



15. The Peppermint Pagoda

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After Marmaduke and Wienerwurst, Ping Pong, Sing Song, and Ah See, had scooted down the long hole for a few thousand miles or so, they began to see light below them, a little circle of blue, just at the other end, on the other side of the world. When their long journey was over, they got up from their flatirons and stretched themselves, and Wienerwurst got up from his haunches and stretched himself. Then one by one they stuck their heads out of the bottom of the hole to take a look at China.

A very pretty country it was, yet quite strange. The strangest thing about it all was that now, though they were on the opposite side of the world from the White House with the Green Blinds by the Side of the Road, they weren't standing upside down. They could stand up straight, with their heads—not their feet—in the air, and look at the sun, at the bottom of the hole just as they did at the top, on the farm back home.

When all five had climbed out, they found that they were near a great wall. It was built of very old stones and was as wide as a road on top. Several horses could ride abreast on it.

A company of Chinese soldiers with guns and swords guarded the gate, and the three little Chinamen, Ping Pong, Sing Song, and Ah See, were afraid to enter with the American boy. The soldiers might have let Wienerwurst in because he was yellow like themselves, but Marmaduke was much too white.

Of course, he was disappointed, but his disappointment didn't last long, for Ping Pong just clapped his hands, and all three crouched down as boys do when they are playing leapfrog, or like the acrobats in the circus. Sing Song climbed on the back of Ping Pong, and Ah See on top of Sing Song. But at that Ah See's head reached only half way up the great wall.

He leaned down towards Marmaduke.

"Come up, little Mellican boy," said he.

And Marmaduke climbed up on the three backs and stood on the shoulders of Ah See, who exclaimed in delight to his friends,—

"Why, he not flaidlily at all."

Then he told Marmaduke to catch hold of his pigtail. Which the little boy did, and Ah See swung his head round and round, and his pigtail with it, like David's slingshot in the Bible story.

When the little boy was spinning around through the air, fast as fast as could be, Ping Pong cried,—

"Velly fine—now—one-two-thlee! Let him go!"

Marmaduke obeyed instantly, letting go of the pigtail and flying through the air like a shot. The three little Chinamen all tumbled in a heap at the foot of the wall, but Marmaduke flew over on the other side and landed safely on his feet, inside the great country of

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

China.

He was pleased to see little Wienerwurst, whom the soldiers had let in through the gate, wagging his tail right beside him; and soon the three little Chinamen came running up, too, and one and all started to explore this great country of China.

As far as their eyes could see, stretched green valleys and blue hills under a pale silver sky, and thousands of men and women, as little and as yellow as Ping Pong, Sing Song and Ah See, worked among the tea-fields on every side.

“See that bush,” said Ping Pong, “some day Mellican boy’s mother drink cup tea from that. Taste velly fine too.”

“And this bush,” he went on, pointing to another, “make cup for Missee F-f-f”—he found it hard to say that name— “for Missee Fizzletlee.”

And Marmaduke thought it quite wonderful to see the very tea plants which his mother and Mrs. Fizzletree would drink up some day, on the other side of the world, twelve thousand miles away. But there was something else to think about. Trouble seemed to be in the wind. For a little way ahead of them, up the zigzagging white road, they saw an odd-looking group of men. They had swords curved like sickles, hats like great saucers turned upside down, and fierce eyes, and drooping mustaches. Their finger nails were six inches long and stuck out, when they talked, like the claws of wild beasts.

All the people working in the tea-fields hid under the bushes when they saw those men. Only the tea-bushes didn’t help them much, for they were so frightened that their little pigtails rose straight up in the air like new shoots growing out of the bushes. There were thousands of those pigtails sticking up straight in the air all over the fields. As for the three little friends, Ping Pong, Sing Song, and Ah See, they trembled like leaves in the wind, then threw themselves flat on their bellies in the dusty road.

“Who are those fellows?” asked Marmaduke, beginning to be frightened.

“It’s Choo Choo Choo and his gang, allee velly bad men,” explained Ping Pong, though he found it very hard to say anything, his teeth chattered so.

The wild men with hats like saucers turned upside down and the long mustaches and fingernails, came near. Four of them had big poles laid over their shoulders. From the poles hung a funny carriage like a hammock-swing with beautiful green curtains. It was called a “palanquin.” When they reached the place where Marmaduke stood, they let the palanquin down on the ground, and he heard a terrible swearing going on behind the green curtains.

The curtains opened, and out stepped a man, also with a hat like a saucer turned upside down, only it was made all of gold and had precious stones in its rim. And his eyes were fiercer, his mustaches longer than those of the other men. In fact, his mustaches reached almost to his knees, and he kept pulling and tugging at them with fingernails that were fully a foot long. My, if those fingernails ever reached Marmaduke’s eyes there wouldn’t be much of them left. That’s what Marmaduke was thinking. And they were very much frightened—all except Wienerwurst, who was smelling the funny slippers of the wild strangers.

