course of progress–thank the fairies for the idea, Mr. Speaker, don't thank me!–I respectfully inform you, Sir, that I shall to-morrow bring in a Bill to abolish cemeteries, and so to reform

our burial customs, that God's acre may be a pleasant garden, wherein people may contemplate immortality without being shocked by pagan stone-ware and unhealthy tombs."

The House thrilled at the calm words which expressed such revolution of methods. It was like suggesting that the world should be summarily dissolved and rebuilt. Yet members heard it like lambs, though even then one voice of interruption was raised.

A member who had entered the Chamber but a few moments before, and therefore was bewildered by the impropriety of Geoffrey's action, and astounded at the strained attention of the House, made formal inquiry.

"Is this in order, Mr. Speaker?"

"No," was the sharp reply, received in ominous silence. "The noble lord is quite out of order, but he may continue!"

Such a volley of cheering rang out that the lights overhead, behind their glass partition, shivered. A united sigh of satisfaction swelled into sound. Members were relieved that the outbreak against convention was not summarily stopped.

June kissed the Speaker again. She was proud, pleased, and grateful. He who had raised the point of order–Mr. Wash, the member for Somewhere–stared, staggered, subsided, squeezed himself into half a seat, and soon found himself, too, under the spell of elf-influence and in cordial sympathy with the reformer.

No more protests were made, then or thereafter, against Geoffrey's irregular courses. He hurried along his fairy way, happily free. He felt more like a skylark than ever. Admiration marched after him with giant strides. In those moments of Parliamentary début he was establishing a reputation which years of official perseverance might never have attained.

"Against useless speeches," he thundered, encouraged–the bedroom manner was effective–"the fairies wage their war. They have commissioned me, also, to declare their absolute disapproval of mere party politics."

There were murmurs of doubt here. The Irish party was even vociferous. June waved the wand; the Speaker raised his hand; the sounds subsided instantly. Never before had the Chair been so willingly obeyed.

"I know," said Geoffrey, "that the party system is a natural development, that without it political life would lose much of its vitality; but it has become a mockery, a nuisance, a mischief; it has gone too far."

"Hear, hear!" said an arch obstructor, the brim of whose silk hat was gay with five fairies.

A loud burst of laughter echoed his words. Saul was indeed among the prophets. That arch obstructor was notorious for his tactics and skill at the business. His moves were dictated solely by party means for party purposes. They

had caused more than one good movement, promising the growth of national well-being, to be frustrated, injured or killed.

"I mean it!" he said emphatically, removing his hat to say so, and thereby causing the five fairies to flutter, sparkling, for some moments above him. Their radiance shone on his high bald brow. His fellow members saw enough of the elf-brightness actually to think it the light of his inspiration. They cheered a volley. Encouraged by this amazing tribute, much of it from men who hitherto had not admired him, he vowed secretly never, never, never again wantonly to hinder or harm a possible good cause by obstructive tactics. Saul, better than a prophet now, had become angelic.

"How many a Bill, supported by the most thoughtful members, in all parts of this House, has been sacrificed to some supposed partisan advantage," Geoffrey continued. "The history of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is choked with statesmanlike intentions, spoiled wantonly. That possibility must not continue."

"Hear, hear!"

"It must not continue. The fairies have given the word. They must be obeyed."

"Hear, hear! Hear, hear!"

"The party organizations, of course, must remain; general business still must be conducted along party lines, for opposition is practically as necessary as government; but the tendency to use party forces as an insensate block must be checked. Hereby, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully give notice that, while loyal to my party, the Buffs, I shall vote for a good Bill promoted by the Blues whenever I think it is calculated honestly to help the people. Buff or Blue, progress is much the same. I stand for true progress. Will at least twenty members from every one of the four parties in this House join with me, look with impartial eyes, as I shall look, at any and all Bills presented to it, and make efforts to pass them when their passage would be for the social good of the nation?"

Voices from every bench on the floor of the House, as well as from the parallel galleries above, cried accord with the intention. Geoffrey had his lead.

