The Westminster Alice

by Saki

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WESTMINSTER ALICE ***

THE WESTMINSTER ALICE

BY HECTOR H. MUNRO (“SAKI”)

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With apologies to Sir John Tenniel and to everybody else concerned, including Messrs. Macmillan and Co., Limited, to whose courtesy we are indebted for permission to publish these political applications of the immortal adventures of Lewis Carroll’s Alice.

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THE WESTMINSTER ALICE

INTRODUCTION

“Alice,” Child with dreaming eyes, Noting things that come to pass Turvey-wise in Wonderland Backwards through a Looking-Glass.

Figures flit across thy dream, Muddle through and flicker out Some in cocksure blessedness, Some in Philosophic Doubt.

Some in brackets, some in sulks, Some with latchkeys on the ramp, Living (in a sort of peace) In a Concentration Camp.

Party moves on either side, Checks and feints that don't deceive, Knights and Bishops, Pawns and all, In a game of Make-Believe.

Things that fall contrariwise, Difficult to understand, Darkly through a Looking-Glass Turvey-wise in Wonderland.

ALICE IN DOWNING STREET

"Have you ever seen an Ineptitude?" asked the Cheshire Cat suddenly; the Cat was nothing if not abrupt.

"CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU ARE DOING HERE?" ALICE INQUIRED POLITELY.

"Not in real life," said Alice. "Have you any about here?"

"A few," answered the Cat comprehensively. "Over there, for instance," it added, contracting its pupils to the requisite focus, "is the most perfect specimen we have."

Alice followed the direction of its glance and noticed for the first time a figure sitting in a very uncomfortable attitude on nothing in particular. Alice had no time to wonder how it managed to do it, she was busy taking in the appearance of the creature, which was something like a badly-written note of interrogation and something like a guillemot, and seemed to have been trying to preen its rather untidy plumage with whitewash. "What a dreadful mess it's in!" she remarked, after gazing at it for a few moments in silence. "What is it, and why is it here?"

"It hasn't any meaning," said the Cat, "it simply is."

"Can it talk?" asked Alice eagerly.

"It has never done anything else," chuckled the Cat.

"Can you tell me what you are doing here?" Alice inquired politely. The Ineptitude shook its head with a deprecatory motion and commenced to drawl, "I haven't an idea."

“It never has, you know,” interrupted the Cheshire Cat rudely, “but in its leisure moments” (Alice thought it must have a good many of them) “when it isn’t playing with a gutta-percha ball it unravels the groundwork of what people believe—or don’t believe, I forget which.”

THE QUEEN.

with apologies to Sir John Tenniel

“It really doesn’t matter which,” said the Ineptitude, with languid interest.

“Of course it doesn’t,” the Cat went on cheerfully, “because the unravelling got so tangled that no one could follow it. Its theory is,” he continued, seeing that Alice was waiting for more, “that you mustn’t interfere with the Inevitable. Slide and let slide, you know.”

“But what do you keep it here for?” asked Alice.

“Oh, somehow you can’t help it; it’s so perfectly harmless and amiable and says the nastiest things in the nicest manner, and the King just couldn’t do without it. The King is only made of pasteboard, you know, with sharp edges; and the Queen”—here the Cat sank its voice to a whisper—“the Queen comes from another pack, made of Brummagem ware, without polish, but absolutely indestructible; always pushing, you know; but you can’t push an Ineptitude. Might as well try to hustle a glacier.”

“That’s why you keep so many of them about,” said Alice.

“Of course. But its temper is not what it used to be. Lots of things have happened to worry it.”

“What sort of things?”

“Oh, people have been dying off in round numbers, in the most ostentatious manner, and the Ineptitude dislikes fuss—but hush, here’s the King coming.”

His Majesty was looking doleful and grumpy, Alice thought, as though he had been

disturbed in an afternoon nap. “Who is this, and what is that Cat doing here?” he asked, glancing gloomily at Alice and her companion.

THE KING WAS FAST ASLEEP.

“I really must ask you to give me notice of these questions,” said the Ineptitude, with a yawn.

“There’s a dragon loose somewhere in the garden,” the King went on peevishly, “and I am expected to help in getting it under control. Do I look as if I could control dragons?”

Alice thought he certainly did not.

“What do you propose doing?” drawled the Ineptitude.

“That’s just it,” said the King. “I say that whatever is done must be done cautiously and deliberately; the Treasurer says that whatever is done must be done cheaply—I am afraid the Treasurer is the weakest member of the pack,” he added anxiously.

