

# The Adventure of the Snowing Globe.

BY F. ANSTEY.

*Author of "Vice Versâ," "The Brass Bottle," etc.*



BEFORE beginning to relate an experience which, I am fully aware, will seem to many so singular as to be almost, if not quite, incredible, it is perhaps as well to state that I am a solicitor of several years' standing, and that I do not regard myself—nor, to the best of my knowledge and belief, have I ever been regarded—as a person in whom the imaginative faculty is at all unduly prominent.

It was in Christmas week of last year. I was walking home from my office in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, as my habit is—except on occasions when the state of the weather renders such open-air exercise too imprudent—and on my way I went into a toy-shop, with a view to purchasing some seasonable present for a small godchild of mine.

As was only to be expected at that time of year, the shop was crowded with customers, and I had to wait until one of the assistants should be at liberty. While waiting, my attention was attracted to a toy on the counter before me.

It was a glass globe, about the size of a moderately large orange. Inside it was a representation of what appeared to be the façade of a castle, before which stood a figure holding by a thread a small, pear-shaped air-ball striped red and blue. The globe was full of water containing a white sediment in solution, which when agitated produced the effect of a miniature snow-storm.

I cannot account for such a childish proceeding, except by the circumstance that I had nothing better to occupy me at the moment, but I employed myself in shaking the globe and watching the tiny snowflakes circulating in the fluid, till I became so engrossed as to be altogether oblivious of my surroundings. So that I was not particularly surprised when I found, as I presently did, that the flakes were falling and melting on my coat-sleeve. Before me was a heavy gateway belonging to a grim, castellated edifice, which I thought at first must be Holloway Gaol, though how I could have wandered so far out of my way was more than I could understand.

But on looking round I saw no signs of any suburban residences, and recognised that I had somehow strayed into a locality with which I was totally unacquainted, but which was evidently considerably beyond the

Metropolitan radius. It seemed to me that my best plan would be to knock at the gate and ask the lodge-keeper where I was and my way to the nearest railway-station; but before I could carry out my intention a wicket in one of the gates was cautiously opened by a person of ancient and venerable appearance. He did not look like an ordinary porter, but was in a peculiar livery, which I took to be a seneschal's—not that I have ever seen a seneschal, but that was my impression of him. Whoever he was, he appeared distinctly pleased to see me. "You are right welcome, fair sir!" he said, in a high, cracked voice. "Well knew I that my hapless lady would not lack a protector in her sad plight, though she had well-nigh abandoned all hope of your coming!"

I explained that I had not called by appointment, but was simply a stranger who found himself in the neighbourhood by the merest chance.

"'Tis no matter," he replied, in his old-fashioned diction, "seeing that you have come, for truly, sir, she is in sore need of anyone who is ready to undertake her cause!"

I said that I happened to be a member of the legal profession, and that if, as I gathered, his mistress was in any difficulty in which she desired my assistance, I was quite prepared to advise her to the best of my ability, and to act for her, should her case be one which, in my opinion, required it.

"That does it, indeed!" he said; "but I pray you stand no longer parleying without, which, since I perceive you are but ill-protected at present," he added, fussily, "may be fraught with unnecessary danger. Come within without further delay!"

I did not think there was any real risk of catching cold, but I did wonder why it had not occurred to me to put up my umbrella, until I discovered that my right hand was already engaged in holding a cord to which was attached a gaudily-coloured balloon that floated above my head.

This was so unsuitable an appendage to any solicitor, especially to one about to offer his services in an affair which was apparently serious, that I was somewhat disconcerted for the moment. But I soon recollected having gone into a toy-shop some time previously, and concluded that I must have purchased this air-ball as a present for my godchild.

I was about to explain this to the old man,

when he pulled me suddenly through the wicket-gate, shutting the door so sharply that it snapped the string of the balloon. I saw it soaring up on the other side of the wall till a whirl of snow hid it from my sight.

