

Bangs John Kendrick

In Camp With A Tin Soldier



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John Kendrick Bangs
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TO

RUSSELL

CHAPTER I. THE START

"BR-R-R-RUB-A-DUB-DUB! Br-r-r-rub-a-dub-a-dub-dub! Br-r-r-rub-adub-dub-a-dub-dub-a-dub-dub!"

"What's that?" cried Jimmieboy, rising from his pillow on the nursery couch, and looking about him, his eyes wide open with astonishment.

"What's what?" asked mamma, who was sitting near at hand, knitting a pair of socks for a small boy she knew who would shortly want them to keep his feet warm when he went off coasting with his papa.

"I thought I heard soldiers going by," returned Jimmieboy, climbing up on the window-sill and gazing anxiously up and down the street. "There were drums playing."

"I didn't hear them," said mamma. "I guess you imagined it. Better lie down again, Jimmieboy, and rest. You will be very tired when papa gets home, and you know if you are tired you'll have to go to bed instead of taking supper with him, and that would be too bad on his birthday."

"Is papa really going to have a birthday to-day?" queried the little fellow. "And a cake with candles in it?"

"Yes," answered mamma. "Two cakes with candles on them, I think," she added.

"What's he to have two cakes for? I had only one," said Jimmieboy.

"One cake wouldn't be big enough to hold all the candles," mamma answered. "You see, papa is a few years older than you are – almost six times as old to-day, and if he has a candle for every year, he'll have to have two cakes to hold them all."

"Is papa six years old to-day?" asked Jimmieboy, resuming his recumbent position on the pillow.

"Oh, indeed, yes, he's thirty," said mamma.

"How many is thirty?" asked Jimmieboy.

"Never mind, dearest," returned mamma, giving Jimmieboy a kiss. "Don't you bother about that. Just close those little peepers and go to sleep."

So Jimmieboy closed his eyes and lay very still for a few minutes. He was not sorry to do it, either, because he really was quite sleepy. He ought to have had his nap before luncheon, but his mamma had been so busy all the morning, making ready for his papa's birthday dinner, that she had forgotten to call him in from the playground, where he was so absorbed in the glorious sport of seesawing with his little friend from across the way that he never even thought of his nap. As many as five minutes must have slipped by before Jimmieboy opened his eyes again, and I doubt if he would have done so even then had he not heard repeated the unmistakable sounds of drums.

"I did hear 'em that time, mamma," he cried, starting up again and winking very hard, for the sand-man had left nearly a pint of sand in Jimmieboy's eyes. "I heard 'em plain as could be."

To this second statement of Jimmieboy's that he heard soldiers going by somewhere, there was no answer, for there was no one in the room to give him one. His mamma, supposing that he had finally fallen asleep, had tiptoed out of the room and was now down stairs, so that the little fellow found himself alone. As a rule he did not like to be alone, although he knew of no greater delight than that of conversing with himself, and he was on the point of running to the door to call to his mother to return, when his attention was arrested by some very curious goings-on in a favorite picture of his that hung directly over the fire-place.

This picture was not, under ordinary circumstances, what any one would call a lively picture – in fact, it was usually a very quiet one, representing a country lane shaded on either side by great oak-trees that towered up into the sky, their branches overhanging the road so as to form a leafy arch, through which only an occasional ray of the sun ever found its way. From one end to the other of

this beautiful avenue there were no signs of life, save those which were presented by the green leaves of the trees themselves, and the purling brook, bordered by grasses and mosses, that was visible a short distance in; no houses or cows or men or children were there in sight. Indeed, had it not been for a faint glimmering of sunlight at the far end of the road, some persons might have thought it a rather gloomy scene, and I am not sure but that even Jimmieboy, had he not wondered what there could be beyond the forest, and around the turn which the road took at that other end, would have found the picture a little depressing. It was his interest in what might possibly lie beyond the point at which the picture seemed to stop that had made it so great a favorite with him, and he had frequently expressed a desire to take a stroll along that road, to fish in the little stream, and to explore the hidden country around the turn.

So great was his interest in it at one time, that Jimmieboy's papa, who was a great person for finding out things, promised to write to the man who had painted the picture and ask him all about the unseen land, so that his little son's curiosity might be satisfied, a promise which he must have kept, for some days later, on his return from business, he took a piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to Jimmieboy, saying that there was the artist's answer. Jimmieboy couldn't read it, of course, because at that time he had not even learned his letters, so he got his papa to do it for him, and they made the pleasing discovery that the artist was a poet as well as a painter, for the answer was all in rhyme. If I remember rightly, this is the way it read:

AROUND THE TURN

Around the turn are kings and queens;
Around the turn are dogs and cats;
Around the turn are pease and beans,
And handsome light blue derby hats.

Around the turn are grizzly bears;
Around the turn are hills and dales;
Around the turn are mice and hares,
And cream and milk in wooden pails.

Indeed, you'll find there horses, pigs,
Great seas and cities you'll discern;
All things, in fact, including figs,
For all the world lies round the turn.

This explanation was quite satisfactory to Jimmieboy, although he was a little fearful as to what might happen if the grizzly bears should take it into their heads to come down into the nursery and hug him, which was certainly not an unlikely thing for them to do, for the mice had come – he had seen them himself – and his mamma had often said that he was a most huggable little fellow.