"Then that is settled. We–this new National Party–will be strong enough to help any Government, Buff or Blue, to carry good measures; and strong enough to force reasonable amendments in otherwise desirable Bills. We shall hold the balance of power, and progress will be made along a middle way. Mr. Speaker, I have done! I thank the House for its great consideration and courtesy to a new member. I have been listened to with a kindness which proves the patriotism of this historic House. I am proud so soon to have been permitted to suggest remedies for the congested condition of public business, and, thanks to the sympathy of honourable members, to have been enabled to devise means whereby causes inspired by the fairies will triumph."

He resumed his seat. Excited applause broke out. Members waved their hats. Three, at least, stood on the benches, the better to cheer. Geoffrey Season was a made Parliamentary man.

The House hushed to hear its Leader. Gracefully leaning on a Treasury box, he smiled a smile of philosophic doubt. Seeing this, June waved command to a bevy of elf-princes, who forthwith transferred the crown from Geoffrey's head to his. At once the smile broadened, its doubt diminished, its philosophy increased.

"The House," said he, "has listened to the noble lord with considerable interest and admiration; and rightly so. He is, it is true, a child in these things; but out of unsophisticated mouths the best wisdom sometimes comes. I am a House of Commons man myself, and any proposal calculated to diminish, or actually to injure, the machinery of this Chamber would be hotly resisted by me; but because a system has lasted a great many years–as the party system has done–is that any reason for its undisturbed continuance? My question must be answered in the negative. I say No; and join with the noble lord in inviting honourable members to look at all Bills with impartial eyes. The Government will do its best to meet the views of the new National Party. I am inclined to wish I could become a member of that party myself. I congratulate the noble lord on being its leader. If it were not for the Labour members–a most useful body–I should say that the old Fourth Party lived again." He paused. He sighed, "Ah me!" and then reclined again.

The House at once voted the Address. Members hurried to remove from the notice paper futile resolutions and blocking motions. A score of bills, prudently progressive, were at once formally introduced. Parties vied with each other in making constructive suggestions. Parliament was full of the spirit which made the Psalmist's mountains skip like rams. It went to work with a will.

In the midst of this whirl of fine happenings the fairies departed. They flew to the top of the Victoria Tower, and revelled; while Bim, unblessed with powers of flight, went peacefully to sleep in Geoffrey's breast-pocket.

CHAPTER XXI
OBERON AT LAST

So far as the conquest of London was concerned, all was over except the shouting. June was triumphant. There was no question about that. Victory clung to her as

a golden shadow. More and more elves came from Fairyland, each one increasing the area for good, and becoming a present testimony to the truth of June's victory.

Oberon was silent; as yet he made no sign–he remained far away, hunting in the valleys of obstinacy; but no other in the shadow-lands of Faerie hesitated to acknowledge the glorious truth. June's madness–as they called it–was justified.

Spring came creeping up. Nature awoke; shook off her lethargy, and cried welcome to the future. The trees were cautiously putting on raiment. Birds found their forgotten voices, and began practising anthems, preparing for the nesting season. June, touched by the hope in the air, and strengthened with the satisfaction of seeing a recovered or recovering London, was modestly confident.

A human person, with such progress behind him, would have been cocksure; but the fairies know better!

She showed her strength and content by an act of courage. She sent the crown back to Fairyland; Bim, as a special mark of honour, was privileged to take it.

The gnome, through this great trust–so responsible, so ennobling–was rapt up to the seventeenth realm of happiness. The privilege filled him with a fine humility. He did not presume to wear the crown; he held it with reverence in his hands, and when riding his pelican homewards–June procured one for that mission from St. James's Park–carried it carefully under his arm.

He reached the Violet Valley, delivered the crown to its mystical guardians, and then, eager to give expression to his wonderful adventures, told to excited groups of immortals tales of the doings of June. His words came forth in torrents. He had so much to say. He developed unexpected powers of expression. He found himself, while detailing his epic, shining with the graces of minor poetry. Nymphs, gathering about him as he spoke, sweetened his narrative with chords struck on harps of gold and starshine. His tales were repeated by tellers a hundredfold. A fairy "Iliad" was in the making. Not a flower or frog in Elfland failed to receive a full, true, and particular account of what the fairy and gnome had experienced, and of their ultimate triumph.