"Trouble not for its loss," said the seneschal; "it has fulfilled its purpose in bringing you to our gates."

If he really supposed that anybody was at all likely to adopt so eccentric a means of conveyance, he must, I thought, be in his dotage, and I began to have a misgiving that, by accepting his invitation to step in, I might have placed myself in a false position.

However, I had gone too far to retract now, so I allowed him to conduct me to his mistress. He took me across a vast courtyard to a side-entrance, and then up a winding stair, along deserted corridors, and through empty ante-chambers, until we came into a great hall, poorly lighted from above, and hung with dim tapestries. There he left me, saying that he would inform his mistress of my arrival.

I had not long to wait before she entered by an opposite archway.

I regret my inability—owing partly to the indifferent manner in which the apartment was lit—to describe her with anything like precision. She was quite young—not much, I should be inclined to say, over eighteen; she was richly but fantastically dressed in some shimmering kind of robe, and her long hair was let down and flowing loose about her shoulders, which (although I am bound to say that the effect, in her case, was not unbecoming) always has, to my mind at least, a certain air of untidiness in a grown-up person, and almost made me doubt for a moment whether she was quite in her right senses.

But, while she was evidently in a highly emotional state, I could detect nothing in her manner or speech that indicated any actual mental aberration. Her personal appearance, too, was distinctly pleasing, and altogether I cannot remember ever to have felt so interested at first sight in any female client.

"Tell me," she cried, "is it really true? Have you indeed come to my deliverance?"

"My dear young lady," I said, perceiving that any apology for what I had feared must seem a highly irregular intrusion was unnecessary, "I have been given to understand that you have some occasion for my services, and if that is correct I can only say that they are entirely at your disposal. Just try to compose yourself and tell me, as clearly and

concisely as you can, the material facts of your case."

"Alas! sir," she said, wringing her hands, which

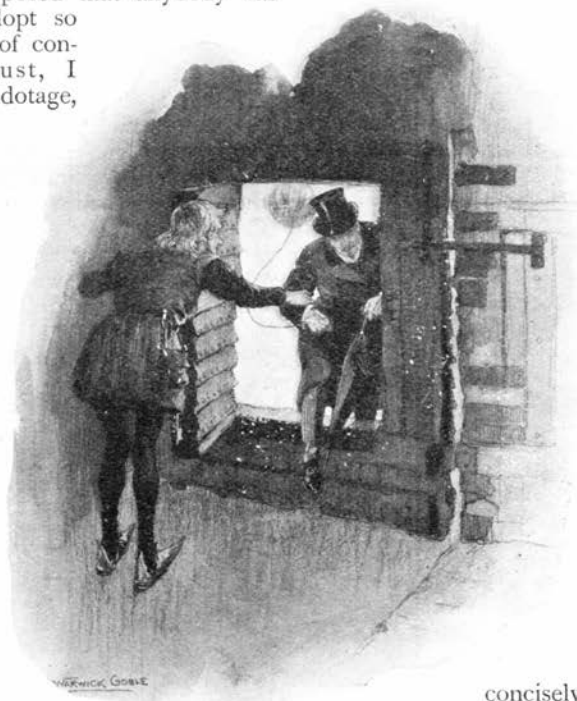
I remember noticing were of quite remarkable beauty, "I am the unhappiest Princess in the whole world."

I trust I am as free from snobbishness as most people, but I admit to feeling some gratification in the fact that I was honoured by the confidence of a lady of so exalted a rank.

"I am extremely sorry to hear it, ma'am," I said, recollecting that that was the proper way to address a Princess. "But I am afraid," I added, as I prepared to take her instructions, "that I can be but of little assistance to you unless you can bring yourself to furnish me with somewhat fuller particulars."

"Surely," she said, "you cannot be ignorant that I am in the power of a wicked and tyrannous uncle?"