Now there was undoubtedly some sign of life down the road, for Jimmieboy could see it with his own eyes. There was something moving there, and that something was dressed in gay colors, and in front of it was something else that shone brightly as an occasional ray of the sun shimmered through the trees and glistened upon it. In an instant all thought of his mamma had flown from his mind, so absorbed was he by the startling discovery he had made up there in the picture. To turn back from the door and walk over to the fire-place was the work of a moment, and to climb up on the fender and gaze into the picture occupied hardly more than another moment, and then Jimmieboy saw what

it was that was moving down the road, and with delighted ears heard also what that other thing was that preceded the moving thing.

The first thing was a company of tin soldiers marching in perfect time, their colors flying and the captain on horseback; and the other thing in front was a full brass band, discoursing a most inspiring military march in a fashion that set Jimmieboy strutting about the nursery like a general.

As the little fellow strode around the room his step was suddenly arrested by a voice immediately at his feet.

"Hi, there, Jimmieboy!" it said. "Please be careful where you are walking. You nearly stepped on me that time."

Jimmieboy stopped short and looked down upon the floor.

"Hello!" he said. "What are you doing there, colonel?" – for it was none other than the colonel of the tin soldiers himself who had thus requested him to look out where he stepped.

"There's trouble on hand," said the colonel, climbing up on to a footstool so as to be nearer Jimmieboy's ear, for he did not wish to alarm everybody by shouting out the dreadful news he had to impart. Jimmieboy's mamma, for instance, was a timid little woman, and she would have been very much frightened if she had known what had happened. "There's a great deal of trouble on hand," the colonel repeated. "The Noah in your ark fell asleep last night before the animals had gone to bed, and while he was napping, the Parallelopipedon got loose, ate up the gingerbread monkey and four peppermint elephants, and escaped out of the back window to the woods. Noah didn't find it out until an hour ago, when he went to feed the elephants, and immediately he made the discovery word came from the Pannikins, who live around the turn there in the woods, that the Parallelopipedon had eaten the roof off their house, and was at the time the letter was written engaged in whittling down the fences with a jackknife, and rolling all the pumpkins down the mountainside into Tiddledywickland, and ruining the whole country. We have got to capture that animal before breakfast. If we don't, there's no telling what may happen. He might even go so far as to come back, and that would be horrible."

"I don't think I remember the Parawelopipedon," said Jimmieboy, pronouncing the animal's name with some difficulty. "What kind of an animal was that?"

"Oh, he's an awful animal," returned the colonel. "I don't blame you for not remembering him, though, because he is a hard animal to remember. He is the only animal they had like him in the ark. They couldn't find two of his sort, and I rather guess they are glad they couldn't, because his appetite is simply dreadful, and the things he eats are most embarrassing. He's the one your papa was telling you about last night before you went to bed. Don't you remember the rhyme he told you – beginning this way:

'The Parallelopipedon
I do not like, because
He has so many, many sides,
And ninety-seven claws'?"

"Oh, yes," replied Jimmieboy. "He is the same animal that —

'Hasn't got a bit of sense,
Or feather to his name;
No eye, no ear with which to hear,
But gets there just the same.'"

"That's it! that's it!" cried the colonel. "And don't you remember,

'There's not a thing he will not eat,

From pie to sealing-wax,
Although he shows a preference for
Red bricks and carpet tacks'?"

"Yes, I remember that very well now," said Jimmieboy. "Wasn't there a verse about his color, too? Didn't it say:

'His color is a fearful one —
A combination hue
Of yellow, green, and purple, mixed
With solferino blue'?"

"No; that was the Parallelogram," replied the colonel. "A Parallelopipedon is six times as bad as a Parallelogram. His color has a verse about it, though, that says:

'His hue is the most terrible
That ever man has seen;
'Tis pink and saffron, blue and red,
Mixed up with apple green'."

"Dear me!" cried Jimmieboy. "And do you mean to say he's really got away?"

"I do, indeed," returned the colonel. "Got away, and Noah is glad of it, because he doesn't have to feed him any more. But it'll never do to let him stay loose; he will do too much damage. Why, Jimmieboy, suppose he should overeat himself and die? He's the only one in the world, and we can't afford to lose an animal like that; besides, after he has ruined all the country around the turn, it's just as like as not he'll begin on the rest of the picture, and eat it all up, frame and all."

"My!" cried the little boy. "That would be terrible, wouldn't it! You are right – he must be captured. I have half a mind to go along with you and help."

"Half a mind isn't enough," retorted the colonel, shaking his head. "You can't go into the soldier business unless you have a whole mind – so good-by, Jimmieboy. I must be running along; and should I not return, as the poet says,

'Pray do not weep for me, my boy,
But, as the years slip by,
Drop all your pennies in a bank —
Brave soldiers never die;
And some day I'll turn up again,
Exalted, high in rank,
And possibly I'll find some use
For that small sum in bank.'"

"I'm not going to stay here while you are fighting," said Jimmieboy, with a determined shake of his head. "I've got a whole mind to go with you, and a uniform to wear as well. But tell me, can I get up there on the road?"

"Certainly," said the colonel. "I'll show you how, only put on your uniform first. They won't let you go unless you are suitably dressed. Little boys, with striped trousers like yours, would be out of place, but with a uniform such as yours is, with real gold on the cap and brass buttons on the coat – well, I'm not sure but what they'll elect you water-carrier, or general, or something equally important."

