

Billy the King

By Edith Nesbit

'Now, William,' said Billy King's great-uncle, 'you are old enough to earn your own living, so I shall find you a nice situation in an office, and you will not return to school.'

The blood of Billy King ran cold in his veins. He looked out over the brown wire blinds into Claremont Square, Pentonville, which was where his uncle lived, and the tears came into his eyes; for, though his uncle thought he was old enough to earn his own living, he was still young enough to hate the idea of having to earn it in an office, where he would never do anything, or make anything, or see anything, but only add up dull figures from year's end to year's end.

'I don't care,' said Billy to himself. 'I'll run away and get a situation on my own--something interesting. I wonder if I could learn how to be a pirate captain or a highwayman?'

And next morning Billy got up very early, before anyone was about, and ran away.

He ran till he was out of breath and then he walked, and he walked till he was out of patience, and then he ran again, and between walking and running he came at last plump up to the door of a shop. And over the shop there were big painted letters saying, 'Registry office for all sorts of persons out of employment.'

'I'm out of employment, anyway,' said he. The window of the shop had big green-baize-shutter sort of things in them, with white cards fastened on to them with drawing-pins, and on the cards were written the kind of persons out of employment the registry office had got places for. And in the very first one he read there was his own name--King!

'I've come to the right shop,' said Billy, and he read the card through. 'Good general King wanted. Must be used to the business.'

'That's not me, I'm afraid,' thought Billy, 'because whatever a general King's business is I can't be used to it till I've tried it.'

The next was: 'Good steady King wanted. Must be quick, willing, and up to his work.'

'I'm willing enough,' said Billy, 'and I'm quick enough--at any rate, at fives or footer--but I don't know what a steady King's work is.' So he looked at another card.

'Wanted, respectable King to take entire charge of Parliament, and to assist in Cabinet Councils and Reform of the Army, to open Bazaars and Schools of Art, and make himself generally useful.'

Billy shook his head.

'I think that must be a very hard place,' said he.

The next was: 'Competent Queen wanted; economical and good manager.'

'Whatever else I am I'm not a Queen,' said Billy, and he was just turning sadly away, when he saw a little card stuck away in the right-hand top corner of the baize field.

'Hard-working King wanted; no objection to one who has not been out before.'

'I can but try,' said Billy, and he opened the door of the registry office and walked in.

Inside there were several desks. At the first desk a lion with a pen behind its ear was dictating to a unicorn, who was writing in a series of Blue-books with his horn. Billy noticed that the horn had been sharpened to a nice point, like a lead pencil when the drawing-master does it for you as a favour.

'I think you want a King?' said Billy timidly.

'No, we don't,' said the lion, and it turned on him so quickly that Billy was sorry he had spoken. 'The situation is filled, young man, and we're thoroughly suited.'

Billy was turning away, much dispirited, when the unicorn said: 'Try some of the others.'

So he went on to the next desk, where a frog sat sadly. But it only wanted Presidents; and at the next desk an eagle told him that only Emperors were wanted, and those very seldom. It was not till he got to the very end of the long room that Billy found a desk where a fat pig in spectacles sat reading a cookery-book.

'Do you want a King?' said Billy. 'I've not been out before.'

'Then you're the King for us,' said the pig, shutting the cookery-book with a bang. 'Hard-working, I suppose, as the notice says?'

'I think I should be,' said Billy, adding, honestly, 'especially if I liked the work.'

The pig gave him a square of silver parchment and said, 'That's the address.'

On the parchment was written:

'Kingdom of Plurimiregia. Billy King, Respectable Monarch. Not been out before.'

'You'd better go by post,' said the pig. 'The five o'clock post will do.'

'But why--but how--where is it?' asked Billy.

'I don't know where it is,' said the pig, 'but the Post-Office knows everything. As to how--why, you just tie a label round your neck and post yourself in the nearest letter-box. As to why, that's a silly question, really, your Majesty. Don't you know the Post-Office always takes charge of the Royal males?'

Billy was just putting the address carefully away in what would have been his watch-pocket if he had had any relation in the world except a great-uncle, when the swing door opened gently and a little girl came in. She looked at the lion and unicorn and the other busy beasts behind their desks, and she did not seem to like the look of them. She looked up the long room and she saw Billy, and she came straight up to him and said:

'Please I want a situation as Queen. It says in the window previous experience not required.'