I might have explained that I was far too



"HE PULLED ME SUDDENLY THROUGH THE WICKET-GATE."

busy a man to have leisure to keep up with the latest Court scandals, but I refrained.

"I may take it, then," I said, "that you are an orphan, and that the relative you refer to is your sole guardian?"

She implied by a gesture that both these inferences were correct. "He has shut me up a close prisoner in this gloomy place," she declared, "and deprived me of all my attendants one by one, save the aged but faithful retainer whom you have beheld."

I replied, of course, that this was an unwarrantable abuse of his authority, and inquired whether she could assign any motive for such a proceeding on his part.

"He is determined that I shall marry his son," she explained, "whom I detest with an unutterable loathing!"

"Possibly," I ventured to hint, "there is someone else who——"

"There is none," she said, "since I have

"Unfit is he, truly!" she agreed. "But I care not who else is on my side, so long as you will be my champion. Only, how will you achieve my rescue?"

"Under all the circumstances," I told her, "I think our best course would be to apply for a *habeas corpus*. You will then be brought up to the Courts of Justice, and the judge could make any order he thought advisable. In all probability he would remove your uncle from his position and have you made a ward of Court."

There is always a difficulty in getting ladies to understand even the simplest details of legal procedure, and my Princess was no exception to the rule. She did not seem in the least to realize the power which every Court possesses of enforcing its own decrees.

"Sir, you forget," she said, "that my uncle, who has great renown in these parts as a sorcerer and magician, will assuredly laugh any such order to scorn."

"In that case, ma'am," said I, "he will render himself liable for contempt of Court. Besides, should his local reputation answer your description, we have *another* hold on him. If we can only prove that he has been using any subtle craft, means, or device to impose on any of His Majesty's subjects, he could be prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act of 1824 as a rogue



"HE IS DETERMINED THAT I SHALL MARRY HIS SON," SHE EXPLAINED.

never been permitted to look upon any other suitor, and here I am held in durance until I consent to this hated union—and I will die sooner! But you will save me from so terrible a fate! For what else are you here?"

"I should be incompetent indeed, ma'am," I assured her, "if I could not see a way out of what is really a very ordinary predicament. By attempting to force you into a marriage against your will your guardian has obviously shown himself a totally unfit person to have you in his custody. You have the law entirely on your side."

and a vagabond. He might get as much as six months for it!"

"Ah, sir," she cried—rather peevishly, I thought—"we do but waste precious time in idle talk such as this, of which I comprehend scarce a word! And the hour is nigh when I must meet my uncle face to face, and should I still refuse to obey his will his wrath will be dire indeed!"

"All you have to do is to refer him to me," I said. "I think I shall be able, in the course of a personal interview, to bring him to take a more reasonable view of his position. If you are expecting him shortly,

perhaps I had better remain here till he arrives?"

"Happily for us both," she replied, "he is still many leagues distant from here! Can you not see that, if my rescue is to be accomplished at all, it must be ere his return, or else am I all undone? Is it possible that, after coming thus far, you can tarry here doing naught?"

I took a little time for reflection before answering. "After careful reconsideration," I said, at last, "I have come to the conclusion that, as you are evidently under grave apprehension of some personal violence from your uncle in the event of his finding you on the premises, I should be fully justified in dispensing with the usual formalities and removing you from his custody at once. At all events, I will take that responsibility on myself—whatever risk I may incur."

"I crave your pardon for my seeming petulance," she said, with a pretty humility. "I should have known right well that I might safely rely on the protection of so gallant and fearless a knight!"

"You will understand, I am sure, ma'am," I said, "that I cannot, as a bachelor, offer you shelter under my own roof. What I propose (subject, of course, to your approval) is that I should place you under the care of an old aunt of mine at Croydon until some other arrangement can be made. I presume it will not take you long to make your preparations for the journey?"

"What need of preparation?" she cried. "Let us delay no longer, but fly this instant!"