So Jimmieboy hurried to his clothes-closet and quickly donned his military suit, and grasping his sword firmly by the hilt, cried out:

"Ready!"

"All right," said the colonel. "They are waiting for us. Close your eyes."

Jimmieboy did as he was told.

"One – two – three – eyes open!" cried the colonel.

Again Jimmieboy did as he was ordered, although he couldn't see why he should obey the colonel, who up to this afternoon had been entirely subject to his orders. He opened his eyes at the command, and, much to his surprise, found himself standing in the middle of that wooded road in the picture, beneath the arching trees, the leaves of which rustled softly as a sweet perfumed breeze blew through the branches. About him on every side were groups of tin soldiers talking excitedly about the escape of the devastating Parallelopipedon, every man of them armed to the teeth and eager for the colonel's command to start off on the search expedition. The band was playing merrily under the trees up the road near the little brook, and back in the direction from which he had come, through the heavy gilt frame, Jimmieboy could see the nursery just as he had left it, while before him lay the turn at the end of the wood and the unknown country now soon to be explored.

CHAPTER II.

JIMMIEBOY RECEIVES HIS ORDERS

FOR a few moments Jimmieboy was so overcome by the extreme novelty of his position that he could do nothing but wander in and out among the trees, wondering if he really was himself, and whether the soldiers by whom he was surrounded were tin or creatures of flesh and blood. They certainly looked and acted like human beings, and they talked in a manner entirely different from what Jimmieboy was accustomed to expect from the little pieces of painted tin he had so often played with on the nursery floor, but he very soon learned that they were tin, and not made up, like himself, of bone and sinew.

The manner of his discovery was this: One of the soldiers, in a very rash and fool-hardy fashion, tried to pick up a stone from the road to throw at a poor little zinc robin that was whistling in the trees above his head, and in bending over after the stone and then straightening himself up to take aim, he snapped himself into two distinct pieces – as indeed would any other tin soldier, however strong and well made, and of course Jimmieboy was then able to see that the band with whom he had for the moment cast his fortunes were nothing more nor less than bits of brittle tin, to whom in some mysterious way had come life. The boy was pained to note the destruction of the little man who had tried to throw the stone at the robin, because he was always sorry for everybody upon whom trouble had come, but he was not, on the whole, surprised at the soldier's plight, for the simple reason that he had been taught that boys who threw stones at the harmless little birds in the trees were naughty and worthy of punishment, and he could not see why a tin soldier should not be punished for doing what a small boy of right feelings would disdain to do.

After he had made up his mind that his companions were really of tin, he became a bit fearful as to his own make-up, and the question that he now asked himself was, "Am I tin, too, or what?" He was not long in answering this question to his own satisfaction, for after bending his little fingers to and fro a dozen or more times, he was relieved to discover that he had not changed. The fingers did not snap off, as he had feared they might, and he was glad.

Barely had Jimmieboy satisfied himself on this point when a handsomely dressed soldier, on a blue lead horse, came galloping up, and cried out so loud that his voice echoed through the tall trees of the forest:

"Is General Jimmieboy here?"

"Jimmieboy is here," answered the little fellow. "I'm Jimmieboy, but I am no general."

"But you have on a general's uniform," said the soldier.

"Have I?" queried Jimmieboy, with a glance at his clothes. "Well, if I have, it's because they are the only soldier clothes I own."

"Well, I am very sorry," said the soldier on horseback, "but if you wear those clothes you've got to be general. It's a hard position to occupy, and of course you'd rather be a high-private or a member of the band, but as it is, there is no way out of it. If the clothes would fit any one else here, you might exchange with him; but they won't, I can tell that by looking at the yellow stripes on your trousers. The stripes alone are wider than any of our legs."

"Oh!" responded Jimmieboy, "I don't mind being general. I'd just as lief be a general as not; I know how to wave a sword and march ahead of the procession."

At this there was a roar of laughter from the soldiers.

"How queer!" said one.

"What an absurd idea!" cried another.

"Where did he ever get such notions as that?" said a third.

And then they all laughed again.

"I am afraid," said the soldier on horseback, with a kindly smile which won Jimmieboy's heart, "that you do not understand what the duties of a general are in this country. We aren't bound down by the notions of you nursery people, who seem to think that all a general is good for is to be stood up in front of a cannon loaded with beans, and knocked over half a dozen times in the course of a battle. Have you ever read those lines of High-private Tinsel in his little book, 'Poems in Pewter,' in which he tells of the trials of a general of the tin soldiers?"

"Of course I haven't," said Jimmieboy. "I can't read."

"Just the man for a general, if he can't read," said one of the soldiers. "He'll never know what the newspapers say of him."

"Well, I'll tell you the story," said the horseman, dismounting, and standing on a stump by the road-side to give better effect to the poem, which he recited as follows:

"THE TIN SOLDIER GENERAL

I walked one day
Along the way
That leads from camp to city;
And I espied
At the road-side
The hero of my ditty.

His massive feet,
In slippers neat,
Were crossed in desperation;
And from his eyes
Salt tears did rise
In awful exudation."

"In what?" asked Jimmieboy, who was not quite used to grown-up words like exudation.