She was a very shabby little girl, with a clean, round, rosy face, and she looked as little like a Queen with previous experience as anybody could possibly have done.

'I'm not the registry office, my good kid,' said Billy.

And the pig said, 'Try the next desk.'

Behind the next desk sat a lizard, but it was so large it was more like an alligator, only with a less unpleasant expression about the mouth.

'Speak to him,' said the pig, as the lizard leaned forward on his front paws like a draper's assistant when he says, 'What's the next article?'

'I don't like to,' said the little girl.

'Nonsense, you little duffer!' said Billy kindly; 'he won't eat you.'

'Are you sure?' said the little girl very earnestly.

Then Billy said, 'Look here, I'm a King, and so I've got a situation. Are you a Queen?'

'My name's Eliza Macqueen,' said the little girl. 'I suppose that's near enough.'

'Well, then,' said Billy to the lizard, 'will she do?'

'Perfectly, I should say,' replied the lizard, with a smile that did not become him very well. 'Here is the address.' He gave it to her; it read:

'Kingdom of Allexanassa. Queen, not been out before; willing, obliging, and anxious to learn.'

'Your kingdoms,' he added, 'are next door to each other.'

'So we shall see each other often,' said Billy. 'Cheer up! We might travel together, perhaps.'

'No,' said the pig; 'Queens go by railway. A Queen has to begin to get used to her train as soon as she can. Now, run along, do. My friend here will see her off.'

'You're sure they won't eat me?' said Eliza--and Billy was certain they wouldn't, though he didn't know why. So he said, 'Good-bye. I hope you'll get on in your new place,' and off he went to buy a penny luggage label at the expensive stationer's three doors down the street on the right-hand side. And when he had addressed the label and tied it round his neck, he posted himself honourably at the General Post-Office. The rest of the letters in the box made a fairly comfortable bed, and Billy fell asleep. When he awoke he was being delivered by the early morning postman at the Houses of Parliament in the capital of Plurimiregia, and the Houses of Parliament were just being opened for the day. The air of Plurimiregia was clear and blue, very different from the air of Claremont Square, Pentonville. The hills and woods round the town looked soft and green, from the hill in the middle of the town where the Parliament Houses stood. The town itself was small and very pretty, like one of the towns in old illuminated books, and it had a great wall all round it, and orange trees growing on the wall. Billy wondered whether it was forbidden to pick the oranges.

When Parliament was opened by the footman whose business it was, Billy said:

'Please, I've come about the place----'

'The King's or the cook's?' asked the footman.

Billy was rather angry.

'Now, do I look like a cook?' he said.

'The question is, do you look like a King?' said the footman.

'If I get the place you will be sorry for this,' said Billy.

'If you get the place you won't keep it long' said the footman. 'It's not worth while being disagreeable; there's not time to do it properly in. Come along in.'

Billy went along in, and the footman led him into the presence of the Prime Minister, who was sitting with straws in his hair, wringing his hands.

'Come by post, your lordship,' the footman said--'from London.'

The Prime Minister left off wringing his hands, and held one of them out to Billy. 'You will suit!' he said. 'I'll engage you in a minute. But just pull the straws out of my hair first, will you? I only put them in because we hadn't been able to find a suitable King, and I find straws so useful in helping my brain to act in a crisis. Of course, once you're engaged for the situation, no one will ask you to do anything useful.'

Billy pulled the straws out, and the Prime Minister said:

'Are they all out? Thanks. Well, now you're engaged--six months on trial. You needn't do anything you don't want to. Now, your Majesty, breakfast is served at nine. Let me conduct you to the Royal apartments.'

In ten minutes Billy had come out of a silver bath filled with scented water, and was putting on the grandest clothes he had ever seen in his life. Everything was of thick, soft, pussy silk, and his boots had gold heels with gold spurs on them.

For the first time in his life it was with personal pleasure, and not from a sense of duty, that he brushed his hair and satisfied himself that none of his nails were in mourning. Then he went to breakfast, which was so fine that none but a French cook could have either cooked or described it. He was a little hungry--he had had nothing to eat since the bread and cheese at supper in Claremont Square the night before last.

After breakfast he rode out on a white pony, a thing he might have lived in Claremont Square for ever without doing. And he found he rode very well. After the ride he went on the sea in a boat, and was surprised and delighted to find that he knew how to sail as well as how to steer. In the afternoon he was taken to a circus; and in the evening the whole Court played blind-man's buff. A most enchanting day!