"I should recommend you to take at least a dressing-bag," I said; "you will have time to pack all you may require while your retainer is fetching us a fly. Then I know of nothing to hinder us from leaving at once."

"Nothing?" she exclaimed. "Do you dread a dragon so little, then, that you can speak thus lightly?"

I could not help smiling; it was so surprising to find a Princess of her age who still retained a belief in fairy-tales. "I think, ma'am," I said, "that at this time of day a dragon is not an obstacle which we need take into serious consideration. You have evidently not been informed that such a monster has long since ceased to exist. In other words, it is undoubtedly extinct."

"And you have slain it!" she cried, and her eyes blazed with admiration. "I might have guessed as much! It is slain—and now even my uncle has no longer power to detain me here! For many a long month I

have not dared to look from out my casements, but now I may behold the light of day once more without shrinking!" She drew back some hangings as she spoke, disclosing a large oriel window, and the next moment she cowered away with a cry of abject terror.

"Why have you deceived me?" she demanded, with indignant reproach. "It is *not* extinct. It is still there. Look for yourself!"

I did look; the window commanded the rear of the castle, which I had not hitherto seen, and now I saw something else so utterly unexpected that I could hardly trust the evidence of my own eyesight.

Towering above the battlemented outer wall I saw a huge horny head, poised upon a long and flexible neck, and oscillating slowly from side to side with a sinister vigilance. Although the rest of the brute was hidden by the wall, I saw quite enough to convince me that it could not well be anything else than a dragon—and a formidable one at that. I thought I understood now why the seneschal had been so anxious to get me inside, though I wished he had been rather more explicit.

I stood there staring at it—but I made no remark. To tell the truth, I did not feel equal to one just then.

The Princess spoke first. "You seem astonished, sir," she said, "yet you can hardly have been in ignorance that my uncle has set this ferocious monster to guard these walls, and devour me should I strive to make my escape."

"I can only say, ma'am," I replied, "that this is the first intimation I have had of the fact."

"Still, you are wise and strong," she said. "You will surely devise some means whereby to rid me of this baleful thing!"

"If you will permit me to draw the curtain again," I said, "I will endeavour to think of something. . . . Am I right in assuming that the brute is the property of your uncle?"

She replied that that was so.

"Then I think I see a way," I said. "Your uncle could be summoned for allowing such a dangerous animal to be at large, since it is clearly not under proper control. And if an application were made to a magistrate, under the Act of 1871, he might be ordered to destroy it at once."

"You little know my uncle," she said, with a touch of scorn, "if you deem that he would destroy his sole remaining dragon at the bidding of any person whatever!"

"He will incur a penalty of twenty shillings



"TOWERING ABOVE THE BATTLEMENTED OUTER WALL I SAW A HUGE HORNED HEAD."

a day till he *does*," I replied. "In any case, I can promise you that, if I can only manage to get out of this place, you shall not be exposed to this annoyance very much longer."

"You will?" she cried. "Are you quite sure that you will succeed?"

"Practically I am," I said. "I shall apply—always supposing I can get home safely—the first thing to-morrow morning, and, if I can only convince the Bench that the terms of the Act are wide enough to include not only dogs, but any other unmanageable quadrupeds, why, the thing is as good as done!"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" she repeated, impatiently. "Must I tell you once more that this is no time to delay? Indeed, sir, if I am to be rescued at all, your hand alone can deliver me from this loathly worm!"

I confess I considered she was taking an altogether extravagant view of the relations between solicitor and client.

"If," I said, "it could be described with any accuracy as a worm, I should not feel the slightest hesitation about attacking it."

"Then you will?" she said, entirely missing my point, as usual. "Tell me you will—for *my* sake."

She looked so engaging whilst making this

appeal that I really had not the heart to pain her by a direct refusal.

"There is nothing," I said, "that is, nothing in reason, that I would not do cheerfully, for your sake. But if you will only reflect, you will see at once that, in a tall hat and overcoat, and with absolutely no weapon but an umbrella, I should not stand the ghost of a chance against a dragon. I should be too hopelessly overmatched."