"Quarts," replied the soldier, with a frown. "Don't interrupt. This poem isn't good for much unless it goes right through without a stop – like an express train."

And then he resumed:

"It filled my soul
With horrid dole
To see this wailing creature;
How tears did sweep,
And furrow deep,
Along his nasal feature!

My eyes grew dim
To look at him,
To see his tear-drops soiling
His necktie bold,
His trimmings gold,
And all his rich clothes spoiling;

And so I stopped,

Beside him dropped,
And quoth, 'Wilt tell me, mortal,
Wherefore you sighed?'
And he replied:
'Wilt I? Well, I shouldst chortle.'"

"I don't know what chortle means," said Jimmieboy.

"Neither do I," said the soldier. "But I guess the man who wrote the poem did, so it's all right, and we may safely go on to the next verse, which isn't very different in its verbiology – "

"Its wha-a-at?" cried a dozen tin soldiers at once.

"Gentlemen," said the declaiming soldier, severely, "there are some words in our language which no creature should be asked to utter more than once in a life-time, and that is one of them. I shall not endanger my oratorical welfare by speaking it again. Suffice it for me to say that if you want to use that word yourselves, you will find it in the dictionary somewhere under F, or Z, or Ph, or some other letter which I cannot at this moment recall. But the poem goes on to say:

"Then as we sat
The road-side at —
His tears a moment quelling —
In accents pale
He told the tale
Which I am also telling."

"Dear me!" said a little green corporal at Jimmieboy's side. "Hasn't he begun the story yet?"

"Yes, stupid," said a high-private. "Of course he has; but it's one of those stories that take a long time to begin, and never finish until the very end."

"Oh yes, I know," said another. "It's a story like one I heard of the other day. You can lay it down whenever you want to, and be glad to have the chance."

"That's it," said the high-private.

"I wish you fellows would keep still," said the soldier who was reciting. "I ought to have been a quarter of the way through the first half of that poem by this time, and instead of that I'm only a sixteenth of the way through the first eighth."

"You can't expect to go more than eight miles an hour," said the corporal, "even in poetry like that. It can't be done."

"But what happened?" asked Jimmieboy, who was quite interested to hear the rest of the poem.

"I'll have to tell you some other time, general," replied the soldier. "These tin warriors here haven't any manners. Some day, when you have time to spare, I'll tell you the rest of it, because I know you'll be glad to hear it."

"Yes, general," put in the corporal, with a laugh. "Some day when you have a year to spare get him to tell you the first twenty-seventh of the next ninety-sixth of it. It won't take him more than eleven months and thirty-two days to do it."

"Bah!" said the poetic soldier, mounting his horse and riding off with an angry flush on his cheek. "Some day, when I get promoted to the ranks, I'll get even with you."

"Who is he, anyhow?" asked Jimmieboy, as the soldier rode off.

"He's Major Blueface, and he has to look after the luggage," replied the corporal. "And as for that poem of his, Jimmieboy, I want to warn you. He has a printed copy of it that takes seven trunks to carry. He says it was written by High-private Tinsel, but that's all nonsense. He wrote it himself."

"Then I like it all the better," said Jimmieboy. "I always like what people I like write."

"There's no accounting for tastes," returned the corporal. "We don't any of us like the major. That's why we made him major. Looking after luggage is such awfully hard work, we didn't want to make any one else do it, and so we elected him."

"Why don't you like him?" asked Jimmieboy. "He seems to me to be a very nice soldier."

"That's just it," returned the corporal. "He's just the kind of soldier to please little boys like you, and he'd look perfectly splendid in a white and gold parlor like your mamma's, but in camp he's a terror. Keeps his boots shined up like a looking-glass; wears his Sunday uniform all the time; in fact, he has seven Sunday uniforms – one for each day of the week; and altogether he makes the rest of us feel so mean and cheap that we can't like him. He offered a prize once to the soldier who'd like him the best, and who do you think won it?"

"I don't know," said Jimmieboy. "Who?"

"He won it himself," retorted the corporal. "Nobody else tried. But you'd better go over to the colonel's quarters right away, Jimmieboy. You know he wants you."

"He hasn't sent for me, has he?" asked the boy.

"Of course he has. That's what the major came to tell you," answered the corporal.

"But he didn't say so," returned Jimmieboy.

"No, he never does what he is sent to do," explained the corporal. "That's how we know. If he had told you the colonel wanted you, we'd all know the colonel didn't want you. He's a queer bird, that major. He's so anxious to read his poem to somebody that he always forgets his orders, and when he does half remember what he is sent to do, we can tell what the orders are by what he doesn't say."

"I shouldn't think he'd be a good man to look after the luggage if he forgets everything that way," said Jimmieboy.

"That's just where he's great," returned the corporal. "For, don't you see, every man in the regiment wants to carry about three times as much luggage as he ought to, and the major makes it all right by forgetting two-thirds of it. Oh, there's no denying that he's one of the greatest luggage men there ever was; but you run along now, or the colonel may lose his temper, and that always delays things."

"I'm not afraid of the colonel," said Jimmieboy, bravely.

"Neither are we," said the corporal, in reply to this, "but we don't like to have our campaign delayed, and when the colonel loses his temper we have to wait and wait until he finds it again. Sometimes it takes him a whole week."

