

The Blue Mountain.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN. BY E. NESBIT.



TONY was young Tony, and old Tony was his grandfather. This story is about young Tony, and no human being believes a word of it, unless young Tony does.

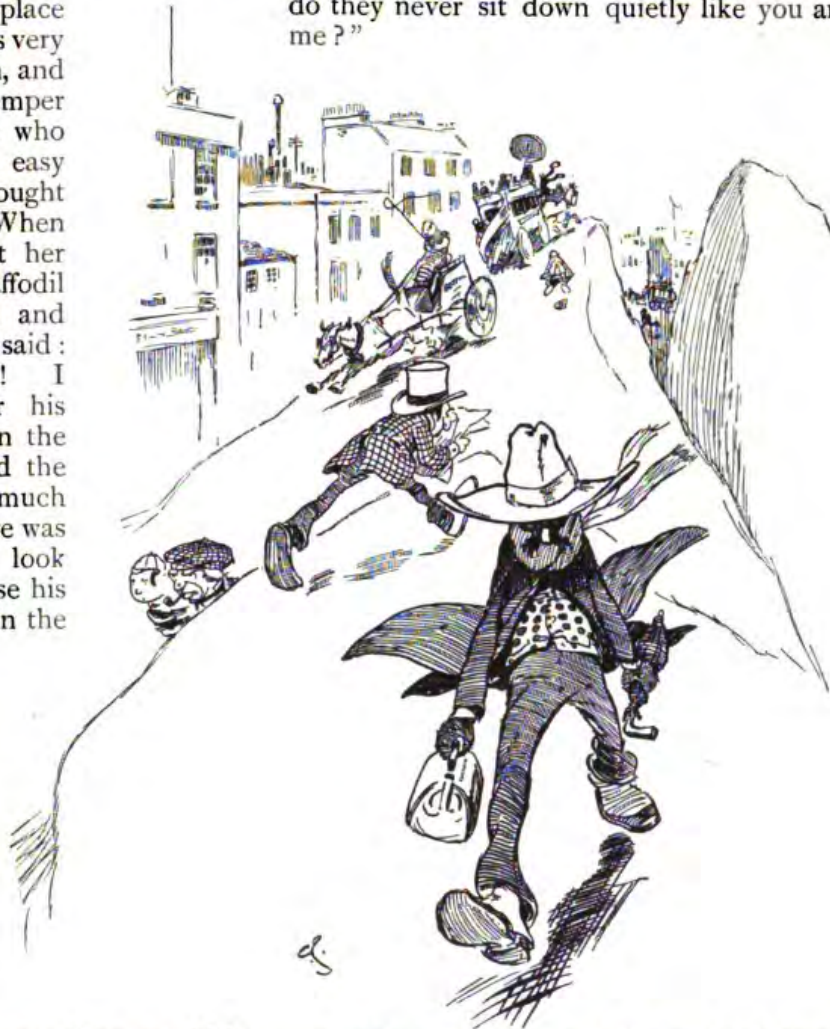
Tony was born in the town of Antioch. This is not the same Antioch that you read about in history, but quite a different place. It was a place where nearly everyone was very dark as to the complexion, and rather short as to the temper and the figure. People who were fair in the face and easy in the temper were not thought much of in Antioch. When Tony's mother saw that her baby was as fair as a daffodil and as good as gold and laughed all day long, she said: "Oh, dear, oh, dear! I suppose he takes after his grandfather. He's not in the least like *my* family," and the matter annoyed her so much that she died. Then there was only old Tony left to look after young Tony, because his father had been killed in the wars only a few weeks before.

The people of Antioch were always fighting the neighbouring tribes — red-faced savages who deserved no better fate than to be killed; only, of course, sometimes a few Antiochians had to be killed too, because that is part of the game, and if there were no danger there would be no glory, would there?

Little Tony's hair remained yellow, and his habit of laughing grew with his years. He learned his lessons and he learned his play. He was excellent company, and if it had not been for the yellowness of his hair and the gentleness of his nature he would have been quite popular among his school-mates. His grandfather called him gentle; but the people of Antioch called him lazy, for they, as I said, were very black and generally angry. They hurried up and down

in their rocky little city, and always they seemed to be driven by most urgent affairs, hurrying to keep important appointments. They ran about all day long attending to their business, and hardly stopping for their dinner or their tea, and no one ever saw any of them asleep.