Next morning the breakfast was boiled underdone eggs and burnt herrings. The King was too polite to make remarks about his food, but he did feel a little disappointed.

The Prime Minister was late for breakfast and came in looking hot and flurried, and a garland of straw was entwined in the Prime Ministerial hair.

'Excuse my hair, sire,' he said. 'The cook left last night, but a new one comes at noon to-day. Meantime, I have done my best.'

Billy said it was all right, and he had had an excellent breakfast. The second day passed as happily as the first; the cook seemed to have arrived, for the breakfast was made up for by the lunch. And Billy had the pleasure of shooting at a target at two thousand yards with the Lee-Metford rifle which had arrived by the same post as himself, and hitting the bull's-eye every time.

This is really a rare thing--even when you are a King. But Billy began to think it curious that he should never have found out before how clever he was, and when he took down a volume of Virgil and found that he could read it as easily as though it had been the 'Child's First Reading-Book,' he was really astonished. So Billy said to the Prime Minister:

'How is it I know so many things without learning them?'

'It's the rule here, sire,' said the Prime Minister. 'Kings are allowed to know everything without learning it.'

Now, the next morning Billy woke very early, and got up and went out into the garden, and, turning a corner suddenly, he came upon a little person in a large white cap, with a large white apron on, in which she was gathering sweet pot-herbs, thyme, and basil, and mint, and savory, and sage, and marjoram. She stood up and dropped a curtsy.

'Halloa!' said Billy the King; 'who are you?'

'I'm the new cook,' said the person in the apron.

Her big flapping cap hid her face, but Billy knew her voice.

'Why,' said he, turning her face up with his hands under her chin, 'you're Eliza!'

And sure enough it was Eliza, but her round face looked very much cleverer and prettier than it had done when he saw it last.

'Hush!' she said. 'Yes, I am. I got the place as Queen of Allexanassa, but it was all horribly grand, and such long trains, and the crown is awfully heavy. And yesterday morning I woke very early, and I thought I'd just put on my old frock--mother made it for me the very last thing before she was taken ill.'

'Don't cry,' said Billy the King gently.

'And I went out, and there was a man with a boat, and he didn't know I was the Queen, and I got him to take me for a row on the sea, and he told me some things.'

'What sort of things?'

'Why, about us, Billy. I suppose you're the same as I am now, and know everything without learning it. What's Allexanassa Greek for?'

'Why, something like the Country of Changing Queens, isn't it?'

'And what does Plurimiregia mean?'

'That must mean the land of many Kings. Why?'

'Because that's what it is. They're always changing their Kings and Queens here, for a most horrid and frightening reason, Billy. They get them from a registry office a long way off so that they shouldn't know. Billy, there's a dreadful dragon, and he comes once a month to be fed. And they feed him with Kings and Queens! That's why we know everything without learning. Because there's no time to learn in. And the dragon has two heads, Billy--a pig's head and a lizard's head--and the pig's head is to eat you with and the lizard's head will eat me!'

'So they brought us here for that,' said Billy--'mean, cruel, cowardly brutes!'

'Mother always said you could never tell what a situation was like until you tried it,' said Eliza. 'But what are we to do? The dragon comes tomorrow. When I heard that I asked where your kingdom was, and the boatman showed me, and I made him land me here. So Allexanassa hasn't got a Queen now, but Plurimiregia has got us both.'

Billy rumped his hair with his hands.

'Oh, my cats alive!' he said, 'we must do something; but I'll tell you what it is, Eliza. You're no end of a brick to come and tell me. You might have got off all by yourself, and left me to the pig's head.'

'No, I mightn't,' said Eliza sharply. 'I know everything that people can learn, the same as you, and that includes right and wrong. So you see I _mightn't_.'

'That's true! I wonder whether our being clever would help us? Let's take a boat and steer straight out, and take our chance. I can sail and steer beautifully.'

'So can I,' said Eliza disdainfully; 'but, you see, it's too late for that. Twenty-four hours before the beast comes the sea-water runs away, and great waves of thick treacle come sweeping round the kingdoms. No boat can live in such a sea.'

'Well, but how does the dragon get here? Is he on the island?'

'No,' said Eliza, squeezing up handfuls of herbs in her agitation till the scent quite overpowered the scent of the honeysuckle. 'No; he comes out of the sea. But he is very hot inside, and he melts the treacle so that it gets quite thin, like when it runs out of a treacle-pudding, and so he can swim in it, and he comes along to the quay, and is fed--with _Us_.'