“Only made of Bristol board, you know,” explained the Cat aside to Alice.

“What does the Queen say about it?” asked the Ineptitude.

“The Queen says that if something is not done in less than no time there’ll be a Dissolution.”

Both looked very grave at this, and nothing was said for some minutes. The King was the first to break the silence. “What are you doing with that whitewash?” he demanded. “The Queen said everything was to be painted khaki.”

“I know,” said the creature pathetically, “but I had run out of khaki; the Unforeseen again, you know; and things needed whitewash so badly.”

The Cat had been slowly vanishing during the last few minutes, till nothing remained of it but an eye. At the last remark it gave a wink at Alice and completed its eclipse.

When Alice turned round she found that both the King and the Ineptitude were fast

asleep.

“It’s no good remaining here,” she thought, and as she did not want to meet either the Queen or the dragon, she turned to make her way out of the street.

“At any rate,” she said to herself, “I know what an Ineptitude is like.”

ALICE IN PALL MALL

“The great art in falling off a horse,” said the White Knight, “is to have another handy to fall on to.”

“But wouldn’t that be rather difficult to arrange?” asked Alice.

“Difficult, of course,” replied the Knight, “but in my Department one has to be provided for emergencies. Now, for instance, have you ever conducted a war in South Africa?”

Alice shook her head.

“I have,” said the Knight, with a gentle complacency in his voice.

“And did you bring it to a successful conclusion?” asked Alice.

“Not exactly to a conclusion—not a definite conclusion, you know—nor entirely successful either. In fact, I believe it’s going on still.... But you can’t think how much forethought it took to get it properly started. I dare say, now, you are wondering at my equipment?”

ALICE AND THE WHITE KNIGHT.

(With apologies to Sir John Tenniel.)

Alice certainly was; the Knight was riding rather uncomfortably on a sober-paced horse that was prevented from moving any faster by an elaborate housing of red-tape trappings. “Of course, I see the reason for that,” thought Alice; “if it were to move any quicker the Knight would come off.” But there were a number of obsolete weapons and appliances hanging about the saddle that didn’t seem of the least

practical use.

“You see, I had read a book,” the Knight went on in a dreamy, far-away tone, “written by some one to prove that warfare under modern conditions was impossible. You may imagine how disturbing that was to a man of my profession. Many men would have thrown up the whole thing and gone home. But I grappled with the situation. You will never guess what I did.”

Alice pondered. “You went to war, of course——”

“Yes; but not under modern conditions.”

The Knight stopped his horse so that he might enjoy the full effect of this announcement.

“Now, for instance,” he continued kindly, seeing that Alice had not recovered her breath, “you observe this little short-range gun that I have hanging to my saddle? Why do you suppose I sent out guns of that particular kind? Because if they happened to fall into the hands of the enemy they’d be very little use to him. That was my own invention.”

“I see,” said Alice gravely; “but supposing you wanted to use them against the enemy?”

The Knight looked worried. “I know there is that to be thought of, but I didn’t choose to be putting dangerous weapons into the enemy’s hands. And then, again, supposing the Basutos had risen, those would have been just the sort of guns to drive them off with. Of course they didn’t rise; but they might have done so, you know.”

At this moment the horse suddenly went on again, and the Knight clutched convulsively at its mane to prevent himself from coming off.

“That’s the worst of horses,” he remarked apologetically; “they are so Unforeseen in their movements. Now, if I had had my way I would have done without them as far as possible—in fact, I began that way, only it didn’t answer. And yet,” he went on in

an aggrieved tone, “at Cressy it was the footmen who did the most damage.”

“But,” objected Alice, “if your men hadn’t got horses how could they get about from place to place?”

“They couldn’t. That would be the beauty of it,” said the White Knight eagerly; “the fewer places your army moves to, the fewer maps you have to prepare. And we hadn’t prepared very many. I’m not very strong at geography, but,” he added, brightening, “you should hear me talk French.”

“But,” persisted Alice, “supposing the enemy went and attacked you at some other place——”

ANOTHER HANDY TO FALL ON TO.

“They did,” interrupted the Knight gloomily; “they appeared in strength at places that weren’t even marked on the ordinary maps. But how do you think they got there?”

He paused and fixed his gentle eyes upon Alice as she walked beside him, and then continued in a hollow voice—

“They rode. Rode and carried rifles. They were no mortal foes—they were Mounted Infantry.”