"Why is it, grandfather?" young Tony asked one day. "What is it all about? Why do they never sit down quietly like you and me?"



"THEY HURRIED UP AND DOWN IN THEIR ROCKY LITTLE CITY."

"It's the great heart of the nation, my boy," said old Tony; "it can't be still—it's in the breed, you know—they can't help it—they're all alike, too—except you and me. Why, bless your heart, look at the King, now. He's more in a hurry than all the rest—and more—more noble and active, bless him!"

The old man ended his speech in quite a different voice from the one he had begun with. This was because he suddenly caught

the glitter of the King's crown as the monarch peeped round the corner. The King of Antioch was always in a hurry—always running somewhere or other; consequently, he was seldom on his throne, and his loyal subjects had to look out very sharply, for he was always sure to be where they least expected him. You may think that they could have got over this little difficulty by always looking for the King where they least expected him; but if you try this simple experiment for yourself, with your governess or tutor, or even your nurse, I think you will find that it is not so easy as it looks.

"Ha!" said the King, standing in the doorway and laughing cheerfully, "talking treason, eh? Well, you know what the punishment for *that* is? Pinching with black pincers, you know, till—well, till you don't feel the pinching any more."

"Ha, ha! Your Majesty has always such a pleasant way with you," said old Tony, politely, and young Tony decided that when he grew up he would try not to have any pleasant ways at all.

The King rustled quickly round the little house and looked at everything—dresser, chairs, plates, and pots. He was sorry that there was nothing he could find fault with, so he said: "Beware of luxury," and hurried off to make his presence felt in some other humble home. There was no pride about King Anthony the Twenty-third. He just dropped in, without an invitation, and took his subjects as he found them.

"King Anthony the Twenty-third is the noblest of monarchs," said old Tony, as he and his grandson sat down to their plain supper.

"It's all right, grandfather, he's quite gone—he's not listening—for a wonder," said young Tony.

Meantime the King was hurrying in and out and up and down the crowded streets of his city, picking up little bits of information, and making his subjects feel that his Kingship was not a mere matter of form, but that he was really interested in the most humble life among his people. It was a strange town, all up hill and down hill, with shelving rocks and precipices all mixed up with the public streets. The people, for all their busy habits, had no trade; or, rather, they did not manufacture anything. They built houses and brought up their families; they wrapped their children up very snugly and carried them about at a much earlier age than we consider safe; and they milked their cows,

which were large and green, and had wings, and they drank the milk, and they gathered the fruit of the trees that grew on the plain below the town, and they got on very well indeed. There was only one drawback to life in Antioch, and that was its uncertainty. At any moment an earthquake might occur: then down would go half the town, and the busy citizens had it all to build again. They soon did it, for they were nothing if not industrious. A much more awful thing was the storm of hot rain that now and then fell on the town—a blighting rain that killed all it touched. This was more dreaded than even the earthquakes, but, fortunately, it very seldom happened.

Old Tony was beadle and sexton and keeper of the town records—and very nicely he kept them, too. There was not a speck of dirt on one of them. He used to spend hours and hours polishing the records, and he scoured the tombstones till they shone again, and he had most of the inscriptions by heart. After an earthquake he was always most careful to put the tombstones back in their proper places, and one day when he was doing this he came upon a stone he did not remember to have seen before. He called to young Tony, who had had a Board School education, to see if he could read the bits of words that were carved upon it.

"It seems like a foreign language," said he.

"I can't make it out," said young Tony; "it's not carved; it's in the stone somehow; looks as if it was coming through from the other side." He turned the stone over, and there on the other side was an inscription which both of them had read a hundred times:—

HERE LIES HENRY BIRKBECK,
MAGICIAN TO THE INSTITUTE.

However humble he seems to you,
His last foretelling is going to come true.

P.S.—You see if it doesn't.

"Dear me," said old Tony, "poor old Henry Birkbeck! It seems like yesterday. Yes—he was very respectable—but only in a small way of business. A magician he was by trade, but no one thought much of him, except, perhaps, the King, and *he* never gave him a lift. He used to do things with eggs and a hat—but he broke the eggs as often as not; and the gold-fish and handkerchief he hardly ever brought off."

Old Tony began to lay down the tombstone—but young Tony held it up with one hand and tried to scrape the back of it with the other.