The result was better than glorious. Bim was acting as a first-rate recruiting officer. In consequence of his eloquence, the flow of fairies townwards grew rapidly in volume. The more he talked, the faster they flew. His ardour and loquacity were stimulated still further by this increasing–and vanishing–evidence of his success. Encouraged, he went on talking–explaining, appealing. He stood on a stump, an orator. His persuasiveness and powers of speech were depopulating Fairyland. They harkened, ruminated, and fled.

Oberon, made aware of this, was roused at last to the seriousness of things, and came back to Elfland in a panic.

"I told you so!" said Titania, with that inconsequence and gentle insistency

her lord so loved.

The king airily murmured a royal ”Pooh!” and hid his thoughts in a mist.

Never before had the real Fairyland been so silent. Many of the glades were empty. The flowers drooped. Noxious insects took courage and prowled. The murmurs of chained dragons, subterraneously entombed, were heard in the stillness for the first time for centuries; but they were securely prisoned.

The fairy knights, their warders, strong in their high chivalry and duteous devotion, resisted all inclination to follow the wings of their fellows. They remained, abiding and true, at their arduous, difficult posts, guarding the fiery caverns. Mankind has no idea of the dangers that threatened them. If those living, prehistoric creatures had escaped–but, no!–no!–no more of that! Let the horrors remain in the ghastly depths, to be remembered only on those rare occasions when, with their mighty convolutions, they cause earthquake.

The fairies flew crowding into London and the other cities which they had forsaken; and did not come alone. Gnomes, thousandfold, also came riding in, mounted on all manner of birds–goldfinches and tits, robins and wrens, and others of the fine companionage of the feathered kingdom. The monopoly of King Sparrow was over. He was kept in his proper place, and became a decent and tolerant Bohemian.

Later in the summer season–when soft is the sun–bright-coloured butterflies fluttered carelessly out of the country into the radiant streets. Several birds went open-mouthed to greet them; but the fairy power was so potent that the lingering things of beauty–the living smiles of Psyche–were not touched.

Fire-flies were seen darting about the Royal Exchange. Swallows played over the waters of the Thames.

London became worthier still of its various newcomers. It cleaned and decked itself so rapidly that far-travelled sailormen, returning to the Pool after merely a month of absence, saw the great difference, and, knowing themselves deficient, earnestly signed the pledge.

Every pillar-box within an area of fifty square miles now had its fairy. Gnomes, overcrowding, had to get lodgment where they could. The favourite habitation of these democratic gentry was a discarded silk hat, of which there were many–for men had come to realize the ugliness and discomfort of the chimney monster, and had flung it out of fashion. Better ventilated, and with the nap rubbed the wrong way, they had become agreeable gnome-dwellings. There were long rows of them in Victoria Park, and they were generously dotted about Lincoln’s Inn Fields and the Embankment Gardens.

The happiest chapter in the progress of June now began. It was nothing other than the open faith of man in the reality and truth of the fairies. Some of them, old people first, the youthful later, the children last, saw them; saw fairies

flying along happy streets or proudly enthroned on the pillar-boxes, ruling with beneficence; saw gnomes dangling and balancing on the iron arms of lamp-posts, seated in rows on walls, sprawling among flower-pots on window-sills.

The discovery of this new vision had colossal results. It set the whole world writing paragraphs. The newspapers, avid for facts, boomed the revelation for all it was worth. German metaphysicians put on gold-rimmed spectacles and laboriously laid the foundations of voluminous tomes dedicated to the scientific analysis and philosophy of the new great influence which had come to advance mankind. It was the X rays and radium–advanced a long stage further.

Humanity generally woke up with a start to the better condition of things, and set itself even more vigorously than before to the remedying of wrongs and the removal of whatever rottenness had managed to survive.

Life became as an anthem with a jolly chorus. Croakers, and the pessimists whose idea of duty is to hinder and delay, were pleasantly pushed out of place, so that optimists, with vision and the will to do, might get to work.

