14. The Hole that Ran to China

By this time you should have noticed, if you ever stop to think, that Marmaduke was quite a traveller. It was really remarkable the trips and voyages that boy took—not only to the town, and Apgar's Woods, and the Leaning Mill on Wally's Creek, but to the South Seas, The Cave of the Winds, the Ole Man in the Moon, the Fields of Golden Stars, and to all sorts of beautiful cities and kingdoms, some of which you may find in your geographies, and some not on any map in the world. And he didn't have much money for fares, either. It was hard to tell just how he managed all these journeys, but sometimes, do you know, I suspect he paid for his fare with a ticket of dreams. What do you think? Well, anyway, one day he went to China.

And this is the way it all came about:

First he went to town—with the Toyman, of course, and Old Methusaleh. That old white horse was tied to the hitching-post in front of Trennery's Grocery Store, with his nose deep in a feed-bag. While the Toyman was talking to Mr. Trennery—Mr. Will Trennery, and his brother Lish—Marmaduke sat on the seat of the buggy and watched the people. There were a lot of them, more than he ever saw on the farm, all at one time. There must have been almost fifty on the street. Some of them were lounging around the soldier who stood on the big stone with a gun that never went off; some were hitching up their horses, or "giddyapping" to them; while a crowd was going in the side door of the "City Hotel," and another stood in front of Trennery's Grocery Store, telling who'd be the next president. They were very wise, they thought, but Marmaduke was sure the Toyman could tell them a thing or two—and that was just what the Toyman was doing.

After a while Marmaduke tired of listening to all their talk about presidents and the new Justice of the Peace, and he looked at the other stores and all their signs. He noticed a new one that had just come to town. It stood between Trennery's and Candlemas' Emporium, and it was even more interesting than the candy store. It had a red sign above the door with white letters which read:—

"Hop Sing
Laundry."

In the windows were parcels of shirts, tied with white string, with little slips of paper under the string. These slips of paper were colored like the petunias in Mother's garden, and on them were funny black letters that looked like chicken-, and rabbit-, and fox-tracks, all mixed up.

Inside the store three little men were ironing, ironing away on boards covered with sheets, and jabbering in a strange language. And they wore clothes that were as strange as the words they spoke—clothes that looked like pajamas with dark blue tops and light blue trousers.

And each of the little men had a yellow face, slant eyes, and a black pigtail.

It was Saturday, and a group of town-boys stood around the door, gazing in at the three strange little men and mocking them:—

"Ching, ching Chinaman,

Bow, wow, wow!"

Then one of the boys would shout in through the door,— "Bin eatin' any ole stewed rats, Chinky?" and another would ask,— "Give us a taste of yer bird's-nest pudding?" They thought they were very smart, and that wasn't all, for, after calling the Chinamen all the names they could think of, the boys reached down into the ditch, which some men were digging for a sewer, and scooped up handfuls of mud and threw it straight into the laundry and all over the snow-white shirts the little men were ironing; at which, the Chinamen grew very angry and came to the door, shaking their flat-irons in their hands and calling,—

And the boys ran away, still mocking them. You could hear their shouts dying away in the distance:—

"Chinky, chinky Chinaman,

Bow, wow, wow!"

Not long after this the Toyman came out from Trennery's and climbed on the seat; and he and Marmaduke and Old Methusaleh jogged along towards home. All the way, Marmaduke couldn't help thinking of the three little men in their blue pajamas and their black pigtails; and he asked the Toyman a lot of questions, even more than you will find in his arithmetic, I guess, all about what those letters on the packages of shirts meant, and if the Chinamen braided their pigtails every night and morning just like girls, and if they really did eat "ole rats," and bird's-nest puddings, and all that.

The Toyman could hardly keep up with the questions; and he hadn't answered them all, either, by the time they reached the White House with the Green Blinds by the Side of the Road.

On the afternoon of that same day, Marmaduke was sitting like a hoptoad, watching the Toyman dig post-holes in the brook pasture. The sun shone so soft and warm, and the cedar posts smelled so nice and fragrant, that he began to feel drowsy. He didn't sit like a hoptoad any more, but lay on his elbow, and his head nodded—nodded——nodded.

Rather faintly he heard the Toyman say:

"Well, that's pretty deep. A little more, and I'd reach down into China."

The little boy rubbed his eyes and looked down into the deep brown hole.

"If you dug a little more," he asked, "would you really go down through the earth, all the way to China—where the Chinamen live?"

"Sure," replied the Toyman, who never liked to disappoint little boys.

"Then," said Marmaduke, "please dig a little more—for—I'd like—to see—where—the Chinamen—live—." His voice sounded very sleepy.