So Jimmieboy, wondering more and more at the singular habits of the tin soldiers, ran off in search of the colonel, whom he found sitting by the brook-side fishing, and surrounded by his staff.

"Hello!" said Jimmieboy, as he caught sight of the colonel. "Having any luck?"

"Lots," said the colonel. "Been here only five minutes, and I've caught three hickory twigs, a piece of wire, and one of the finest colds in my head I ever had."

"Good," said Jimmieboy, with a laugh. "But aren't there any fish there?"

"Plenty of 'em," answered the colonel. "But they're all so small I'd have to throw 'em back if I caught 'em. They know that well enough, and so save me trouble by not biting. But I say, I suppose you know we can't start this expedition without ammunition?"

"What's that?" queried Jimmieboy, to whom the word ammunition was entirely new.

"Ammunition? Why, that's stuff to load our guns with," returned the colonel. "You must be a great general not to know that."

"You must excuse me," said Jimmieboy, with a blush. "There is a great deal that I don't know. I'm only five years old, and papa hasn't had time to tell me everything yet."

"Well, it's all right, anyhow," replied the colonel. "You'll learn a great deal in the next hundred years, so we won't criticise; but of course, you know, we can't go off without ammunition any more than a gun can. Now, as general of the forces, it is your duty to look about you and lay in the necessary supplies. For the guns we shall need about fourteen thousand rounds of preserved cherries, seventeen

thousand rounds of pickled peaches for the cannon, and a hundred and sixty-two dozen cans of strawberry jam for me."

Jimmieboy's eyes grew so round and large as he listened to these words that the major turned pale.

"Then," continued the colonel, "we have to have powder and shell, of course. Perhaps four hundred and sixteen pounds of powdered sugar and ninety-seven barrels of shells with almonds in 'em would do for our purposes."

"But – but what are we to do with all these things, and where am I to get them?" gasped Jimmieboy, beginning to be very sorry that he had accepted so important a position as that of general.

"Do with 'em?" cried the colonel. "What'll we do with 'em? Why, capture the Parallelopipedon, of course. What did you suppose we'd do with 'em – throw them at canary-birds?"

"You don't load guns with preserved cherries, do you?" asked the boy.

"We don't, eh? Well, I just guess we do," returned the colonel. "And we load the cannon with pickled peaches, and to keep me from deserting and going over to the enemy, they keep me loaded to the muzzle with strawberry jam from the time I start until we get back."

"You can't kill a Parawelopipedon with cherries and peaches, can you?" asked Jimmieboy.

"Not quite, but nearly," said the colonel. "We never hit him with enough of them to kill him, but just try to coax him with 'em, don't you see? We don't do as you do in your country. We don't shoot the enemy with lead bullets, and try to kill him and make him unhappy. We try to coax him back by shooting sweetmeats at him, and if he won't be coaxed, we bombard him with pickled peaches until they make him sick, and then he has to surrender."

"It must be pretty fine to be an enemy," said Jimmieboy, smacking his lips as he thought of being bombarded with sweetmeats.

"It is," exclaimed the colonel, with enthusiasm. "It's so nice, that they have to do the right thing by me in the matter of jam to keep me from being an enemy myself."

"But what do I get?" returned Jimmieboy, who couldn't see why it would not be pleasant for him to be an enemy, and get all these delightful things.

"You? Why, you get the almonds and the powdered sugar and all the mince-pie you can eat – what more do you want?" said the colonel.

"Nothing," gasped Jimmieboy, overcome by the prospect. "I wouldn't mind being a general for a million years at that rate."

With which noble sentiment the little fellow touched his cap to the colonel, and set off, accompanied by a dozen soldiers, to find the cherries, the peaches, the almonds, and the powdered sugar.

CHAPTER III. MAJOR BLUEFACE TRIES TO ASSIST

THE expedition under Jimmieboy's command had hardly been under way a quarter of an hour when the youthful general realized that the colonel had not told him where the cherries and peaches and other necessary supplies were to be found.

"Dear me," he said, stopping short in the road. "I don't know anything about this country, and I am sure I sha'n't be able to find all those good things – except in my mamma's pantry, and it would never do for me to take 'em from there. I might have to fight cook to get 'em, and that would be dreadful."

"Yes, it would," said Major Blueface, riding up as Jimmieboy spoke these words. "It would be terribly awful, for if you should fight with her now, she wouldn't make you a single pancake or pie or custard or anything after you got back."

"I'm glad you've come," said Jimmieboy, with a sigh of relief. "Perhaps you can tell me what I've got to do to get that ammu – that ammu – oh, that ammuknow, don't you?"

"Ammunition?" suggested the major.

"Yes, that's it," said Jimmieboy. "Could you tell me where to get it?"

"I could; but, really," returned the major, "I'm very much afraid I'd better not, unless you'll promise not to pay any attention to what I say."

"I don't see what good that would do," said Jimmieboy, a little surprised at the major's words. "What's the use of your saying anything, if I am not to pay any attention to you?"

"I'll tell you if you'll sit down a moment," was the major's reply, upon which he and Jimmieboy sat down on a log at the road-side.

The major then recited his story as follows:

"THE MAJOR'S MISFORTUNE

When I was born, some years ago,
The world was standing upside down;
Pekin was off in Mexico,
And Paris stood near Germantown.

The moon likewise was out of gear.
And shone most brilliantly by day;
The while the sun did not appear
Until the moon had gone away.