"There *is* something here," he said; "let's set it upright, instead of laying it down, and I'll scrub it and see what the letters are. Poor old Mr. Birkbeck! I wonder what his last foretelling was. Was he good at prophesying, grandfather?"

"Not a bit," said the sexton. "And, to do him justice, he almost gave it up in his later years. You see, people laughed at him so, because the things he foretold never happened. Towards the end he grew very feeble—hardly prophesied a single prophecy from one year's end to another. Sometimes he would say: 'I shouldn't wonder if it rained before Sunday,' but then he never wondered at anything. He was a calm old man, was poor Henry—it took a good deal to astonish him."

Young Tony tried to interest his boy friends in the back of poor old Henry Birkbeck's tombstone, but nobody cared. They were all in too much of a hurry to care for an occupation so slow as cleaning tombstones. But Tony worked away perseveringly; he cleaned it with soap and he cleaned it with soda; with brick-dust and vinegar, with rotten-stone and wash-leather; with patience and elbow grease; and, as you know, the last two will clean almost anything. So, after a time, a few letters began to show distinctly here and there, and presently Tony found he could read whole words. There was "milk," and "mountains," and a word that looked like "Jilk," only, of course, it couldn't be that. And the last word of all was "reign," and the second word of all was "Tony."

"It must be something to do with *me*," said young Tony, "because of my name being in it."

"It must have something to do with the King," said old Tony, "because it says reign; so you'd better cut off to the palace, and look sharp about it, or His Majesty will know the reason why."

So Tony looked sharp about it, and got to the palace in less than five minutes. For a wonder, the King was not engaged in dropping in on his subjects, but was on his throne amid his fussy black courtiers, who were all busy trying to make themselves as small as they could.

This was because the King was very short; though he did not like to think so. He always had himself described in the census and the police reports as a

"powerful man of middle height," though he was nowhere near the middle height and no more powerful than other people.

"Well, boy," said King Anthony the Twenty-third, "what have you come here for?"

"There's a prophecy," said Tony.

"There are a good many," said King Anthony, "but they don't amount to much since poor Henry Birkbeck died. He was something like a prophet," he went on, turning to his courtiers. "He foretold, when I was only a baby, that if I grew up I should perhaps be King. The late King, my father, was very pleased, I remember."

The courtiers all bowed, and said it was really wonderful. Tony said:—

"Well, then, you'd better come and have a look at this prophecy, because it's the late Mr. Birkbeck's last one—and he said it's going to come true."



"OFF THEY ALL WENT."

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Bring it here, can't you?" said the King.
 "No, I can't," said the boy; "it's on his tombstone, so there. I can't carry tombstones about."

"No," said the King, thoughtfully; "of course, you're not powerfully built—you're nowhere near the medium height."

"Come and look at it, if you want to," said Tony. "I'm in no hurry."

"Well," said King Anthony, "I don't care if I do. I'm tired of sitting still."

So off they all went, King, Court, heralds, men-at-arms, banner-bearers, and spearmen, down the narrow, dark, crooked town streets till they came to the churchyard where the tombstones were—both the upright and the flat kind.

Tony ran on ahead, and knelt in front of the tombstone. Then he jumped up and called out:—

"Hi! You hurry up: it's as plain now as the nose on your face."

"You should say, 'the Royal nose on your Majesty's Royal face,'" said old Tony, anxiously.

But the King was too much interested to care about even his subjects' manners just then.

He came up to the tombstone, and on it he read, and Tony read, and all the courtiers read:—

When Tony drinks the
 Blue Mountain's milk
 He shall wear a Sunday
 suit of silk.
 He shall be tallest in
 all the land
 And hold the town
 under his command.
 He shall have greatness
 and we shall have
 grain.
 Soon may it happen,
 and long may he
 reign.

Hurrah.
 H. BIRKBECK.

The King read this and said,
 "Well, I never."

And all the courtiers said the same.

"Tony means Me," said the King.

The courtiers said that of course it did.

"I am King Tony the Twenty-third," said he.

And the courtiers said of course he was. They all spoke at once, like a chorus.

"I was christened Anthony, of course," his restless Majesty went on, fidgeting with his gold collar, "but I know that my subjects

have always spoken of me behind my back by the endearing diminutive."

The courtiers assured the King that this was so.

"I suppose there's no one else called Tony?" The King turned a threatening glance on the crowd, and everyone hastened to say no, there wasn't.