The Toyman dug another shovelful or two, and all the while the little boy's head kept nodding, nodding in the sun—then—as the last shovelful fell on the pile at his side, he looked down in the hole once more and heard voices—strange voices.

Words were coming up out of that hole, and it seemed to Marmaduke that he could see those words as well as hear them. Now that is a very odd thing, but it is actually what happened—he could both see and hear them—and they looked like the funny music on phonograph advertisements—something like this:

And, way down at the bottom of the hole, he saw three black heads with pigtails that curled upward in the hole like smoke coming from a chimney.

He tried to grab hold of them, but he fell, and Wienerwurst after him, right plump among the pigtails, landing on the three Chinamen way down in the hole, and knocking them flat on their backs until their feet with the funny black slippers kicked in the air.

Then they all got up and rubbed their tummies under the blue pajamas.

"Velly wude little Mellican boy," said the first little Chinaman, whose name was Ping Pong.

"Velly bad manners," said the second, who was called Sing Song.

"You beggy our pardon," the third, whose name was Ah See.

Now Marmaduke intended to do that very thing—that is, beg their pardon, for he was very polite for an American boy.

"I'm very sorry—I didn't mean to hurt you," he explained, "I just fell down that hole."

At this he looked up the sides of the hole. It seemed as if he were at the bottom of a great round stove-pipe, or a well with brown sides. Far, far above him was a little circle of light blue, the top of the hole where he had fallen in.

After he had begged their pardon so nicely, the three little yellow men said, all together,—

"Little Mellican boy velly politely; he has honorable ancestors."

Marmaduke looked around again and saw that they were standing, not on the bottom of the hole, but on a little landing like that on a stairway. Below them the hole kept on descending into the darkness, curving round and round like a corkscrew or the stairways in old castles—down, down, down.

"Little Mellican boy like see China?" asked Ping Pong.

"Very much, thank you," replied Marmaduke, trying to be as polite as they were.

But the Toyman would miss him. He looked way up at the circle of light at the top of the hole and shouted:

"Say, Toyman, can I go to China—just for a little while?"

The Toyman's face appeared in the circle of light at the top.

"Sure, sonny, have a good time," he shouted back, and his voice coming way down that hole sounded hollow, as if he were hollering down a well.

Marmaduke waved to him.

"Goodbye, I won't be long," he called.

Then, turning, he saw that the three Chinamen had flat-irons in their hands. They were fitting the handles to them. Ah See handed Marmaduke a fourth iron for himself.

"Mellican boy wide on this—now, velly caleful," said he.

"But how can I ride on such a small iron?" asked Marmaduke.

"Watchee and see,
Allee samee as me."

And at once all the three little Chinamen mounted the irons and curled their tiny slippered feet under them. And Marmaduke curled up on his iron just as they did.

"Allee weady!" shouted Ping Pong, and all-of-a-sudden they started scooting down that curving brown hole, round and round, down through the deep earth. Wienerwurst had no iron to slide on, but he did pretty well on his haunches, and how swiftly the brown sides of the earth slipped by them! How fast the air whistled past!

After a fine ride they saw ahead of them a great red light. It looked like the sky that time when Apgar's barn was on fire.

They stopped with a bump and a bang. Marmaduke waited until he had caught his breath, then he looked around. They had stopped on a gallery, or sort of immense shelf, that extended around a tremendous pit or hole in the earth. In the centre of it stood a big giant, shovelling coal in a furnace. The furnace was as high as the Woolworth Building in New York City, which Marmaduke had seen on picture post-cards. And the Giant was as big as the furnace himself.

He had a beard, and eyes as large and round as the wheels of a wagon; and he was naked to the waist. Great streams of sweat, like brooks in flood-time, poured off his body. When these rivers of sweat struck the ground, they sizzled mightily and turned into fountains of steam that rose in the air like the geysers in Yellowstone Park, it was so hot in the place.

Marmaduke felt pretty warm himself, and he mopped his face with the handkerchief which he had won in the Jack Horner pie at the church sociable. It had pictures of pink and blue ducks and geese on it, and it looked very small beside the handkerchief with which the Giant was mopping his face. That was as big as a circus tent. Marmaduke himself looked very small beside the stranger. When the little boy stretched out his hand, he just reached the nail on the Giant's great toe.

The three little yellow men were exclaiming:—

Which meant that this was the centre of the Earth.

"But what is he doing that for—shovelling all that coal in the furnace when it's so hot already we're almost roasting!" complained their little American guest.