Which was, you see, a very strange,
Unhappy way of doing things,
And people did not like the change,
Save clods who took the rank of kings.

For kings as well were going wrong,
And 'stead of crowns wore beaver hats,
While those once mean and poor grew strong;
The dogs e'en ran from mice and rats.

The Frenchman spoke the Spanish tongue,
The Russian's words were Turkestan;
And England's nerves were all unstrung
By cockneys speaking Aryan.

Schools went to boys, and billie-goats
Drove children harnessed up to carts.
The rivers flowed up hill, and oats
Were fed to babies 'stead of tarts.

With things in this shape was I born.
The stars were topsy-turvy all,
And hence it is my fate forlorn
When things are short to call them tall;

When thing are black to call them white;
And if they're good to call them bad;
To say 'tis day when it is night;
To call an elephant a shad.

And when I say that this is this,
That it is that you'll surely know;
For truth's a thing I always miss,
And what I say is never so."

"Poor fellow!" cried Jimmieboy. "How very unpleasant! Is that really a true story?"

"No," returned the major, sadly. "It is not true."

And then Jimmieboy knew that it was true, and he felt very sorry for the major.

"Never mind, major," he said, tapping his companion affectionately on the shoulder. "I'll believe what you say if nobody else does."

"Oh, don't, don't! I beg of you, don't!" cried the major, anxiously. "I wouldn't have you do that for all the world. If you did, it would get us into all sorts of trouble. If I had thought you'd do that, I'd never have told you the story."

"Very well," said Jimmieboy, "then I won't. Only I should think you'd want to have somebody believe in you."

"Oh, you can believe in me all you want," returned the major. "I'm one of the finest fellows in the world, and worthy of anybody's friendship – and if anybody ought to know, Jimmieboy, I'm the one, for I know myself intimately. I've known myself ever since I was a little bit of a boy, and I can tell you if there's any man in the world who has a noble character and a good conscience and a heart in the right place, I'm him. It's only what I say you mustn't believe in. Remember that, and we shall be all right."

"All right," said Jimmieboy. "We'll do it that way. Now tell me what you don't know about finding preserved cherries and pickled peaches. We've got to lay in a very large supply of them, and I haven't the first idea how to get 'em."

"H'm! What I don't know about 'em would take a long time to tell," returned the major, with a shake of his head, "because there's so much of it. In the first place,

"I do not know

If cherries grow
On trees, or roofs, or rocks;
Or if they come
In cans – ho-hum! —
Or packed up in a box.

Mayhap you'll find
The proper kind
Down where they sell red paint;
And then, you see,
Oh, dear! Ah, me!
And then again you mayn't."

"That appears to settle the cherries," said Jimmieboy, somewhat impatiently, for it did seem to him that the major was wasting a great deal of valuable time.

"Oh, dear me, no!" ejaculated the major. "I could go on like that forever about cherries. For instance:

"You might perchance
Get some in France,
And some in Germany;
A crate or two
In far Barboo,
And some in Labradee."

"Where's Labradee?" asked Jimmieboy.

"It's Labrador," said the major, with a smile; "but Labradee rhymes better with Germany, and as long as you know I'm not telling the truth, and are not likely to go there, it doesn't make any difference if I change it a little."

"That's so," said Jimmieboy, with a snicker. "But how about those peaches? Do you know anything that isn't so about them?"

"Oh, yes, lots," said the major.

"I know that when the peach is green,
And growing on the tree,
It's harder than a common bean,
And yellow as can be.

I know that if you eat a peach
That's just a bit too young,
A lesson strong the act will teach,
And leave your nerves unstrung.

And, furthermore, I know this fact:
The crop, however hale
In every year before 'tis packed,
Doth never fail to fail."

"That's very interesting," said Jimmieboy, when the major had recited these lines, "but it doesn't help me a bit. What I want to know is how the pickled peaches are to be found, and where."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the major. "Well, it's easy enough to tell you that. First as to how you are to find them – this applies to huckleberries and daisies and fire-engines and everything else, just as well as it does to peaches, so you'd better listen. It's a very valuable thing to know.

"The way to find a pickled peach,
A cow, or piece of pumpkin pie,
A simple lesson is to teach,
As can be seen with half an eye.

Look up the road and down the road,
Look North and South and East and West.
Let not a single episode
Come in betwixt you and your quest.

Search morning, night, and afternoon,
From Monday until Saturday;
By light of sun and that of moon,
Nor mind the troubles in your way.

And keep this up until you get
The thing that you are looking for,
And then, of course, you need not fret
About the matter any more."

"You are a great help," said Jimmieboy.

"Don't mention it, my dear boy," replied the major, so pleased that he smiled and cracked some of the red enamel on his lips. "I like to be useful. It's almost as good as being youthful. In fact, to people who lisp and pronounce their esses as though they were teeaitches, it's quite the same. It was very easy to tell you how to find a pickled peach, but it's much harder to tell you where. In fact, I don't know that I can tell you where, but if I were not compelled to ignore the truth I should inform you at once that I haven't the slightest idea. But, of course, I can tell you where you might find them if they were there – which, of course, they aren't. For instance:

"Pickled peaches might be found
In the gold mines underground;

Pickled peaches might be seen
Rolling down the Bowling Green;

Pickled peaches might spring up
In a bed of custard cup;

Pickled peaches might sprout forth
From an ice-cake in the North;

I have seen them in the South
In a pickaninny's mouth;

I have seen them in the West
Hid inside a cowboy's vest;

I have seen them in the East
At a small boy's birthday feast;

Maybe, too, a few you'd see
In the land of the Chinees;

And this statement broad I'll dare:
You might find them anywhere."