Billy shuddered.

'I wish we were back in Claremont Square,' said he.

'So do I, I'm sure,' said Eliza. 'Though I don't know where it is, nor yet want to know.'

'Hush!' said Billy suddenly. 'I hear a rustling. It's the Prime Minister, and I can hear he's got straws in his hair again, most likely because you're disappeared, and he thinks he will have to cook the breakfast. Meet me beside the lighthouse at four this afternoon. Hide in this summer-house and don't come out till the coast's clear.'

He ran out and took the Prime Minister's arm.

'What is the straw for now?'

'Merely a bad habit,' said the Prime Minister wearily.

Then Billy suddenly saw, and he said:

'You're a beastly mean, cowardly sneak, and you feel it; that's what the straws are about!'

'Your Majesty!' said the Prime Minister feebly.

'Yes,' said Billy firmly; 'you know you are. Now, I know all the laws of Plurimiregia, and I'm going to abdicate this morning, and the next in rank has to be King if he can't engage a fresh one. You're next in rank to me, so by the time the dragon comes you'll be the King. I'll attend your Coronation.'

The Prime Minister gasped, 'How did you find out?' and turned the colour of unripe peaches.

'That's tellings,' said Billy. 'If you hadn't all been such sneaks, I expect heaps of your Kings had sense enough to have got rid of the dragon for you. Only I suppose you've never told them in time. Now, look here. I don't want you to do anything except keep your mouth shut, and let there be a boat, and no boatman, on the beach under the lighthouse at four o'clock.'

'But the sea's all treacle.'

'I said on the beach, not on the sea, my good straw merchant. And what I say you've jolly well got to do. You must be there--and no one else. If you tell a soul I'll abdicate, and where will you be then?'

'I don't know,' said the wretched Prime Minister, stooping to gather some more straws from the strawberry bed.

'But I do,' said Billy. 'Now for breakfast.'

Before four o'clock that afternoon the Prime Minister's head was a perfect bird's-nest of straws. But he met Billy at the appointed place, and there was a boat--and also Eliza. Billy carried his Lee-Metford.

A wind blew from the shore, and the straws in the Prime Minister's hair rustled like a barley-field in August.

'Now,' said Billy the King, 'my Royal Majesty commands you to speak to the dragon as soon as it arrives, and to say that your King has abdicated---'

'But he hasn't,' said the Prime Minister in tears.

'But he does now--so you won't be telling a lie. I abdicate. But I give you my word of honour I'll turn King again as soon as I've tried my little plan. I shall be quite in time to meet my fate--and the dragon. Say "The King has abdicated. You'd better just look in at Allexanassa and get the Queen, and when you call again I'll have a nice fat King all ready for you."'

The straws trembled, and Eliza sobbed.

Billy went on; and he had never felt so truly regal as now, when he was preparing to risk his life in order to save his subjects from the monthly temptation to be mean and cowardly and sneakish. I think myself it was good of Billy. He might just have abdicated and let things slide. Some boys would have.

The sea of greeny-black treacle heaved and swelled sulkily against the beach. The Prime Minister said:

'Very well; I'll do it. But I'd sooner die than see my King false to his word.'

'You won't have to choose between the two,' said Billy, very pale, but determined. 'Your King's not a hound, like--like some-people.'

And then, far away on the very edge of the green treacly sea, they saw a squirming and a squelching and clouds of steam, and all sorts of exciting and unpleasant things happening very suddenly and all together.

The Prime Minister covered his head with dry seaweed and said:

'That's Him.'

'That's _He_, ' corrected Eliza the Queen and Billy the King in one breath.

But the Prime Minister was long past any proper pride in his grammar.

And then, cutting its way through the thick, sticky waves of the treacle sea, came the hot dragon, melting a way for himself as he came. And he got nearer and nearer and bigger and bigger, and at last he came close to the beach, snouting and snorting, and opened two great mouths in an expecting, hungry sort of way; and when he found he was not being fed the expression of the mouths changed to an angry and surprised question. And one mouth was a pig's mouth and one was a lizard's.

Billy the King borrowed a pin from Eliza the Queen to stick into the Prime Minister, who was by this time nearly buried in the seaweed which he had been trying to arrange in his hair.