But old Tony turned extremely pale, and hurrying into the vestry he tampered with the register of births, and altered his own name to Sidney Cecil Ernest Watchett.

But young Tony spoke up. "My name's Tony," said he.

"Oh, is it?" said His Majesty. "We'll soon see about that. Guards, seize him. Now, what's your name?"

"Tony," said he.

"Your name is not Tony," said the King. "Your name is——" he could not think of a name at the moment, so he stopped. Tony said:—

"My name is Tony."

"Take him to the Parliament House," said the King, beside himself with rage. "Give him a taste of the Mace." And Tony tasted the Mace, and was stamped on by the Great Seal, who was very fierce and lived in a cage at the Parliament House, until he was stiff and sore and sorry enough to be glad to say that his name was anything the King liked except Tony, which, of course, it never,

never could have been. He admitted at last that his name was William Waterbury Watchett, and was discharged with a caution, in old Tony's care.

"But my name *is* Tony after all," he said to himself, as he went home full of sad memories of the Mace and the Great Seal. "I wonder where the Blue Mountain is?"

Young Tony thought a good deal about



"TONY WAS STAMPED ON BY THE GREAT SEAL."

poor Henry Birkbeck's prophecy—perhaps the Great Seal had stamped it on his memory. Anyway, he could not forget it, and all the next day he wandered about on the steep edge of the town, looking out over the landscape below.

It was not an interesting landscape. All round the brown hill where the town was lay the vast forests of green trees, something like bamboos, whose fruit the people ate, and beyond that one could see the beginnings of a still larger forest, where none of the people of Antioch had ever dared to go—the forest whose leaves were a hundred times as big as the King himself, and the trunks of the trees as big as whole countries. Above all was the blue sky, but, look as Tony would, he could see no Blue Mountain. Then suddenly he saw the largest forest shake and shiver, its enormous leaves swaying this way and that.

"It must be an earthquake," said Tony, trembling. But he did not run away. And his valour was rewarded, as valour deserves to be. The next moment the vast branches of the enormous forest parted—and a giant figure came out into the forest of bamboo-like trees. It was a figure more gigantic than Tony had ever imagined possible. It had long, yellow hair. In its hands it carried a great white bowl, big enough to

float a navy in. If such an expression did not sound rather silly, I should say that this figure gave Tony the idea of a little-girl-giant.

It sat down among the bamboo forest, crushing millions of trees as it sat; and with a spoon twice the length of the King's Banqueting Hall it began to eat out of the tremendous basin. Tony saw great lumps, like blocks of soft marble, balanced on the vast spoon—and he knew that the giant-little-girl was eating giant bread and milk. And she wore a giant frock—and the frock was blue. Then Tony understood. This was the "Blue Mountain"—and in that big, big sea of a basin there was milk, "the Blue Mountain's milk."

Tony stood still a moment and then turned and ran as hard as he could, straight into the Royal presence. To be more exact, he ran into the Royal waistcoat, for the King, in a hurry as usual, was coming out of his palace gates with a rush.

The King was extremely annoyed. He refused to listen to a word Tony had to say until Parliament had been called together, and had

passed a Bill strengthening the enactments against Cheek.

Then he allowed Tony to tell his tale. And when the tale was told everyone ran to the battlements of the town to look.

There was no Blue Mountain to be seen. Then His Majesty told Tony what he



"A LITTLE-GIRL-GIANT."

thought of him, and it was not pleasant hearing.

"I'm *not* a liar," said Tony, "and I'm very sorry I told you anything about it. I might jolly well have gone and got it for myself. *My* name's—er—William Waterbury Watchett." He stopped in confusion.

"I should think it was," said the King. "If there *is* any mountain, which I don't for a moment believe, you'd better go and fetch me some of the milk—not that I think there is any—out of the mountain's basin, which I cannot believe exists outside your . . . imagination. If you bring it to this address you will be suitably rewarded."

"All right," said Tony; "shall I fetch it in a jug or will they lend me a can?"

"I will lend you my mug," said the King, "and mind you bring it back safe."

So Tony took the mug—it had "For a good little King. A present from Antwerp" on it—and kissed his grandfather, and started off on his long and perilous journey.

"I suppose he'll give me a reward if I get it," he thought; "and if not, well, it's an adventure any way."