"You say truth," she replied, much to my satisfaction. "I could not desire any champion of mine to engage in so unequal a contest. So have no uneasiness on that score."

On this she clapped her hands as a summons to the seneschal, who appeared so promptly that I fancy he could not have been very far from the keyhole. "This gallant gentleman," she explained to him, "has undertaken to go forth and encounter the dragon without

our walls, provided that he is fitly furnished for so deadly a fray."

I tried to protest that she had placed a construction on my remarks which they were not intended to bear—but the old man was so voluble in thanks and blessings that I could not get in a single word.

"You will conduct him to the armoury," the Princess continued, "and see him arrayed in harness meet for so knightly an endeavour. Sir," she added to me, "words fail me at such an hour as this. I cannot even thank you as I would. But I know you will do your utmost on my behalf. Should you fall——"

She broke off here, being evidently unable to complete her sentence, but that was unnecessary. I knew what would happen if I fell.

"But fall you will not," she resumed. "Something tells me that you will return to me victorious; and then—and then—should you demand any guerdon of me—yea" (and here she blushed divinely) "even to this hand of mine, it shall not be denied you."

Never in the whole course of my professional career had I been placed in a position of greater difficulty. My common sense

told me that it was perfectly preposterous on her part to expect such services as these from one who was merely acting as her legal adviser. Even if I performed them successfully—which was, to say the least of it, doubtful—my practice would probably be injuriously affected should my connection with such an affair become known. As for the special fee she had so generously suggested, that, of course, was out of the question. At my time of life marriage with a flighty young woman of eighteen—and a Princess into the bargain—would be rather too hazardous an experiment.

And yet, whether it is that, middle-aged bachelor as I am, I have still a strain of unsuspected romance and chivalry in my nature, or for some other cause that I cannot explain, somehow I found myself kissing the little hand she extended to me, and going forth without another word to make as good a fight of it as I could for her against such an infernal beast as a dragon. I cannot say that I felt cheerful over it, but, anyhow, I went.

I followed the seneschal, who led me down by a different staircase from that I had come up, and through an enormous vaulted kitchen, untenanted by all but black-beetles, which were swarming. Merely for the sake of conversation, I made some remark on their numbers and pertinacity, and inquired why no steps had apparently been taken to abate so obvious a nuisance. "Alas! noble sir," he replied, as he sadly shook his old white head, "'twas the scullions' office to clear the place of these pests, and the last minion has long since vanished from our halls!"

I felt inclined to ask him where they had vanished to—but I did not. I thought the answer might prove discouraging. Even as it was, I would have given something for a whisky and soda just then—but he did not offer it, and I did not like to suggest it for fear of being misunderstood. And presently we entered the armoury.

Only a limited number of suits were hanging on the walls, and all of them were in a deplorably rusty and decayed condition, but the seneschal took them down one by one, and made fumbling attempts to buckle and hook me into them. Most unfortunately, not a single suit proved what I should call workmanlike, for I defy any man to fight a dragon in armour which is too tight even to move about in with any approach to comfort.

"I'm afraid it's no use," I told the seneschal, as I reluctantly resumed my ordinary garments. "You can see for your-

self that there's nothing here that comes near my size!"

"But you cannot engage in combat with the dragon in your present habiliments!" he remonstrated. "That were stark madness!"

I was glad that the old man had sufficient sense to see *that*. "I am quite of your opinion," I replied; "and believe me, my good old friend, nothing is farther from my thoughts. My idea is that if—I do not ask you to expose yourself to any unnecessary risk—but if you *could* contrive to divert the dragon's attention by a demonstration of some sort on one side of the castle, I might manage to slip quietly out of some door on the other."

"Are you but a caitiff, then, after all," he exclaimed, "that you can abandon so lovely a lady to certain doom?"