'Speak up, silly!' said His Majesty.

The Prime Minister spoke up.

'Please, sir,' he said to the two-headed dragon, 'our King has abdicated, so we've nothing for you just now, but if you could just run over to Allexanassa and pick up their Queen, we'll have a nice fat King ready for you if you'll call on your way home.'

The Prime Minister shuddered as he spoke. He happened to be very fat.

The dragon did not say a word. He nodded with both his heads and grunted with both his mouths, and turned his one tail and swam away along the track of thin, warm treacle which he had made in swimming across the sea.

Quick as thought, Billy the King signed to the Prime Minister and to Eliza, and they launched the boat. Billy sprang on board and pushed off, and it was not till the boat was a dozen yards from shore that he turned to wave a farewell to Eliza and the Prime Minister. The latter was indeed still on the beach, searching hopefully among the drifts and weeds for more straws, to mark his sense of the constitutional crisis, but Eliza had disappeared.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' said Billy the King; 'surely that brute of a Prime Minister can't have killed her right off, so as to have her ready for the dragon when he comes back. Oh, my dear little Eliza!'

'I'm here,' said a thick voice.

And, sure enough, there was Eliza, holding on to the gunwale of the boat and swimming heavily in the warm treacle. Nearly choked with it, too, for she had been under more than once.

Billy hastened to haul her aboard, and, though she was quite brown and very, very sticky, the moment she was safe in the boat he threw his arms round her and said:

'Dear, darling Eliza, you're the dearest, bravest girl in the world. If we ever get out of this you'll marry me, won't you? There's no one in the world like you. Say you will.'

'Of course I will,' said Eliza, still spluttering through the treacle. 'There's no one in the world like you, either.'

'Right! Then, if that's so, you steer and I'll sail, and we'll get the better of the beast yet,' said Billy.

And he set the sail, and Eliza steered as well as she could in her treacly state.

About the middle of the channel they caught up with the dragon. Billy took up his Lee-Metford and fired its eight bullets straight into the dragon's side. You have no idea how the fire spurted out through the bullet-holes. But the wind from shore had caught the sails, and the boat was now going very much faster than the dragon, who found the bullet-holes annoying, and had slowed up to see what was the matter.

'Good-bye, you dear, brave Eliza,' said Billy the King. '_You're_ all right, anyhow.'

And, holding his reloaded Lee-Metford rifle high over his head, he plunged into the treacly sea and swam back towards the dragon. It is very difficult to shoot straight when you are swimming, especially in nearly boiling treacle, but His Majesty King Billy managed to do it. He sent his eight bullets straight into the dragon's heads, and the huge monster writhed and wriggled and squirmed and squawked, all over the sea from end to end, till at last it floated lifeless on the surface of the clear, warm treacle, and stretched its wicked paws out, and shut its wicked eyes, all four of them, and died. The lizard's eyes shut last.

Then Billy began to swim for dear life towards the shore of Plurimiregia, and the treacle was so hot that if he hadn't been a King he would have been boiled. But now that the dreadful dragon was cold in death there was nothing to keep the treacle sea thin and warm, and it began to thicken so fast that swimming was very difficult indeed. If you don't understand this, you need only ask the attendants at your nearest swimming-baths to fill the baths with treacle instead of water, and you will very soon comprehend how it was that Billy reached the shore of his kingdom quite exhausted and almost speechless.

The Prime Minister was there. He had fetched a whole truss of straw when he thought Billy's plan had failed, and that the dragon would eat him as the next in rank, and he wanted to do the thing thoroughly; and when he warmly embraced the treacly King, Billy became so covered with straws that he hardly knew himself. He pulled himself together, however, enough to withdraw his resignation, and then looked out over the sea. In mid-channel lay the dead dragon, and far in the distance he could see the white sails of the boat nearing the shores of Allexanassa.

'And what are we to do now?' asked the Prime Minister.

'Have a bath,' said the King. 'The dragon's dead, and I'll fetch Eliza in the morning. They won't hurt her over there now the dragon's killed.'

'_They_ won't hurt her,' said the Prime Minister. 'It's the treacle. Allexanassa is an island. The dragon brought the treacle up by his

enchantments, and now there is no one to take it away again. You'll never get a boat to live in a sea like that--never.'

'Won't I?' said Billy. 'I'm cleverer than you.'