The Knight swayed about so with the violence of his emotion that it was inevitable that he should lose his seat, and Alice was relieved to notice that there was another horse with an empty saddle ready for him to scramble on to. There was a frightful dust, of course, but Alice saw him gathering the reins of his new mount into a bunch, and smiling down upon her with increased amiability.

“It’s not an easy animal to manage,” he called out to her, “but if I pat it and speak to it in French it will probably understand where I want it to go. And,” he added hopefully, “it may go there. A knowledge of French and an amiable disposition will see one out of most things.”

"Well," thought Alice as she watched him settling down uneasily into the saddle, "it ought not to take long to see him out of that."

ALICE AT LAMBETH

There was so much noise inside that Alice thought she might as well go in without knocking.

The atmosphere was as noticeable as the noise when Alice got in, and seemed to be heavily charged with pepper. There was a faint whiff of burning incense, and some candles that had just been put out were smouldering unpleasantly. Quite a number of Articles were strewn about on the floor, some of them more or less broken. The Duchess was seated in the middle of the kitchen, holding, as well as she could, a very unmanageable baby that kept wriggling itself into all manner of postures and uncompromising attitudes. At the back of the kitchen a cook was busily engaged in stirring up a large cauldron, pausing every now and then to fling a reredos or half a rubric at the Duchess, who maintained an air of placid unconcern in spite of the combined fractiousness of the baby and cook and the obtrusiveness of the pepper.

"Your cook seems to have a very violent temper," said Alice, as soon as a lull in the discord enabled her to make herself heard.

THE DUCHESS, THE BABY, AND THE COOK.

(With apologies to Sir John Tenniel.)

"Drat her!" said the Duchess.

"I beg your pardon," said Alice, not quite sure whether she had heard aright; "your Grace was remarking——"

"Pax vobiscum, was what I said," answered the Duchess; "there's nothing like a dead language when you're dealing with a live volcano."

"But aren't you going to do something to set matters straight a bit?" asked Alice,

dodging a whole set of Ornaments that went skimming through the air, and watching with some anxiety the contortions of the baby, which was getting more difficult to hold every moment.

“Of course something must be done,” said the Duchess, with decision, “but quietly and gradually—the leaden foot within the velvet shoe, you know.”

Alice seemed to recognise the quotation, but she did not notice that anything particular was being done. “At the rate you’re going, it will be years before you get settled,” she remarked.

“Perhaps it will,” said the Duchess resignedly. “I’m paid by the year, you know. Festina lente, say I.”

“But surely you can keep some sort of order in your Establishment?” said Alice. “Why don’t you exert your authority?”

“My dear, it takes me all the exertion I can spare to have any authority. I give orders, and it’s my endeavour not to see that they’re disobeyed. I’m sure I’ve given this child my Opinion—but there, you might as well opine to a limpet. As to the cook——”

“I ALWAYS SAID IT WOULD,” SAID THE CAT.

Here the cook sent the pepper-pot straight at the Duchess, who broke off in a violent fit of sneezing. In the midst of the commotion the baby suddenly disappeared, and as the cook had taken up a new caster labelled “cayenne” Alice thought she might as well go and see where it had gone to. As she slipped out of the kitchen she heard the Duchess gasping between her sneezes, “Must ... be done ... quietly ... and ... gradually.”

* * * * * *

“What happened to the baby?” asked the Cheshire Cat, appearing suddenly a few minutes later.

“It went out—to roam, I think,” said Alice.

“I always said it would,” said the Cat.

ALICE AND THE LIBERAL PARTY

Quite a number of them were going past, and the noise was considerable, but they were marching in sixes and sevens and didn’t seem to be guided by any fixed word of command, so that the effect was not so imposing as it might have been. Some of them, Alice noticed, had the letters “I.L.” embroidered on their tunics and headpieces and other conspicuous places (“I wonder,” she thought, “if it’s marked on their underclothing as well”); others simply had a big “L,” and others again were branded with a little “e.” They got dreadfully in each other’s way, and were always falling over one another in little heaps, while many of the mounted ones did not seem at all sure of their seats. “They won’t go very far if they don’t fall into better order,” thought Alice, and she was glad to find herself the next minute in a spacious hall with a large marble staircase at one end of it. The White King was sitting on one of the steps, looking rather anxious and just a little uncomfortable under his heavy crown, which needed a good deal of balancing to keep it in its place.