"Thank you," said Jimmieboy. "I feel easier now that I know all this. I don't know what I should have done if I hadn't met you, major."

"It's very unkind of you to say so," said the major, very much pleased by Jimmieboy's appreciation. "Of course you know what I mean."

"Yes," answered Jimmieboy, "I do. Now I'll tell you what I think. I think pickled peaches come in cans and bottles."

"Bottles and cans,
Bottles and cans,
When a man marries it ruins his plans,"

quoted the major. "I got married once," he added, "but I became a bachelor again right off. My wife wrote better poetry than I could, and I couldn't stand that, you know. That's how I came to be a soldier."

"That hasn't anything to do with the pickled peaches," said Jimmieboy, impatiently. "Now, unless I am very much mistaken, we can go to the grocery store and buy a few bottles."

"Ho!" jeered the major. "What's the use of buying bottles when you're after pickled peaches?"

'Of all the futile, futile things —
Remarked the Apogee —
That is as truly futilest
As futilest can be.'

You never heard my poem on the Apogee, did you, Jimmieboy?"

"No. I never even heard of an Apogee. What is an Apogee, anyhow?" asked the boy.

"To give definitions isn't a part of my bargain," answered the major. "I haven't the slightest idea what an Apogee is. He may be a bird with a whole file of unpaid bills, for all I know, but I wrote a poem about him once that made another poet so jealous that he purposely caught a bad cold and sneezed his head off; and I don't blame him either, because it was a magnificent thing in its way. I'll tell it to you. Listen:

"THE APOGEE

The Apogee wept saline tears
Into the saline sea,

To overhear two mutineers
Discuss their pedigree.Said he:
Of all the futile, futile things
That ever I did see.
That is as truly futilest
As futilest can be.

He hied him thence to his hotel,
And there it made him ill
To hear a pretty damosel
A bass song try to trill.Said he:
Of all the futile, futile things —
To say it I am free —
That is about the futilest
That ever I did see.

He went from sea to mountain height,
And there he heard a lad
Of sixty-eight compare the sight
To other views he'd had;And he
Remarked: Of all the futile things
That ever came to me,
This is as futily futile
As futile well can be.

Then in disgust he went back home,
His door-bell rang all day,
But no one to the door did come:
The butler'd gone away.Said he:
This is the strangest, queerest world
That ever I did see.
It's two per cent. of earth, and nine-
Ty-eight futility."

"Isn't that elegant?" added the major, when he had finished.

"It sounds well," said Jimmieboy. "But what does it mean? What's futile?"

"Futile? What does futile mean?" said the major, slowly. "Why, it's – it's a word, you know, and sort of stands for 'what's the use.'"

"Oh," replied Jimmieboy. "I see. To be futile means that you are wasting time, eh?"

"That's it," said the major. "I'm glad you said it and not I, because that makes it true. If I'd said it, it wouldn't have been so."

"Well, all I've got to say," said Jimmieboy, "is that if anybody ever came to me and asked me where he could find a futile person, I'd send him over to you. Here we've wasted nearly the whole afternoon and we haven't got a single thing. We haven't even talked of anything but peaches and cherries, and we've got to get jam and sugar and almonds yet."

Here the major smiled.

"It isn't any laughing matter," said Jimmieboy. "It's a very serious piece of business, in fact. Here's this Parawelopipedon going around ruining everything he can lay his claws on, and instead

of helping me out of the fix I'm in, and starting the expedition off, you sit here and tell me about Apogees and other things I haven't time to hear about."

"I was only smiling to show how sorry I was," said the major, apologetically.

"I always smile when I am sad,
And when I'm filled with glee
A solitary tear-drop trick-
Les down the cheek of me."

"Oh, that's it," said Jimmieboy. "Well, let's stop fooling now and get those supplies."

"All right," assented the major. "Where are the soldiers who accompanied you? We'll give 'em their orders, and you'll have the supplies in no time."

"How's that?" queried Jimmieboy.

"Why, don't you see," said the major, "that's the nice thing about being a general. If you have to do something you don't know how to do, you command your men to go and do it. That lifts the responsibility from your shoulders to theirs. They don't dare disobey, and there you are."

"Good enough!" cried Jimmieboy, delighted to find so easy a way out of his troubles. "I'll give them their orders at once. I'll tell them to get the supplies. Will they surely do it?"

"They'll have to, or be put in the guard-house," returned the major. "And they don't like that, you know, because the guard-house hasn't any walls, and it's awfully draughty. But, as I said before, where are the soldiers?"

"Why!" said Jimmieboy, starting up and looking anxiously about him. "They've gone, haven't they?"

"They seem to have," said the major, putting his hand over his eyes and gazing up and down the road, upon which no sign of Jimmieboy's command was visible. "You ordered them to halt when you sat down here, didn't you?"

"No," said Jimmieboy, "I didn't."