His voice was almost lost in the tremendous place. It was strange that it ever reached the Giant's ear, which was hundreds of feet above Marmaduke's head, but nevertheless the Giant did hear it, for he called:—

"Now, you three Chinamen keep your jabbering tongues still," he said, "and let me have a chance to talk. It's so long since I've seen a boy from up on the Earth that I'd like to talk a spell myself—to limber up my old tongue. It's grown pretty stiff all these years."

Then he looked way down at Marmaduke, who was standing there, no higher than the Giant's great toe.

"Come up," he invited the boy, "and have a seat on my shoulder."

Marmaduke looked up and hesitated, for the distance up to that shoulder was so great. He might as well have tried to climb a mountain rising straight up in the air. But the Giant

helped him out.

"Don't be scared," he said, "I'll give you a boost."

And he reached down his mighty hand and placed it under the seat of Marmaduke's trousers. The little boy looked no bigger than the kernel of a tiny hazelnut rolling around in the big palm. But very gently the big fingers set him on the tall shoulder, way, way above the bottom of that pit, but very safe and sound. Marmaduke grabbed tight hold of one of the hairs of the Giant's beard to keep from falling off. He had hard work, too, for each hair of that beard was as stout and as thick as the rope of a ship.

"Kind of cosey perch, ain't it?" asked the Giant.

Now it didn't strike Marmaduke as quite that, when he had such hard work to hold on, and he was so far from the ground, but nevertheless he answered,—

"Y-y-yes, s-s-sir."

His lip quivered like the lemon jelly in the spoon, that time he was so sick. If he had fallen from that shoulder, he would have dropped as far as if he had been thrown from the top gilt pinnacle of the Woolworth Building. And so tremendous was the Giant's voice that when he talked the whole earth seemed to shake, and Marmaduke shook with it as if he were blown about by a mighty wind.

"Now," the Giant was saying in that great voice like thunder, "you want to know what I'm heating up this furnace for?"

"Y-y-yes," replied Marmaduke, his lips still trembling like the lemon jelly.

"You see it's this way," the Giant tried to explain, "my old friend, Mr. Sun, keeps the outside of the Earth warm, but I keep the inside nice and comfy."

It seemed strange to hear the Giant use that word, "comfy." It is a word that always seems to sound small, and the Giant was so huge.

"I haven't seen my chum, Mr. Sun, for quite a spell," the Giant went on, "let me see—it was the other day when I last saw him."

"What day?" asked Marmaduke, "last Sunday?"

"Oh, no, a little before that. I guess it was about a million years ago."

"A million! Whew!" Marmaduke whistled. "That was quite a long time."

"Oh, no," responded the Giant, "not as long as you think. No more than three shakes of a lamb's tail—when you come to look at it right."

"But where do you get all the coal?" was Marmaduke's next question. "I should think you'd use it all up quick, you put on such big shovelsful."

"See there," the Giant said, for answer pointing in at the sides of the pit. Little tunnels ran from the sides into the dark Earth. And in the tunnels were little gnomes, with stocking caps on their heads, and they were trundling little wheelbarrows back and forth. The wheelbarrows were full of coal, and when they had dumped the coal on the Giant's pile they would hurry back for more. In their foreheads were little lights, and in the dark tunnels of the Earth these shone like fireflies or little lost stars.

"Would you like to see a trick?" asked the Giant.

"A card trick?" asked Marmaduke in turn, rather hoping it was.

The Giant laughed and looked down at his fingers. Each one was as big as a thick flagpole thirty feet long.

"What would these fingers be doing, playing cards?" he said. "Pshaw! I couldn't play even Old Maid—or Casino."

"I'll show you how," said Marmaduke eagerly, and the Giant put him on a shelf of the Earth close to his head. Then Marmaduke took from his pocket a little pack of cards and shuffled them. He explained the rules very carefully—Old Maid it was—and then dealt them to Ping Pong, Sing Song and Ah See, for they joined in the game, and to the Giant. In those thirty-foot fingers the tiny cards looked like little bits of pink confetti. The Giant seemed to like the game, but Marmaduke beat the three little Chinamen, and the Giant, too, for all he was so big.

They had finished the second hand, when the Giant looked at his furnace.

"There, that's what I get for loafin'," he said, "my furnace is 'most out."

After he had thrown about a thousand shovelfuls or so on the fire, which must have taken him all of five minutes, the Giant turned to Marmaduke.

"I haven't shown you my trick," he said, "how would you like to see me make a volcano blow up?"

Marmaduke was a little frightened, but it was too good a chance to miss.

"Yes, thank you," he replied, "that would be rather nice."

"Well, sir, watch then."

And the Giant raised his hands to his mouth and shouted at the little gnomes:—

"Hurry, more coal now—make it snappy!"

And the gnomes ran back and forth from the coal-piles to the tunnels, trundling their wheelbarrows, until their legs twinkled under them as fast as the little lights in their foreheads.