THE PRIMROSE MESSENGER. “Out of reach.” THE UNKHAKI MESSENGER. “Out of touch.”

“Did you happen to meet any fighting men?” he asked Alice.

“A great many—two or three hundred, I should think.”

“Not quite two hundred, all told,” said the King, referring to his note-book.

“Told what?” asked Alice.

“Well, they haven’t been told anything, exactly—yet. The fact is,” the King went on nervously, “we’re rather in want of a messenger just now. I don’t know how it is, there are two or three of them about, but lately they have always been either out of

reach or else out of touch. You don't happen to have passed any one coming from the direction of Berkeley Square?" he asked eagerly.

Alice shook her head.

"There's the Primrose Courier, for instance," the King continued reflectively, "the most reliable Messenger we have; he understands all about Open Doors and Linked Hands and all that sort of thing, and he's quite as useful at home. But he frightens some of them nearly out of their wits by his Imperial Anglo-Saxon attitudes. I wouldn't mind his skipping about so if he'd only come back when he's wanted."

"And haven't you got any one else to carry your messages?" asked Alice sympathetically.

"There's the Unkhaki Messenger," said the King, consulting his pocket-book.

"I beg your pardon," said Alice.

"You know what Khaki means?" I suppose.

"It's a sort of colour," said Alice promptly; "something like dust."

"Exactly," said the King; "thou dost—he doesn't. That's why he's called the Unkhaki Messenger."

Alice gave it up.

"Such a dear, obliging creature," the King went on, "but so dreadfully unpunctual. He's always half a century in front of his times or half a century behind them, and that puts one out so."

Alice agreed that it would make a difference.

"It's helped to put us out quite six years already," the King went on plaintively; "but you can't cure him of it. You see he will wander about in byways and deserts, hunting for Lost Causes, and whenever he comes across a stream he always wades against the current. All that takes him out of his way, you know; he's somewhere up in the Grampian Hills by this time."

“I see,” said Alice; “that’s what you mean by being out of touch. And the other Messenger is—”

“Out of reach,” said the King. “Precisely.”

“Then it follows——” said Alice.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘it,’” interrupted the King sulkily. “No one follows. That is why we stick in the same place. DON’T!” he suddenly screamed, jumping up and down in his agitation. “Don’t do it, I say.”

“Do what?” asked Alice, in some alarm.

“Give advice. I know you’re going to. They’ve all been doing it for the last six weeks. I assure you the letters I get——”

“I wasn’t going to give you advice,” said Alice indignantly, “and as to letters, you’ve got too much alphabet as it is.”

“Why, you’re doing it now,” said the King angrily. “Good-bye.”

As Alice took the hint and walked away towards the door she heard him calling after her in a kinder tone: “If you should meet any one coming from the direction of Berkeley Square——”

ALICE ANYWHERE BUT IN DOWNING STREET

“I don’t know what business you have here,” the Red Queen was saying, “if you don’t belong to the Cabinet; of course,” she added more kindly, “you may be one of the outer ring. There are so many of them, and they’re mostly so unimportant that one can’t be expected to remember all their faces.”

“What is your business?” asked Alice, by way of evading the question.

“There isn’t any business really,” said the White Queen. “Her Red Majesty sometimes says more than she means. Fancy,” she added eagerly, “I went round in 85 yesterday!”

“Round what?” asked Alice.

“The Links, of course.”

“Talking about a Lynx,” said the Red Queen, “are you any good at Natural History? Take prestige from a Lion, what would remain?”

“The prestige wouldn’t, of course,” said Alice, “and the Lion might not care to be without it. I suppose nothing——”

“I should remain, whatever happened,” said the Red Queen, with decision.

(With apologies to Sir John Tenniel.)

“She’s no good at Natural History,” observed the White Queen. “Shall I try her with Christian Science? If there was a sort of warfare going on in a kind of a country, and you wanted to stop it, and didn’t know how to, what course of inaction would you pursue?”

“Action you mean. Her White Majesty occasionally muddles things,” interposed the Red Queen.

“It amounts to much the same thing with us,” said the White Queen.

Alice pondered. “I suppose I should resign,” she hazarded.

Both Queens gasped and held up their hands in reprobation.

“A most improper suggestion,” said the White Queen severely. “Now I should simply convince my reasoning faculty that the war didn’t exist—and there’d be an end of it.”

“But,” objected Alice, “supposing the war was to assume that your reasoning faculty was wanting, and went on all the same?”