Those months of spring–until the almond was in blossom, and the daisies began to bud–knew more eager preparation and the devising of true artistic plans for the betterment and adornment of London, its suburbs, and the other like places of England, than ever before.

What of poet and artist, lives somehow and somewhere, in every individual, became, in the sunshine of ideas then warm in the world, strong enough to emerge from its chrysalis state? Facts were examined in the light of informed ideas. Men went about with dreams in their eyes, and worked with practical hands.

The smoke fiend was promptly abolished–the means for doing this had long been waiting to be used; and at once London became brighter. A bottle of November fog was treasured in the British Museum. The blue skies, no longer veiled through the incense of black King Coal, shone so brightly on streets and buildings, lighting them up, that the lurking filth and dinginess despoiling worthy edifices became more than ever eyesores and an annoyance.

St. Paul's Cathedral was attacked with an army of brushes. Before Midsummer-day came, the great architectural crown of London emerged in white glory from its setting of roofs–they were flower-filled now–and soon would be pointing to the heavens, a burnished dome of bronze.

Trees were planted along the sides of every main thoroughfare. Silent motor-buses glided through green avenues. Statues not doomed by the order of ugliness were cleansed; and, where their subject allowed it, were adorned with flowers festooned about their pedestals.

Trafalgar Square was, at last, in process of becoming worthy of its position and opportunity. A new story, architecturally handsome, was superimposed on

the National Gallery, removing the past insignificance. The Square itself became a joy in marble and roses. Whitehall sparkled with fountains. The rails of the Parks were removed.

The Thames grew silvern again. Men fished from boats alongside the Embankment, and listened to the choruses of concerts in the gardens which graced the fine thoroughfare. It was a favourite sight in future years to watch the salmon running down to sea, and, later, making their willing return to the upper reaches beyond Teddington.

Members of Parliament–there were petticoats amongst them–in the intervals of beneficent debate–threw food from the Terrace to fishes and seagulls.

Cockneys hoped for a hay-harvest on Clerkenwell Green.

And that is all we need say to show how splendidly the fairies were causing men to modify London.

Beauty was living; vulgarity was dying. Hopefulness, happiness, kindness reigned.

We must go back to an earlier stage of the triumph of June, when the happy developments, aforesaid, were generally but generating in men's minds, and had not come to actual processes of materialization.

It was April–the beginning of the last week of the joyous month; and though on all sides of her there was bustling evidence of her absolute victory, June felt sad, for Oberon had given no sign of his forgiveness. He and Titania were the only fairies who had not come to justify her happiness. Realizing this, she had almost enough sorrow for tears. Why did not the king come? Could his displeasure still be active?

As she flew here, there, and all about the radiant Metropolis–from over which the pall of evil had been finally removed–she sighed and sighed again. Her comrades, seeing the sadness, her burden, were grieved. It was the only dark speck on a condition of absolute joy.

June visited her human friends–Sally Wilkins, the Oldsteins, Archdeacon Pryde, the Mosses, the Duke and Duchess of Armingham, Lord Geoffrey Season, Sir Titus Dods–and rejoiced to find them still at work on the right lines, marching the way of fairy progress, but her yellow depression clung to her and would not be shaken off.

Strange that even in the hour of fulfilled joy she should be haunted by the spectre of disappointment; but so it was.

The last days of April drifted by. It was the evening of its thirtieth day. Soon after midnight, in the first of the morning darkness, the fairy of the year was to be crowned.

June hid herself in loneliness on her roof over Paradise Court, drooped her wings, and was, in every respect, weary. The hour of reaction, so long resisted, at last had come. She felt then that the successful fulfilment of her quest, while lifting a weight from her, had also taken away something that sustained and inspired her. With Bim far away–she knew not where–and her multitude of comrades dispersed in all parts of the Metropolis, or, she supposed, travelling to the new crowning, her burden of weakness and weariness was heavy indeed.

She looked up to the sky, and remembered the evening of a year ago. The stars were shining now as they shone then. The crescent moon looked down. Curious as ever, Diana, that prudish old maid, the Hellenic Mrs. Grundy, peeped through the silver cranny, and watched the world, waiting the crowning.