He passed through the crowded streets, where everyone was hurrying about in the usual frantic haste, and out at the town gates, and down the road into the forest. In due time he reached the spot where the Blue Mountain had sat down to eat its unimaginably enormous breakfast. But there was no mountain to be seen, and Tony knew that he could do nothing but sit down and wait, in the hope that the Blue Mountain would come next morning to eat its breakfast in the same place.

So he looked about for a place to rest safely in, and presently found just what he wanted—a little cave whose walls and roof were of dried earth, and there he stayed all that day and night, eating the fruit of the fallen trees.

And next morning there was a rustling and a swaying of the trees, and the Blue Mountain came striding over the tall tree-tops, bending down the forest as she came, on colossal black legs, and massive shoes with monstrous ankle straps—and each shoe was big enough to have crushed a thousand Tonys at one step.

So he hid in his cave, and presently knew by the shaking of the ground, like an earthquake, that the mountain had sat down.

Then he came out. He was too near to see the mountain properly, but he saw a great blue fold of giant frock near him, and far above him towered the blue heights of

the giant-little-girl's knees. On the summit of these shone a vast white round—the great bread and milk basin.

Tony started to climb the blue fold. It was stiff, starched with giant starch, I suppose, and it bore his weight easily. But it was a long climb, and he drew a deep breath of thankfulness when he reached the broad table-land of the giant-little-girl's knees. And now the smooth, shiny roundness of the big basin was before him; he tried its polished surface again and again, and always fell back baffled. Then he saw that he might climb up the sleeve of the gigantic arm whose hand held the basin. With his heart in his mouth he began the ascent, slowly and carefully, holding the precious mug closely to his breast. His breath came faster and faster as he went up and up, and at last stood triumphantly on the edge of the great blue sleeve. From there to the edge of the basin it was easy to crawl. And now at last he stood on the giddy verge of the monstrous basin, and looked down at the lake of milk with the rocks of bread in it, many, many feet below. The great height made him giddy; he lost his footing, and, still clasping the mug, he fell headlong into the giant bread and milk. The bread-rocks were fortunately soft. Tony picked himself up. He was wet—but no bones were broken; and the mug—oh, joy—the mug was safe! Tony looked it over anxiously as he sat on a rock of bread—a sloppy and uncertain resting-place: there was only one small crack near the handle, and Tony was almost sure that had been there before.

"I don't know how ever I shall get out again," said Tony; "perhaps I never shall, but in case I do I suppose I had better fill the mug." So he stooped from the rock and filled the mug from the lake of milk, which was quite different from the milk of the green cows with wings, the only kind of milk Tony was used to. He had just filled the mug, and tied it down with a piece of parchment which he had taken from the town records and brought with him for the purpose, when a noise like thunder suddenly broke on his ear—indeed, it very nearly broke the ear itself—and so startled Tony that the precious mug all but slipped from his grasp.

Then a wave of milk swept up almost over his bread-rock. The whole of the massive basin was moving sideways. Then came a shock like an earthquake—the basin was being set on the ground.

Tony felt that the Blue Mountain had



"HE STOOPED FROM THE ROCK AND FILLED THE MUG."

seen him. What would the giant-little-girl do? Would she kill him? If so, how? These questions afforded Tony food for some interesting reflections for the next few moments.

He looked round him for a way of escape. Everywhere towered the smooth, white, sloping walls. The tremendous spoon which he had seen the Blue Mountain use had unfortunately not been left in the basin, or he could have climbed out by that. He gave himself up for lost.

Then, suddenly, he saw the trunk of a slender tree appear at the edge of the basin. It was pushed down towards him, yes, on to the very bread-rock on which he crouched. Would it crush him? No: the end of it rested on the rock by his side: it gently moved towards him. He saw now that the Blue Mountain was not cruel—she was not bent on destroying him. She was offering him a way of escape. He eagerly climbed the tree. When he was half-way up, however, the giant-little-girl flung the tree

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aside, and, with Tony still clinging to it, it fell crashing into the forest. When he came to himself he almost shouted for joy to find the mug still whole.

He never knew how he got home.

When he took the mug to the King the monarch looked at it, and said, "The milk's very queer."

"It's giant cow's milk," said Tony. "You drink it up, and let's see what happens."

"I don't know," said the King, suspiciously; "suppose it's poisoned? I shall have it analyzed."

"Well, you promised me a reward," said Tony, "and you wouldn't grudge it if you knew what a time I've had of it. I might have been killed, you know."