“The child is talking nonsense,” said the Red Queen; “she doesn’t know anything of Christian Science. Let’s try Political Economy. Supposing you were pledged to introduce a scheme for Old-Age Pensions, what would be your next step?”

Alice considered. “I should think——”

“Of course you’d think,” said the White Queen, “ever so much. You’d go on thinking off and on for years. I can’t tell you how much I’ve thought about it myself; I still think about it a little, just for practice—principally on Tuesdays.”

“I should think,” continued Alice, without noticing the interruption, “that the first thing would be to find the money.”

“Dear, no,” said the Red Queen pityingly, “that wouldn’t be Political Economy. The first thing would be to find an excuse for dropping the question.”

(With apologies to Sir John Tenniel.)

“What a dreadful lot of unnecessary business we’re talking!” said the White Queen fretfully. “It makes me quite miserable—carries me back to the days when I was in Opposition. Can’t she sing us something?”

“What shall I sing you?” asked Alice.

“Oh, anything soothing; the ‘Intercessional,’ if you like.”

Alice began, but the words didn’t come a bit right, and she wasn’t at all sure how the Queens would take it:

“Voice of the People, lately polled, Awed by our broad-cast battle scheme, By virtue of whose vote we hold Our licence still to doze and dream, Still, falt’ring Voice, complaisant shout, Lest we go out, lest we go out.”

Alice looked anxiously at the Queens when she had finished, but they were both fast asleep.

“It will take a deal of shouting to rouse them,” she thought.

ALICE IN DIFFICULTIES

“How are you getting on?” asked the Cheshire Cat.

“I’m not,” said Alice.

Which was certainly the truth.

It was the most provoking and bewildering game of croquet she had ever played in. The other side did not seem to know what they were expected to do, and, for the most part, they weren't doing anything, so Alice thought she might have a good chance of winning—though she was ever so many hoops behind. But the ground she had to play over was all lumps and furrows, and some of the hoops were three-cornered in shape, which made them difficult to get through, while as for the balls (which were live hedgehogs and very opinionated), it was all she could do to keep them in position for a minute at a time. Then the flamingo which she was using as a mallet kept stiffening itself into uncompromising attitudes, and had to be coaxed back into a good temper.

"I think I can manage him now," she said, "since I let him have a latchkey and allowed him to take up the position he wanted he has been quite amiable. The other flamingo I was playing with," she added regretfully, "strayed off into a furrow. The last I saw of it, it was trying to bore a tunnel."

"HOW ARE YOU GETTING ON?" ASKED THE CHESHIRE CAT.

"A tunnel?" said the Cat.

"Yes; under the sea, you know."

"I see; to avoid the cross-current, of course."

Alice waited till the Cat had stopped grinning at its own joke, and then went on—

THE OTHER FLAMINGO.

"As for the hedgehogs, there's no doing anything with them; they've got such prickly tempers. And they're so short-sighted; if they don't happen to be looking the same way they invariably run against each other. I should have won that last hoop if both hedgehogs hadn't tried to get through at the same time."

"Both?"

“Yes, the one I was playing with and the one I wasn’t. And every one began shouting out all sorts of different directions till I scarcely knew which I was playing with. Really,” she continued plaintively, “it’s the most discouraging croquet-party I was ever at; if we go on like this there soon won’t be any party at all.”

“It’s no use swearing and humping your back,” said the Cat sympathetically. (Alice hadn’t done either.) “Keep your temper and your flamingo.”

“Is that all?”

“No,” said the Cat; “keep on playing with the right ball.”

“Which is the right ball?” asked Alice.

But the Cat had discreetly vanished.

ALICE AT ST. STEPHEN’S

“It’s very provoking,” said Alice to herself; she had been trying for the previous quarter of an hour to attract the attention of a large and very solemn caterpillar that was perched on the top of a big mushroom with a Gothic fringe. “I’ve heard that the only chance of speaking to it is to catch its eye,” she continued, but she found out that however perseveringly she thrust herself into the Caterpillar’s range of vision its eye persistently looked beyond her, or beneath her, or around her—never at her. Alice had read somewhere that little girls should be seen and not heard; “but,” she thought, “I’m not even seen here, and if I’m not to be heard, what am I here at all for?” In any case she determined to make an attempt at conversation.

“If you please——” she began.

“I don’t,” said the Caterpillar shortly, without seeming to take any further notice of her.

After an uncomfortable pause she commenced again.