Memories of the last May-day came forcefully to June. She recollected Oberon's appeal to her; Titania's brief kindness of championship; her own defiance and flight. How changed things were since then! She longed to be back in the Land of Wild Roses, now that her task was fulfilled.

Though the stars were shining brightly, life and the sky seemed to her grey, and grey remained till the clocks struck eleven. Roused by their chorus from her depressing reverie, she flew to the highest chimney on her roof, to contemplate in farewell the wonders surrounding her.

Bim's garden was still flourishing. Its flowers shone proudly with fairy-light. They–aha!–were not faint-hearted. On many roofs spring-time petals were looking upward, an elf-flame breaking from every opening bud. Fairyland was effectually translated; London transformed.

Good-bye for a time! To-morrow she would leave all this–her particular task was done. She would, in the minutes before midnight, hasten to the new crowning, wherever it might be, to congratulate the happiest fairy, whoever that should be, and then, free, she would fly to the dear home ways, to rest, refresh, rejoice.

But would the gentle King forgive her? She remembered his command of a year ago, and felt sorrow, which the record of a completed purpose and victory won could not banish or diminish.

The question troubled her, till Oberon brought the answer.

She was seated brooding on the rim of the chimney, her deportment and limp wings signs of extreme dejection, when she was aware of brightness and happiness approaching. She looked hastily about her.

Sorrow went.

Myriads of fairies were on the wing, coming fleetly towards her, singing the songs that gladden the night of the crowning. Their brightness was such that for a time it paled the stars. Then slowly, still chanting, they ranged on the houses about her, or fluttered in laughing lines under the sky.

Gnomes, eager to join in what was happening, came up, climbing rain-pipes, and using other means of reaching the roof-country.

They reminded June of Bim. She wished he, too, was there. Why had not he returned? This procession and display meant honour and happiness which he deserved to share. But wherever he was, it was well with him; that she knew.

She gave the whole of her attention to the wonders approaching.

On all sides about her fairies were ranged; the houses were outlined with their radiance; every flower on window-sills and roof-gardens was awake and shining.

Slowly now, gladly, majestically, the high aristocracy of Elfdom came. They greeted June with the waving of wands, and then took places near where she was sitting.

There was a burst of applause in melody. Oberon and Titania were approaching. June's being trembled with rapture. They had come! They had come! She rose to greet them; a great glad cry of welcome–welcome from multitudinous elves rang up to the sky.

Their majesties of Fairyland came to Bim's garden, and there were enthroned, a brilliant escort of knights grouped behind them.

"June," said the King, so clearly that every elf could hear him, "a year has passed since your act of disobedience. Against our wishes, and despite our will, you went to fulfil the impossible. You came to where the cloud of evil–that ominous pall–hung over London, and proclaimed the weakness of Fairyland!"

These words sounded so like a rebuke that June was fearful. She bowed her head, opened wings, and knelt mutely before her monarch. Oberon smiled.

"You have done well, June! You have accomplished the impossible. You have taught us never to despair. For the first time in history a fairy has disobeyed a King's command and done right. Elves!" he cried to the company, "the hour of the crowning has nearly come. Who shall the honoured fairy be?"

There was a moment's silence. Then, as a chord of music, far-flung, unanimous, the answer came:

"June!"

Magnificent silence again.

The fortunate fairy, chosen, was still kneeling. Her great happiness humbled her. Her wings quivered. She was enduring an ordeal. Titania raised her, kissed her, brought to her confidence. Then, hand in hand, June linking the King and Queen, they flew westward. The host of fairies followed in a long line of golden light, cheerily singing. A comet would be a mere firework in comparison with their splendour.

As they made progress over the town, Oberon and Titania saw the fruits of June's efforts. The great Metropolis shone beautiful beneath them. There was

no ugliness, want, or unkindness in London that night. Streets and houses were full of inspiring brightness and noble delight.

As they passed, half circling, St. Paul's Churchyard, a nightingale was singing.

A great army of gnomes hurried along the roads, following the way of the procession. They were not going to miss the crowning–no, not they! Policemen on duty were only half aware of the bustlement proceeding.

