

The Fourteenth Surprise - THE PUNISHMENT OF THE PURPLE DRAGON

Scarcely had the King spoken when some of his soldiers came running with news that they had seen the Purple Dragon eating plum-pudding in the royal garden.

"What did you do about it?" asked the monarch.

"We did nothing," they answered; "for, had we interfered with its repast, the Dragon would probably have eaten us for dessert."

"That is true," remarked the King. "Yet something must be done to protect us from this monster. For many years it has annoyed us by eating our choicest crops, and nothing we can do seems of any avail to save us from its ravages."

"If we were able to destroy the Dragon," said Prince Thinkabit, "we should be doing our country the greatest possible service."

"We have often tried to destroy it," replied the King, "but the beast always manages to get the best of the fight, having wonderful strength and great cunning. However, let us hold a council of war, and see what is suggested."

So a council of war was called. The Wise Man, all the Princes and Noblemen, the Dog and the Wise Donkey being assembled to talk the matter over.

"I advise that you build a high wall around the Dragon," said the Wise Man. "Then it will be unable to get out, and will starve to death."

"It is strong enough to break down the wall," said the King.

"I suggest you dig a great hole in the ground," remarked the Donkey. "Then the Dragon will fall into it and perish."

"It is too clever to fall into the hole," said the King.

"The best thing to do," declared Timtom, "is to cut off its legs; for then it could not walk into our gardens."

"The scales on its legs are too hard and thick," said the King. "We have tried that, and failed."

"We might take a red-hot iron, and put the Dragon's eyes out," ventured Prince Jollikin.

"Its eyes are glass," replied the King with a sigh, "and the iron would have no effect on them."

"Suppose we tie a tin can to its tail," suggested the Dog. "The rattling of the can would so frighten the Dragon that it would run out of the country."

"Its tail is so long," answered the King, gloomily, "that the Dragon could not hear the can rattle."

Then they all remained silent for a time, thinking so hard that their heads began to ache; but no one seemed able to think of the right thing to do.

Finally the King himself made a proposition.

"One thing we might attempt with some hope of success," said his Majesty. "Should it fail, we can not be worse off than we are at present. My idea is for us to go in a great body to the castle of the Dragon, and pull out its teeth with a pair of forceps. Having no teeth, the monster will be harmless to annoy us in any way; and, since we seem unable to kill it, I believe this is the best way out of our difficulty."

The King's plan pleased every one, and met with shouts of approval. The council then adjourned, and all the members went to prepare for the fight with the Purple Dragon.

First the blacksmith made a large pair of forceps, to pull the Dragon's teeth with. The handles of the forceps were so long that fifty men could take hold of them at one time. Then the people armed themselves with swords and spears and marched in a great body to the castle of the Purple Dragon.

This remarkable beast, which for so long had kept the Valley of Mo in constant terror, was standing on the front porch of its castle when the army arrived. It looked at the crowd of people in surprise, and said:

"Are you not weary with your attempts to destroy me? What selfish people you must be! Whenever I eat anything that belongs to you, there is a great row, and immediately you come here to fight me. These battles are unpleasant to all of us. The best thing for you to do is to return home and behave yourselves; for I am not in the least afraid of you."

Neither the King nor his people replied to these taunts. They simply brought forward the big pair of forceps and reached them toward the Dragon.

This movement astonished the monster, who, never having been to a dentist in his life, had no idea what the strange instrument was for.

"Surely you can not think to hurt me with that iron thing," it called out, in derision. And then the Dragon laughed at the idea of any one attempting to injure it.

But when the Dragon opened its mouth to laugh, the King opened the jaws of the forceps, quickly closing them again on one of the monster's front teeth.

"Pull!" cried the King; and fifty men seized the handles of the forceps and began to pull with all their strength.

But, pull as they might, the tooth would not come out, and this was the reason: The teeth of Dragons are different from ours, for they go through the jaw and are clinched on the other side. Therefore, no amount of pulling will draw them out.

The King did not know this fact, but thought the tooth must have a long root; so he called again:

"Pull! my brave men; pull!"

And they pulled so hard that the Dragon was nearly pulled from the porch of its castle. To avoid this danger the cunning beast wound the end of its tail around a post of the porch, and tied a hard knot in it.

"Pull!" shouted the King for the third time.

Then a surprising thing happened. Any one who knows anything at all about Dragons is aware that these beasts stretch as easily as if made of india-rubber. Therefore the strong pulling of the fifty men resulted in the

Dragon being pulled from its foothold, and, as its tail was fastened to the post, its body began to stretch out.

The King and his people, thinking the tooth was being pulled, started down the hill, the forceps still clinging fast to the monster's big front tooth. And the farther they went the more Dragon's body stretched out.

"Keep going!" cried the King; "we mustn't let go now!" And away marched the fifty men, and farther and farther stretched the body of the Dragon.

Still holding fast to the forceps, the King and his army marched into the Valley, and away across it, and up the hills on the other side, not even stopping to take breath. When they came to the mountains and the forests, and could go no farther, they looked back; and behold! the Dragon had stretched out so far that it was now no bigger around than a fiddle-string!

"What shall we do now?" asked the fifty men, who were perspiring with the long pull and the march across the Valley.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the panting King. "Let us tie this end of the beast around a tree. Then we can think what is best to be done."

So they tied that end of the Dragon to a big tree, and sat down to rest, being filled with wonder that the mighty Purple Dragon was now no larger around than a piece of twine.

"The wicked creature will never bother us again," said the King. "Yet it was only by accident we found a way to destroy it. The question now is, what shall we do with this long, thin Dragon? If we leave it here it will trip any one who stumbles against it."

"I shall use it for fiddle-strings," said Prince Fiddlecumdoo, "for the crop failed this year, and I have none for my violin. Let us cut the Dragon up into the proper sizes, and store the strings in the royal warehouse for general use."

The King and the people heartily approved this plan. So the Prince brought a pair of shears and cut the Dragon into equal lengths to use on his violin. Thus the wicked monster was made good use of at last, for the strings had an excellent tone.

And that was not only the end of the Purple Dragon, but there were two other ends of him; one tied to a tree in the mountains and the other fastened to a post of the castle.

That same day the Monarch of Mo gave a magnificent feast to all his people to celebrate the destruction of their greatest foe; and ever afterward the gardens of the Beautiful Valley were free from molestation.