“I should like——”

“You shouldn’t,” said the Caterpillar, with decision.

Alice felt discouraged, but it was no use to be shut up in this way, so she started again as amiably as she could.

“You can’t think, Mr. Caterpillar——”

“I can, and I often do,” he remarked stiffly; adding, “You mustn’t make such wild statements. They’re not relevant to the discussion.”

“But I only said that in order——”

“You didn’t,” said the Caterpillar angrily. “I tell you it was not in order.”

“You are so dreadfully short,” exclaimed Alice; the Caterpillar drew itself up.

“In manner, I mean; no—in memory,” she added hastily, for it was thoroughly angry by this time.

“I’m sure I didn’t mean anything,” she continued humbly, for she felt that it was absurd to quarrel with a caterpillar.

The Caterpillar snorted.

“What’s the good of talking if you don’t mean anything? If you’ve talked all this time without meaning anything you’re not worth listening to.”

“But you put a wrong construction——” Alice began.

“You can’t discuss Construction now, you know; that comes on the Estimates. Shrivel!”

“I don’t understand,” said Alice.

“Shrivel. Dry up,” explained the Caterpillar, and proceeded to look in another direction, as if it had forgotten her existence.

“Good-bye,” said Alice, after waiting a moment; she half hoped that the Caterpillar might say, “See you later,” but it took not the slightest notice of her remark, so she got up reluctantly and walked away.

“Well, of all the gubernatorial——” said Alice to herself when she got outside. She did not quite know what it meant, but it was an immense relief to be able to come out with a word of six syllables.

ALICE LUNCHES AT WESTMINSTER

(With apologies to Everybody.)

“I think I would rather not hear it just now,” said Alice politely.

“It is expressly intended for publication,” said Humpty Dumpty; “I don’t suppose there’ll be a paper to-morrow that won’t be talking about it.”

“In that case I suppose I may as well hear it,” said Alice, with resignation.

“The scene,” said Humpty Dumpty, “is Before Ladysmith, and the time—well, the time is After Colenso:

I sent a message to the White To tell him—if you must, you might.

But then, I said, you p’raps might not (The weather was extremely hot).

This query, too, I spatchcock-slid, How would you do it, if you did?

I did not know, I rather thought— And then I wondered if I ought.”

“It’s dreadfully hard to understand,” said Alice.

“It gets easier as it goes on,” said Humpty Dumpty, and resumed—

They tried a most malignant scheme, They put dead horses in the stream;

(With One at home I saw it bore On preference for a horseless war).

But though I held the war might cease, At least I never held my peace.

I held the key; it was a bore I could not hit upon the door.

Then One suggested, in my ear, It would be well to persevere.

The papers followed in that strain, They said it very loud and plain.

I simply answered with a grin, “Why, what a hurry they are in!”

I went and played a waiting game; Observe, I got there just the same.

And if you have a better man, Well, show him to me, if you can.

“Thank you very much,” said Alice; “it’s very interesting, but I’m afraid it won’t help to cool the atmosphere much.”

“I could tell you lots more like that,” Humpty Dumpty began, but Alice hastily interrupted him.

“I hear a lot of fighting going on in the wood; don’t you think I had better hear the rest some other time?”

ALICE IN A FOG

“The Duke and Duchess!” said the White Rabbit nervously, as it went scurrying past; “they may be here at any moment, and I haven’t got it yet.”

“Hasn’t got what?” wondered Alice.

“A rhyme for Cornwall,” said the Rabbit, as if in answer to her thought; “borne well, yawn well”—and he pattered away into the distance, dropping in his hurry a folded paper that he had been carrying.

“What have you got there?” asked the Cheshire Cat as Alice picked up the paper and opened it.

“It seems to be a kind of poetry,” said Alice doubtfully; “at least,” she added, “some of the words rhyme and none of them appear to have any particular meaning.”

“What is it about?” asked the Cat.

“Well, some one seems to be coming somewhere from everywhere else, and to get a mixed reception:

... Your Father smiles, Your Mother weeps.”

“I’ve heard something like that before,” said the Cat; “it went on, if I remember,

‘Your aunt has the pen of the gardener.’”

THE WHITE RABBIT.

“There’s nothing about that here,” said Alice; “supposing she didn’t weep when the time came?”

“She would if she had to read all that stuff,” said the Cat.

“And then it goes on—

You went as came the swallow.”