Soon the coal-pile was as high as a black mountain, and the Giant began to shovel, shovel away, throwing the coal into the mouth of the furnace which was as high as the Woolworth Tower. Then he closed the door and watched.

The flames began to leap, and the steam began to hiss, and soon the great furnace began to shake all over with the steam imprisoned inside, just like a man with chills and fever. Then all-of-a-sudden, from somewhere above them on the outside of the Earth, they heard a great roar.

"There goes old Vesuvius," said the Giant.

There was another great roar.

"And there's Aetna and Cotopaxi," he added, "now for Old Chimborazo!"

Marmaduke remembered enough of his geography to know that the Giant was calling off the names of the great volcanoes of the world. It was indeed very thrilling! But he really had hardly time to think, for he had to hold on so tight to the rope hair of the Giant's beard; and if the three little Chinamen hadn't kept tight hold, too, of their flatirons, they would have been blown to the ceiling of the pit, the furnace and the whole place shook so. As it was they were tossed head over heels, their feet flying in the air, but their hands held

on to the flatirons like ships to their anchors, and they were saved.

The Giant turned to Marmaduke.

"Have you the time?" he asked, "I've broken the watch my grandfather gave me."

Marmaduke took out his little Ingersoll with one hand, meanwhile holding on with the other to the beard.

"It's just twelve," he informed the Giant.

"Noon again—my, how Time does fly!" the Giant exclaimed. "It seems as if yesterday were the first noon, and yet that was a couple of million years ago. But we've had only six volcanoes. We must have six more for a noon whistle, so the little gnomes will know it's time for lunch."

There were six more gigantic explosions up on the outside of the earth, then the little gnomes all stopped work, turned up their wheelbarrows, sat down on them in tailor-fashion, took out their lunch-pails, and began to eat. Then the three little Chinamen perched on their irons and took out some bowls and chopsticks. It made the Giant laugh to see their funny antics.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed he, but he turned away his head in another direction before he laughed.

"I'm laughing in that direction," he explained, "because there's a city full of wicked people up there, on the Earth outside. When I laugh, it's an Earthquake, you see, and I don't want to shake up the good people. Now"—he pointed in another direction— "the town of Five Corners is up about there. You wouldn't want me to try an Earthquake on it , would you?"

Marmaduke thought this was very kind and considerate of the Giant, to try to spare the people in the town where he went to buy candy and to see circuses and things. Then he had an idea.

"Couldn't you shake up the ground a mile or two west of that—see," he pointed his finger at the roof of the pit, "about there. That's where Fatty lives, over near Wally's Creek, and it would do him good to be shaken up by a earthquake—just a little one."

"All right," replied the Giant, "I can accommodate you. But you're running a risk. I might kill your friend Fatty."

"He isn't any friend of mine," Marmaduke interrupted—then he thought for a moment. After all he didn't really want Fatty killed. He guessed he'd better not take a chance.

"No," he said, shaking his head, "after all, I 'spose you'd better not try it."

"All right," the Giant answered, "just as you say. But have you had any lunch?"

At that question Marmaduke suddenly felt rather faint, and he watched the Giant hungrily, as he took out of an oven in the furnace a dozen steers, roasted whole, and ten loaves of bread, each as big as a house.

It didn't take many gulps for the Giant to swallow the whole lot, but first he very kindly handed a few crumbs of bread to Marmaduke up on his shoulder. At least the Giant thought they were crumbs, but they were really as big as loaves of bread Mother made. And the little slivers of roasted steer which the Giant reached up to him were as big as whole steaks. So Marmaduke's hunger was soon satisfied, and, for once in his life, Wienerwurst's, too.

He wanted to stay a little longer, to talk with the big Giant and ask him questions, but, looking down, he saw the three little Chinamen making odd gestures and beckoning to him with their long fingernails.

"We must hully, quickillilly," they said, which, of course, meant, as you should know, that they had to hurry quickly, or it would be dark before they reached China.

He told his troubles to the Giant, who said he "didn't see what anyone wanted to see that heathen land for," but nevertheless he lifted the little boy down, hundreds of feet to the ground, and Marmaduke curled up on his iron, and the three little yellow men curled up on theirs, while Wienerwurst got down on his haunches; and they all said "goodbye" to the great Giant, and the little gnomes trundling their wheelbarrows, and the little twinkling lights in their foreheads.

On the other side of the furnace, the hole opened up again, and down it they scooted on their way to China. It was fortunate that the Giant had given Marmaduke something to eat, for it was a long trip.

There were many wonderful things there, but as you're all yawning, and we couldn't make sleepyheads understand, for that you'll have to wait till another night.