"There is no occasion for addressing me in offensive terms," I replied. "I have no intention whatever of abandoning your mistress. You will be good enough to inform her that I shall return to-morrow without fail with a weapon that will settle this dragon's business more effectually than any of your obsolete lances and battle-axes!"

For I had already decided on this as the only course that was now open to me. I had a friend who spent most of the year abroad in the pursuit of big game, but who chanced by good luck to be in town just then. He would, I knew, willingly lend me an express rifle and some expansive bullets, and, as an ex-Volunteer and marksman, I felt that the odds would then be slightly in my favour, even if I could not, as I hoped I could, persuade my friend to join me in the expedition.

But the seneschal took a less sanguine view of my prospects.

"You forget, sir," he remarked, lugubriously, "that, in order to return hither, you must first quit the shelter of these walls—which, all unarmed as you are, would be but to court instant death!"

"I don't quite see that," I argued. "After all, as the dragon made no effort to prevent me from coming in, it is at least possible that it may not object to my going out."

"For aught I can say," he replied, "it may have no orders to hinder any from entrance. As to that I know naught. But of this I am very sure—it suffers no one to depart hence undevoured."

"But could I not contrive to get out of its reach before it was aware that I had even started?" I suggested.

"I fear me, sir," he said, despondently,



"YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF THAT THERE'S NOTHING HERE THAT COMES NEAR MY SIZE!"

"that the creature would not fail to follow up your tracks ere the snow could cover them."

"That had not occurred to me," I said. "But now you mention it, it does not seem altogether unlikely. In your opinion, then, I should do better in remaining where I am?"

"Only until the enchanter return," was his reply, "as, if I mistake not, he may do at any moment, after which your stay here will assuredly be but brief."

"You can't mean," I said, "that he would have the inhumanity to turn me out to be devoured by his beastly dragon? For that is what it would *come* to."

"Unless, perchance, by dint of strength or cunning you were to overcome the monster," he said. "And methought you had come hither with that very intent."

"My good man," I replied, "I've no idea why or how I came here, but it was certainly with no desire or expectation of meeting a dragon. However, I begin to see very clearly that if I can't find some way of putting an end to the brute—and promptly, too—he will make an end of *me*. The question is, how the deuce am I to set about it?"

And then, all at once, I had an inspiration. I recollected the black-beetles, and something the seneschal had said about its being the scullions' duty to keep them down. I asked him what methods they had employed for this purpose, but, such humble details being naturally outside his province, he was unable to inform me. So I returned to the kitchen, where I began a careful search, not without some hope of success.

For awhile I searched in vain, but at last, just when I had begun to despair, I found on a dusty shelf in the buttery the identical thing I had been looking for. It was an earthen vessel containing a paste, which, in spite of the fungoid growth that had collected on its surface; I instantly recognised as a composition warranted to prove fatal to every description of vermin.

I called to the seneschal and asked if he could oblige me with a loaf of white bread, which he brought in evident bewilderment. I cut a slice from the middle and was proceeding to spread the paste thickly upon it when he grasped my arm. "Hold!" he cried. "Would you

rashly seek your death ere it is due?"

"You need not be alarmed," I told him; "this is not for myself. And now will you kindly show me a way out to some part of the roof where I can have access to the dragon?"

Trembling from head to foot he indicated a turret-stair, up which, however, he did not offer to accompany me; it brought me out on the leads of what appeared to be a kind of bastion. I crept cautiously to the parapet and peeped over it, and then for the first time I had a full view of the brute, which was crouching immediately below me. I know how prone the most accurate are to exaggeration in matters of this kind, but, after making every allowance for my excited condition at the time, I do not think I am far out in estimating that the dimensions of the beast could not have been much, if at all, less than those of the "Diplodocus Carnegii," a model of which is exhibited at the Natural History Museum, while its appearance was infinitely more terrific.