But, all the same, he didn't quite see his way to sailing a boat in that sea, and with a sad and aching heart he went back to the palace to the silver bath. The treacle and straws took hours to wash off, and after that he was so tired that he did not want any supper, which was just as well, because there was no one to cook it. Tired as he was, Billy slept very badly. He woke up again and again to wonder what had become of his brave little friend, and to wish that he could have done something to prevent her being carried away in that boat; but, think as he might, he failed to see that he could have done any differently. And his heart sank, for, in spite of his bold words to the Prime Minister, he had no more idea than you have how to cross the sea of thick treacle that lay between his kingdom and Allexanassa. He invented steamships with red-hot screws and paddle-wheels all through his dreams, and when he got up in the morning he looked out of his window on the dark sea and longed for a good, gray, foamy, salt, tumbling sea like we have at home in England, no matter how high the waves and the winds might be. But the wind had fallen, and the dark brown sea looked strangely calm.

Hastily snatching a dozen peaches out of the palace garden by way of breakfast, Billy the King hurried to the beach by the lighthouse. No heaving of the treacle sea broke the smooth line of it against the beach. Billy looked--looked again, swallowed the last peach, stone and all, and tore back to the town.

He rushed into the chief ironmonger's and bought a pair of skates and a gimlet. In less time than I can write it he had scurried back to the beach, bored holes in his gold heels, fastened on the skates, and was skating away over the brown sea towards Allexanassa. For the treacle, heated to boiling-point by the passing of the dragon, had now grown cold, and, of course, it was now toffee! Far off, Eliza had had the same idea as soon as she saw the toffee, and, of course, as Queen of Allexanassa, she could skate beautifully. So the two skated into each other's arms somewhere near the middle of the channel between the two islands.

They stood telling each other how happy they were for a few moments, or it may have been a few hours; and when they turned to go back to

Plurimiregia they found that the toffee-ice of the treacle sea was black with crowds of skaters--for the Allexanassians and the Plurimiregians had found out the wonderful truth, and were hurrying across to pay visits to their friends and relations in the opposite islands. Near the shore the toffee was hidden by troops of children, who had borrowed the family hammers and were chipping into the solid toffee and eating the flakes of it as they splintered off.

People were pointing out to each other the spot where the dragon had sunk, and when they perceived Billy the King and Eliza the Queen they sent up a shout that you could have heard miles out at sea--if there had been any sea--which, of course, there wasn't. The Prime Minister had lost no time in issuing a proclamation setting forth Billy's splendid conduct in ridding the country of the dragon, and all the populace were in a frenzy of gratitude and loyalty.

Billy turned on a little tap inside his head by some means which I cannot describe to you, and a bright flood of cleverness poured through his brain.

'After all,' he said to Eliza, 'they were going to give us to the dragon to save their own lives. It's bad, I know. But I don't know that's it's worse than people who let other people die of lead-poisoning because they want a particular glaze on their dinner-plates, or let people die of phosphorus-poisoning so that they may get matches at six boxes a penny. We're as well off here as in England.'

'Yes,' said Eliza.

So they agreed to stay and go on being King and Queen, on condition that the Prime Minister consented to give up straws altogether, even in moments of crisis.

'I will, your Majesties,' he said, adding, with a polite bow, 'I shall not need a single straw under your Majesty's able kingship.'

And all the people cheered like mad.

Eliza and Billy were married in due course. The kingdoms are now extremely happy. Both are governed by Billy, who is a very good King because he knows so much. Eliza got him to change the law about Queens knowing everything, because she wanted her husband to be

cleverer than she was. But Billy didn't want to make laws to turn his Eliza stupid, so he just changed the law--only a little bit--so that the King knows everything a man ought to know, and the Queen knows everything that ought to be known by a woman. So that's all right.

Exploring expeditions were fitted out to find the edge of the toffee. It was found to stand up in cliffs two hundred feet high, overhanging the real, live, salt-watery sea. The King had ships built at once to sail on the real sea and carry merchandise to other lands. And so Allexanassa and Plurimiregia grew richer and richer every day. The merchandise, of course, is toffee, and half the men in the kingdoms work in the great toffee-mines. All the toffee you buy in shops comes from there. And the reason why some of the cheaper kinds you buy are so gritty is, I need hardly say, because the toffee-miners will not remember, before they go down into the mines, to wipe their muddy boots on the doormats provided by Billy the King, with the Royal Arms in seven colours on the middle of each mat.