"Reward!" said the King, who had been looking at the mug. "REWARD? When

you've cracked my mug—my own only mug with 'A Present for a good King' on it? Reward indeed! A stamp from the Great Seal would be more—"

But Tony was gone. He ran home to tell his grandfather, but his grandfather was not there, only a letter lay on the kitchen table.

"DEAR GRANDSON," it said; "the King has found out that my name was entered in the register as Anthony Antrobus, and he refuses to believe that the alteration to Sidney Cecil Ernest Watchett was made at my birth. So I am seeking safety at a distance. I have only one piece of advice to give you. *Do so too.*—Your loving

"GRANDFATHER."

This seemed such good advice to Tony (whose name was also in the register) that he was just going to take it when the door was flung open and in rushed the King and the army. They hustled and bustled and rustled round the house, breaking and tearing everything, and when there was nothing more to spoil they carried Tony off to prison.

"So this is my reward for getting the milk for him," said poor Tony to himself as he sat in prison, loaded with chains and waiting for his trial. "I wish I'd drunk the milk myself. This is what comes of loyalty. But I don't care! *My* name's Tony and his *isn't*: and I'll say so too—if I hang for it."

Acting on this resolution, next day at his trial Tony *did* say so, and what is more, he came very near indeed to hanging for it, for King Anthony the Twenty-third was furious. He absolutely danced with rage, and it took six Prime Ministers to restrain his emotion while the trial went on.

Tony was tried for an attempt to murder the King. The whole thing, said the Public Persecutor, was nothing but a plot. The prophecy of Henry Birkbeck—which nobody had seen till Tony found it; the Blue Mountain—which nobody but Tony had seen at all; the strange milk, so mysteriously obtained—all pointed to dark treason and villainy. The crack in the mug was a peculiarly incriminating circumstance (I can't help the long words—Public Persecutors *will* use them). It was a vile plot, the Persecutor said—but it had failed. The Public Analyst gave evidence that the milk was not milk at all, but some explosive substance too dangerous to analyze.

Tony looked at the jury, and he looked round the court, and he saw that the case did indeed look black against him. When he was asked what was his defence, he said:—

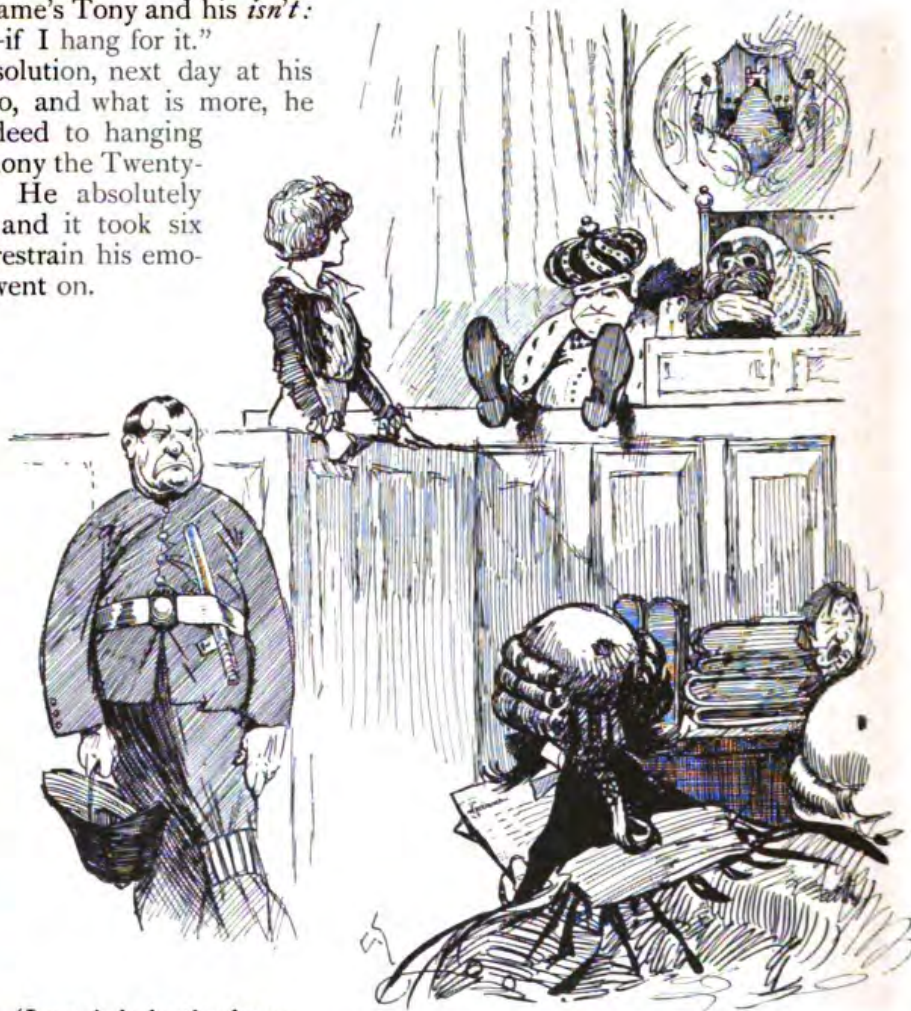
"There's no pleasing some people."