I do not mind admitting frankly that the sight so unmanned me for the moment that I was seized with an almost irresistible impulse to retire by the way I had come

before the creature had observed me. And yet it was not without a certain beauty of its own; I should say, indeed, that it was rather an unusually handsome specimen of its class, and I was especially struck by the magnificent colouring of its scales, which surpassed that of even the largest pythons. Still, to an unaccustomed eye there must always be something about a dragon that inspires more horror than admiration, and I was in no mood just then to enjoy the spectacle. It was hunched up together, with its head laid back, like a fowl's, between its wings, and seemed to be enjoying a short nap. I suppose I must unconsciously have given some sign of my presence, for suddenly I saw the horny films roll back like shutters from its lidless eyes, which it fixed on me with a cold glare of curiosity.

And then it shambled on to its feet, and slowly elongated its neck till it brought its horrible head on a level with the battlements. I need not say that on this I promptly retreated to a spot where I judged I should be out of immediate danger. But I had sufficient presence of mind to remember the purpose for which I was there, and, fixing the prepared slice on the ferrule of my umbrella, I extended it as far as my arm would reach in the creature's direction.

I fancy it had not been fed very lately. The head made a lightning dart across the parapet, and a voracious snap—and the next moment both bread and umbrella had disappeared down its great red gullet.

The head was then withdrawn. I could hear a hideous champing sound, as of the ribs of the umbrella being slowly crunched. After that came silence.

Again I crawled to the parapet and looked down. The huge brute was licking its plated jaws with apparent gusto, as though—which was likely enough—an umbrella came as an unaccustomed snack to its jaded palate. It was peacefully engaged now in digesting this *hors d'œuvre*.

But my heart only sank the lower at the sight. For if an alpaca umbrella with an ebony handle could be so easily assimilated, what possible chance was there that beetle-paste would produce any deleterious effect? I had been a fool to place the faintest hope on so desperate a hazard. Presently he would be coming for more—and I had nothing for him!

But by and by, as I gazed in a sort of fascinated repulsion, I fancied I detected some slight symptoms of uneasiness in the reptile's demeanour.

It was almost nothing at first—a restless

twitch at times, and a squint in its stony eyes that I had not previously noticed—but it gave me a gleam of hope. Presently I saw the great crest along its spine slowly begin to erect itself, and the filaments that fringed its jaws bristling, as it proceeded to deal a succession of vicious pecks at its distended olive-green paunch, which it evidently regarded as responsible for the disturbance.

Little as I knew about dragons, a child could have seen that this one was feeling somewhat seriously indisposed. Only—was it due to the umbrella or the vermin-killer? As to that I could only attempt to speculate, and my fate—and the Princess's, too—hung upon which was the more correct diagnosis!

However, I was not kept long in suspense. Suddenly the beast uttered a kind of bellowing roar—the most appalling sound I think I ever heard—and after that I scarcely know what happened exactly.

I fancy it had some kind of fit. It writhed and rolled over and over, thrashing the air with its big leathery wings, and tangling itself up to a degree that, unless I had seen it, I should have thought impossible, even for a dragon.

After this had gone on for some time, it untied itself and seemed calmer again, till all at once it curved into an immense arch, and remained perfectly rigid with wings outspread for nearly half a minute. Then it suddenly collapsed on its side, panting, snorting, and quivering like some monstrous automobile, after which it stretched itself out to its full length, once or twice, and then lay stiff and still. Its gorgeous hues gradually faded into a dull, leaden-grey tint. . . . All was over—the vermin-destroyer had done its work after all.

I cannot say that I was much elated. I am not sure that I did not even feel a pang of self-reproach. I had slain the dragon, it was true, but by a method which I could not think would have commended itself to St. George as entirely sportsmanlike, even though the circumstances left me no other alternative.

However, I had saved the Princess, which, after all, was the main point, and there was no actual necessity for her to know more than the bare fact that the dragon was dead.