“That doesn’t help us unless we know how the swallow came,” observed the Cat. “If he went as the swallow usually travels he would have won the Deutsch Prize.”

“ ...homeward draw Now it hath winged its way to winters green.”

“There seems to have been some urgent reason for avoiding the swallow,” continued Alice. “Then all sorts of things happened to the Almanac:

Twice a hundred dawns, a hundred noons, a hundred eves.

“You see there were two dawns to every noon and evening—it must have been dreadfully confusing.”

“It would be at first, of course,” agreed the Cat.

“I think it must have been that extra dawn that

Never swallow or wandering sea-bird saw

or else it was the Flag.”

“What flag?”

“Well, the flag that some one found,

Scouring the field or furrowing the sea.”

“Would you mind explaining,” said the Cat, “which was doing the scouring and furrowing?”

“The flag,” said Alice, “or the some one. It isn’t exactly clear, and it doesn’t make

sense either way. Anyhow, wherever the flag was it floated o’er the Free.”

“WOULD YOU MIND EXPLAINING?” SAID THE CAT.

“Come, that tells us something. Whoever it was must have avoided Dartmoor and St. Helena.”

“You, wandering, saw, Young Commonwealths you found.”

“There’s a great deal of wandering in the poem,” observed the Cat.

“You sailed from us to them, from them to us,” continued Alice.

“That isn’t new, either. It should go on: ‘You all returned from him to them, though they were mine before.’”

“It doesn’t go on quite like that,” said Alice; “it ends up with a lot of words that I suppose were left over and couldn’t be fitted in anywhere else:

Therefore rejoicing mightier hath been made Imperial Power.”

“That,” said the Cat, “is the cleverest thing in the whole poem. People see that at the end, and then they read it through to see what on earth it’s about.”

“I’d give sixpence to any one who can explain it,” said Alice.

ALICE HAS TEA AT THE HOTEL CECIL

The March Hare and the Dormouse and the Hatter were seated at a very neglected-looking tea-table; they were evidently in agonised consideration of something—even the Dormouse, which was asleep, had a note of interrogation in its tail.

“No room!” they shouted, as soon as they caught sight of Alice.

“There’s lots of room for improvement,” said Alice, as she sat down.

“You’ve got no business to be here,” said the March Hare.

“And if you had any business you wouldn’t be here, you know,” said the Hatter; “I

hope you don’t suppose this is a business gathering. What will you have to eat?” he continued.

Alice looked at a long list of dishes with promising names, but nearly all of them seemed to be crossed off.

“That list was made nearly seven years ago, you know,” said the March Hare, in explanation.

“But you can always have patience,” said the Hatter. “You begin with patience and we do the rest.” And he leaned back and seemed prepared to do a lot of rest.

TEA AT THE HOTEL CECIL.

(With apologies to Everybody Concerned.)

“Your manners want mending,” said the March Hare suddenly to Alice.

“They don’t,” she replied indignantly.

“It’s very rude to contradict,” said the Hatter; “you would like to hear me sing something.”

Alice felt that it would be unwise to contradict again, so she said nothing, and the Hatter began:

Dwindle, dwindle, little war, How I wonder more and more, As about the veldt you hop When you really mean to stop.

“Talking about stopping,” interrupted the March Hare anxiously, “I wonder how my timepiece is behaving.”

He took out of his pocket a large chronometer of complicated workmanship, and mournfully regarded it.

“It’s dreadfully behind the times,” he said, giving it an experimental shake. “I would take it to pieces at once if I was at all sure of getting the bits back in their right places.”

“What is the matter with it?” asked Alice.

“The wheels seem to get stuck,” said the March Hare. “There is too much Irish butter in the works.”

“Ruins the thing from a dramatic point of view,” said the Hatter; “too many scenes, too few acts.”

“The result is we never have time to get through the day’s work. It’s never even time for a free breakfast-table; we do what we can for education at odd moments, but we shall all die of old age before we have a moment to spare for social duties.”

“You might lose a lot if you run your business in that way,” said Alice.

“DWINDLE, DWINDLE, LITTLE WAR.”

“Not in this country,” said the March Hare. “You see, we have a Commission on everything that we don’t do.”

“The Dormouse must tell us a story,” said the Hatter, giving it a sharp pinch.

The Dormouse awoke with a start, and began as though it had been awake all the time: “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe——”

“I know,” said Alice, “she had so many children that she didn’t know what to do.”

TRYING TO MAKE HIM LOOK LIKE A LION.