"Then that accounts for it," returned the major, with a scornful glance at Jimmieboy. "They've gone on. They couldn't halt without orders, and they must be eight miles from here by this time."

"What'll happen?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"What'll happen?" echoed the major. "Why, they'll march on forever unless you get word to them to halt. You are a gay general, you are."

"But what's to be done?" asked Jimmieboy, growing tearful.

"There are only two things you can do. The earth is round, and in a few years they'll pass this way again, and then you can tell them to stop. That's one thing you can do. The second is to despatch me on horseback to overtake and tell them to keep right on. They'll know what you mean, and they'll halt and wait until you come up."

"That's the best plan," cried Jimmieboy, with a sigh of relief. "You hurry ahead and make them wait for me, and I'll come along as fast as I can."

So the major mounted his horse and galloped away, leaving Jimmieboy alone in the road, trudging manfully ahead as fast as his small legs could carry him.

CHAPTER IV.

JIMMIEBOY MEETS THE ENEMY

AS the noise made by the clattering hoofs of Major Blueface's horse grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away entirely in the distance, Jimmieboy was a little startled to hear something that sounded very like a hiss in the trees behind him. At first he thought it was the light breeze blowing through the branches, making the leaves rustle, but when it was repeated he stopped short in the road and glanced backward, grasping his sword as he did so.

"Hello there!" he cried. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Sh-sh-sh!" answered the mysterious something. "Don't talk so loud, general, the major may come back."

"What if he does?" said Jimmieboy. "I rather think I wish he would. I don't know whether or not I'm big enough not to be afraid of you. Can't you come out of the bushes and let me see you?"

"Not unless the major is out of sight," was the answer. "I can't stand the major; but you needn't be afraid of me. I wouldn't hurt you for all the world. I'm the enemy."

"The what?" cried Jimmieboy, aghast.

"I'm the enemy," replied the invisible object. "That's what I call myself when I'm with sensible people. Other people have a long name for me that I never could pronounce or spell. I'm the animal that got away."

"Not the Parallelopedon?" said Jimmieboy.

"That's it! That's the name I can't pronounce," said the invisible animal. "I'm the Parallelandsforth, and I've been trying to have an interview with you ever since I heard they'd made you general. The fact is, Jimmieboy, I am very anxious that you should succeed in capturing me, because I don't like it out here very much. The fences are the toughest eating I ever had, and I actually sprained my wisdom-tooth at breakfast this morning trying to bite a brown stone ball off the top of a gate post."

"But if you feel that way," said Jimmieboy, somewhat surprised at this unusual occurrence, "why don't you surrender?"

"Me?" cried the Parallelopedon. "A Parallelandsforth of my standing surrender right on the eve of a battle that means all the sweetmeats I can eat, and more too? I guess not."

"I wish I could see you," said Jimmieboy, earnestly. "I don't like standing here talking to a wee little voice with nothing to him. Why don't you come out here where I can see you?"

"It's for your good, Jimmieboy; that's why I stay in here. I am an awful spectacle. Why, it puts me all in a tremble just to look at myself; and if it affects me that way, just think how it would be with you."

"I wouldn't be afraid," said Jimmieboy, bravely.

"Yes, you would too," answered the Parallelopedon. "You'd be so scared you couldn't run, I am so ugly. Didn't the major tell you that story about my reflection in the looking-glass?"

"No," answered Jimmieboy. "He didn't say anything about it."

"That's queer. The story is in rhyme, and the major always tells everybody all the poetry he knows," said the invisible enemy. "That's why I never go near him. He has only enough to last one year, and the second year he tells it all over again. I'm surprised he never told you about my reflection in the mirror, because it is one of his worst, and he always likes them better than the others."

"I'll ask him to tell it to me next time I see him," said Jimmieboy, "unless you'll tell it to me now."

"I'd just as lief tell you," said the Parallelopedon. "Only you mustn't laugh or cry, because you haven't time to laugh, and generals never cry. This is the way it goes:

"THE PARALLELOPIPEDON AND THE MIRROR

The Parallelopedon so very ugly is,
His own heart fills with terror when he looks upon his phiz.
That's why he wears blue goggles – twenty pairs upon his nose,
And never dares to show himself, no matter where he goes.

One day when he was walking down a crowded village street,
He looked into a little shop where stood a mirror neat.
He saw his own reflection there as plain as plain could be;
And said, 'I'd give four dollars if that really wasn't me.'

And, strange to say, the figure in the mirror's silver face
Was also filled with terror at the other's lack of grace;
And this reflection trembled till it strangely came to pass
The handsome mirror shivered to ten thousand bits of glass.

To this tale there's a moral, and that moral briefly is:
If you perchance are burdened with a terrifying phiz,
Don't look into your mirror – 'tis a fearful risk to take —
'Tis certain sure to happen that the mirror it will break."

"Well, if that's so, I guess I don't want to see you," said Jimmieboy. "I only like pretty things. But tell me; if all this is true, how did the major come to say it? I thought he couldn't tell the truth."

"That's only as a rule. Rules have exceptions. For instance," explained the Parallelopedon, "as a rule I can't pronounce my name, but in reciting that poem to you I did speak my name in the very first line – but if you only knew how it hurt me to do it! Oh dear me, how it hurt! Did you ever have a tooth pulled?"

"Once," said Jimmieboy, wincing at the remembrance of his painful experience.

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