The crowning was to be celebrated in St. James's Park. A choir of birds were already singing the opening anthem as Oberon and Titania, still hand in hand with June, descended to thrones in the greenness.

CHAPTER XXII
CROWNED

Fairyland! Fairyland!

Again there was high revel in Fairyland–revel heartier, happier than ever before. No wilderness was now left unlighted by elf-kindness. Every brick and fragment of London town, as every grass-blade and flower in the green country, was under the acknowledged dominion of the fairy King. The elves had come to their own again.

Oberon and Titania, with June seated between them, watched the procession of infinite fairies arriving; saw the glorious presences range themselves round the place of the coronation, while the preparation of the Park's smooth sward for feasting and dancing went rapidly on. Gnomes bustled about pell-mell, as they had done that night of the year before, and soon made the wide, smooth lawn ready for melodies of motion and song.

The heroes of old time came marching amid cheering to their places of honour near the throne. They were shining with the pride wrought by arduous duties done.

The cousins of Rumpelstiltzkin, belonging to the brotherhood which in the far-away mountains of Knickerbocker had kidnapped happy-go-lucky Rip, came up from their deep-down workshops–hammers in their hands–to greet the fairy of the year. They stood or sat in groups, wagging their beards with crony's talk, while gravely nodding in time with the music. The hoarded gossip of months was then in circulation.

June was entranced by the wonders presented to her. It was all so happily old, and yet in every item and particle so freshly, entrancingly new.

Nymphs came from the dim Down-There–an underground Kingdom with roads, rivers and mountains, nearly as vast and wonderful as this over-world, is hidden in Fairyland (its stories may be told some day)–to flit on gossamer wings and feet of light over the grass. Their motion touched the winds with rapture, and gave to the night radiance and fragrance.

The daintiest and proudest of the immortals joined in the delight of the dancing. No happier evening in the long, long annals of Elfland has been or can be recorded. It was pre-eminently a brief series of hours of triumph, without a single regret or fear to spoil or mar the brightness and harmony.

Stars sent down their dearest beams laden with blessings for elfkind and humanity. A great planet crossed the sky, a dazzling miniature of the moon at its full.

June's only wonder during that period was–Bim! He could not be far away. Where was he? It was strange he should not be there.

Meanwhile the revel went on, with its laughter, songs and feasting.

The time for the crowning came. Oberon rose and raised his sceptre in command. A glad unanimous cry rang out. Birds atune to the rapture sang. A chosen choir of a thousand nightingales expressed delight.

The time of the fairy year! The crown, guarded by a score of sentinels, was reverently borne towards the King and Titania by a gnome–by Bim. He was by royal proclamation appointed, henceforth and for ever, to be its especial keeper; and so reaped the reward of his year of devotion and prowess. June rose with delight to greet him. She forgot all else of that festival then, in gladness at seeing him. For his part, in return he smiled a smile broad enough to be a generous grin–no mere plain prose words can express the fulness of his happiness.

June realized at once that he was changed, improved. He was less gnome now than fairy knight. The nymph of the pool in the Violet Valley had remembered the promise made on the early morning of his departure in the wake of June. Bim had received the reward she had predicted. He was, in that proud hour and for a while thereafter, unique in Fairyland; having the distinction of being raised to a class by himself: less gnome than knight: the rewarded hero; and no one was envious because of his good fortune.

The gnomes, especially, were proud of their fellow, who by earning honour for himself had thrown honour, reflected, on them.

The king took the crown from Bim, and held it above the happy fairy.

"June, June, June!" again and again that favourite name was raised.

The nightingales, unanimous, gave the guiding note, and the triumph song–the anthem of that supreme hour–rang once again up to the stars.

London in sleep heard the song and dreamed of the fairies.

Oberon placed the crown on June's head. Hand in hand with Bim, she and the comrade who had done so duteously walked slowly round the inside of the great circle of elves.

It was the hour of triumph. Victory, absolute and supreme, was expressed in the music of that night. Oberon ruled everywhere!

Fairyland! Fairyland!

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