"It is my duty to caution you," said the Persecutor, "that everything you say will be used against you."

"I daresay it will," said Tony, wearily; "but I can't help that. Everything I *do* is used against me too. I needn't have told anyone anything about it—I might have got the milk myself, and been King. But I got it for *him*, and I didn't crack the mug: at

least, I'm almost sure not. I only wish I *had* drunk the milk."

"Make him drink it now," shouted a thousand voices from the crowded court.



"TONY WAS TRIED FOR AN ATTEMPT TO MURDER THE KING."

"Don't," said the King, hastily; "it might not be poison after all."

"You can't have it both ways, your Majesty," said the Persecutor, bravely. "Either it is poison—in which case the prisoner deserves to drink it; or it's not poison—in which case the prisoner leaves the court without a stain upon his character."

"It is poison!"

"It isn't!"

"It is!"

"It isn't!"

The shouts rose louder and louder.

"It's not poison, it's milk," cried Tony, and suddenly seizing the mug of milk, which had been brought into the court to give its evidence, he lifted it to his lips, and before the gaoler could prevent it, he drained the

milk to the last drop and ran out of the court, for everyone was too astonished to stop him. The moment he was outside he felt a sudden and awful change in himself. He was growing, growing, growing! He hurried out of the town. He felt that it would soon be too small to hold him. Outside he got bigger and bigger, till the trees of the nearer forest were like grass under his feet, and the mug ran out of his hand like a little grain of rape-seed.

And there beside him stood the Mountain—a little girl in a blue dress—and he was taller than she was.

"Halloa," said the Blue Mountain, "where did you spring from?"

"From the town down there," said Tony.

"There?" said the Mountain, stooping. "That's not a town, silly! You know it's only an ant-hill, really."

"It's my town," said Tony, "and its name is Antioch, and——"

And then he told her the whole story.

In the middle of it she sat down, to listen better, crushing millions of trees as she sat. And Tony sat down, crushing other millions. But now it only seemed to him that he had sat down on the grass. It makes a great deal of difference what size you are.

"And that's where I used to live," said Tony, pointing to the town, "and my name is Tony."

"I know *that*," said the Blue Mountain; "but you live next door to us, you know you do. You always did, and that's only an ant-hill."

And when Tony looked down again it seemed to him that perhaps it really *was* only an ant-hill.

All the same he knew the King when he saw him hurrying along the ramparts, and he picked the King up and put him on a cow's

ear, and the cow scratched its ear with its hind foot, and that was the end of the King.

"Don't tease the ants," said the Blue Mountain. "People pour boiling water some-

times, or dig up the heaps, but I think it's cruel."

Tony remembered the hot rain and the earthquakes.

"It's a nice story," she said. "Of course the grass *is* like a forest to the ants, and the big forest's the hedge, and

your Sunday suit *is* silk velvet. Your aunt told mother so. Yes, it's a nice story. And an ant *did* drop into my bread and milk yesterday, though I don't know how you knew."

"You mayn't believe it," said Tony. "I shall give

them corn, because it says so in Mr. Birkbeck's prophecy; but I won't ever give them any milk in case they grow big. They're too bad-tempered. Just think, if the King had been *our* size!"

"Oh, come along home, do," said the Blue Mountain, a little crossly. "I'm tired, and it's dinner-time. It's no use pretending about Kings and things. You know well enough you're only Tony-next-door."

And, whatever he may have been before, it is quite certain that since then he has been Tony-next-door, and nothing else whatever.



"HE WAS GROWING, GROWING, GROWING!"