I was just about to go down and inform her that she was now free to leave the castle, when I heard a whirring noise in the air, and, glancing back, I saw, flying towards me through the still falling snow, an elderly gentleman of forbidding aspect, who was evidently in a highly exasperated state. It was the Princess's uncle.



I don't know how it was, but till that moment I had never realized the extremely unprofessional proceeding into which I had been betrayed by my own impulsiveness. But I saw now, though too late, that, in taking the law into my own hands and administering a poisonous drug to an animal which, however furious it might be, was still the property of another, I had been guilty of conduct unworthy of any respectable solicitor. It was undoubtedly an actionable tort, if not a trespass—while he might even treat it as a criminal offence.

So, as the magician landed on the roof, his face distorted with fury, I felt that nothing would meet the case but the most ample apology. But, feeling that it was better to allow the first remark to come from him, I merely raised my hat and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Are you being attended to, sir?" was the remark that actually came—and both words and tone were so different from what I had expected that I could not repress a start.

And then, to my utter astonishment, I discovered that battlements and magician had all disappeared. I was back again in the toy-shop, staring into the glass globe, in which the snow was still languidly circling.

"Like to take one of these shilling snow-storms, sir?" continued the assistant, who seemed to be addressing me; "we're selling

a great quantity of them just now. Very suitable and acceptable present for a child, sir, and only a shilling in that size, though we have them larger in stock."

I bought the globe I had first taken up—but I have not given it to my god-child. I preferred to keep it myself.

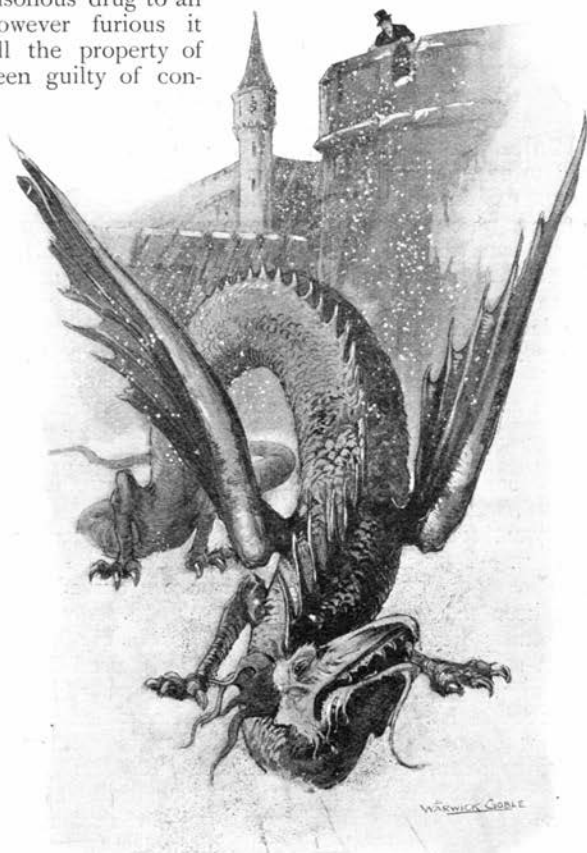
Of course, my adventure may have been merely a kind of day-dream; though, if so, it is rather odd that it should have taken that form, when, even at night, my dreams—on the rare occasions when I do dream—never turn upon such subjects as castles, princesses, or dragons.

A scientific friend, to whom I related the experience, pronounces it to be an ordinary case of auto-hypnotism, induced by staring into a crystal globe for a prolonged period.

But I don't know. I cannot help thinking that there is something more in it than that.

I still gaze into the globe at times, when I am alone of an evening; but while I have occasionally found myself back in the snow-storm, again, I have never, so far, succeeded in getting into the castle.

Perhaps it is as well; for, although I should not at all object to see something more of the Princess, she has most probably, thanks to my instrumentality, long since left the premises—and I have no particular desire to meet the magician.



"ALL AT ONCE IT CURVED INTO AN IMMENSE ARCH."