“Nothing of the sort,” said the Dormouse, “you lack the gift of imagination. She put most of them into Treasuries and Foreign Offices and Boards of Trade, and all sorts of unlikely places where they could learn things.”

“What did they learn?” asked Alice.

“Painting in glowing colours, and attrition, and terminology (that’s the science of knowing when things are over), and iteration (that’s the same thing over again), and drawing——”

“What did they draw?”

“Salaries. And then there were classes for foreign languages. And such language!” (Here the March Hare and the Hatter shut their eyes and took a big gulp from their

tea-cups.) “However, I don’t think anybody attended to them.”

The Dormouse broke off into a chuckle which ended in a snore, and as no one seemed inclined to wake it up again Alice thought she might as well be going.

When she looked back the Hatter and the March Hare were trying to stiffen the Dormouse out into the attitude of a lion guardant. “But it will never pass for anything but a Dormouse if it will snore so,” she remarked to herself.

ALICE GOES TO CHESTERFIELD

Alice noticed a good deal of excitement going on among the Looking-Glass creatures: some of them were hurrying off expectantly in one direction, as fast as their legs would carry them, while others were trying to look as if nothing in particular was about to happen.

“Those mimsy-looking birds,” she said, catching sight of a group that did not look in the best of spirits, “those must be Borogoves. I’ve read about them somewhere; in some parts of the country they have to be protected. And, I declare, there is the White King coming through the Wood.”

Alice went to meet the King, who was struggling with a very unwieldy pencil to write something in a notebook. “It’s a memorandum of my feelings, in case I forget them,” he explained. “Only,” he added, “I’m not quite sure that I meant to put it that way.”

Alice peeped over his shoulder and read: “The High Commissioner may tumble off his post; he balances very badly.”

“Could you tell me,” she asked, “what all the excitement is about just now?”

“Haven’t an idea,” said the White King, “unless it’s the awakening.”

THE AWAKENING.

“The what?” said Alice.

“The Red King, you know; he’s been asleep for ever so long, and he’s going to wake up to-day. Not that it makes any difference that I can see—he talks just as loud when he’s asleep.”

Alice remembered having seen the Red King, in rose-coloured armour that had got a little rusty, sleeping uneasily in the thickest part of the wood.

“The fact is,” the White King went on, “some of them think we’re only a part of his dream, and that we shall all go ‘piff’ when he wakes up. That is what makes them so jumpy just now. Oh,” he cried, giving a little jump himself, “there go some more!”

THE RED KING IN THE WOOD.

“What are they?” asked Alice, as several strange creatures hurtled past, like puff-balls in a gale.

“They’re the Slithy Toves,” said the King, “Libimps and Jubjubs and Bandersnatches. They’re always gyring and gimbling wherever they can find a wabe.”

THE WHITE KING.

“Where are they all going in such a hurry?” Alice asked.

“They’re going to the meeting to hear the Red King,” the White King said, in rather a dismal tone. “They’ve all got latchkeys,” he went on, “but they’d better not stay out too late.”

Here the White King gave another jump. “What’s the matter?” asked Alice.

“Why, I’ve just remembered that I’ve got a latchkey too, my very own! I must go and find it.” And away went the White King into the wood.

“How these kings do run about!” thought Alice. “It seems to be one of the Rules of the Game that when one moves the other moves also.”

The next moment there was a deafening outburst of drums, and Alice saw the Red King rushing through the wood with a big roll of paper.

“Dear me!” she heard him say to himself as he passed, “I hope I sha’n’t be late for the meeting, and I wonder how they’ll take my speech.”

Alice noticed that the Borogoves made no attempt to follow, but tried to look as if they didn’t care a bit. And away in the distance she heard a sort of derisive booing, with a brogue in it. “That must be the Mome Raths outgribing,” she thought.

THE AGED MAN

Westminster Gazette, May 16, 1901.]

(With apologies to Sir John Tenniel.)

I shook him well from side to side Until his face was blue. “Come, tell me where’s the Bill,” I cried, “And what you’re going to do.”

He said, “I hunt for gibes and pins To prick the Bishops’ calves, I search for Royal Commissions, too, To use as safety valves.”

[See the Debate on Temperance Legislation in the House of Lords, May 14, 1901.]

SPADES IN WONDERLAND

Westminster Gazette, January 24, 1902.]

The Red King: Harcourt, Grey, and Lloyd-George are all putting their own colours on, I think I’d better paint it myself.]

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