Choo Choo Choo (for that was their leader’s name) stretched himself. With his droop-

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

ing sleeves and foot-long fingernails, he looked like the bats that sail under the trees in the twilight and nest, so they say, in people's hair. He gazed out over the tea-fields and saw not a soul, for every mother's son and mother's daughter, too, was hiding tight under the bushes, but a million little pigtailed trembled in the air.

"Wheel!" shouted the great Choo Choo Choo;

And again,—

"Wheel!"

And once more,—

"Wheel!"

The million pigtailed shook more wildly each time until, at the last, the million little Chinamen rose up from their hiding-places under the bushes, and came running from all over the fields like the inhabitants of a great city running to a fire.

When they reached the road and the green palanquin, they fell on their knees, jabbering and praying the chief Choo Choo Choo not to hurt them with his long curved sword or the curved fingernails, which were worse than the sword.

"Pss-ss-iss-sst!" exclaimed Choo Choo Choo, who for all his faults liked to see people brave and not cowardly like that.

"Psss-sss-iss-sst!" he said again, then a third time, for in China, especially if you are a robber, you must say things three times if you really mean it, or else people won't believe you at all.

So, again "Pss-ss-iss-sst!" said this bold Choo Choo Choo.

At this third dread cry, each of the million Chinamen took out of his pocket a penny, a Chinese penny. And a Chinese penny is rather big, with a hole in the centre, and funny chicken-track letters stamped on it.

Before Marmaduke could have said "Jack Robinson," there were a million of them lying in the road.

Choo Choo Choo scratched his head with his long fingernail. He didn't know what in the world to do with so many pennies.

After some time he seemed to land on an idea, for he beckoned to one of his soldiers with that nail. And when that nail beckoned, it looked like the long claw of a lobster, waving awkwardly back and forth. It would have been funny indeed, if it hadn't been quite so dangerous.

Nearby a kite flew high in the air, its string tied to a tea-bush. Choo Choo Choo's servant hauled in the kite and the twine, and one by one the soldiers strung all those pennies, those pennies with holes in them, on the twine, like beads on a string.

When they had finished, the string of pennies looked like a great shiny bronze snake coiling back in the road for almost a mile.

By this time the great robber chief Choo Choo Choo had begun to notice Marmaduke.

"Come here!" he commanded, crooking a fingernail. It was funny how Ping Pong, Sing Song, and Ah See, who were quite honest, spoke broken or Pigeon English, while Choo Choo Choo talked correctly and very politely. Robbers, and burglars too, frequently do that.

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

So you can't always tell a man by his fine language.

Marmaduke obeyed. He drew near the palanquin and waited, his heart banging against his ribs.

"What are you doing here?" asked Choo Choo Choo.

"I want to see China."

"Oh you do, do you!" said the robber chief, "and why, pray, do you want to see China?"

"I wanted to see if the people stood upside down on the other side of the world," explained Marmaduke, hoping that this explanation would please Choo Choo Choo.

"So," said he very sarcastically, "that's silly—immeasurably silly, I call it. Look out or you'll go back without a head yourself. But first tell me,—have you any ancestors, honorable ancestors?"

"What are ancestors, honorable ancestors, sir?" Marmaduke inquired. He thought that if he said "sir"—very politely—it might help matters a bit.

"Oh, people in your family who lived long before you, and who have long beards and are very honest," returned the robber chief.

Marmaduke thought it was odd, his mentioning that honorable ancestors must be honest, when he was a robber himself, but anyway he was relieved as he thought of "Great-grandpa Boggs."

"Yes," he told Choo Choo Choo, "if that's what it is, I have an honorable ancestor—Great-grandpa Boggs. He was very old before he died. He was so old his voice sounded like a tiny baby's, and he had a beard—a long and white one—that nearly reached to the bottom button of his vest, and he must have been honest, 'cause Mother said he might have been rich if he hadn't been so honest."

"But wait a minute," roared Choo Choo Choo, "did he have fingernails as long as mine?"

"No," replied Marmaduke, "they were short like these," and he showed him his own hands.

"Pss-ss-iss-sst!" said Choo Choo Choo in disgust, "he couldn't have been so very honorable then. I guess we'd better behead you without any more argument."

He looked around at the sky and so did Marmaduke. It was very pretty and blue, and the road looked very white and inviting, the tea-bushes very lovely and green.

"It's just the right weather for beheading," remarked Choo Choo Choo, "soldiers, are your swords very sharp?" and he patted the snake made of pennies that curved up the white road.

Marmaduke was certainly in danger now, but he kept his head so as not to lose it. And he found an idea in it.

The idea was this:—

Before he had left the Coal-Giant in the Pit in the centre of the earth, the Giant had told him, if he ever needed an earthquake to help him out, to call on him. All Marmaduke was to do was to tap on the earth three times with his right foot, three times with his left, and three times more, standing on his head. Then he was to run away. The Giant had promised to allow five minutes so that Marmaduke and his friends could get to safety.

So this Marmaduke did, just as he had been told. He tapped on the ground three times with his right foot, three times with his left, and three times more, standing on his head,

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

and all under Choo Choo Choo's very nose, for, of course, that was the very place where Marmaduke wanted the earthquake to come.

Choo Choo Choo must have been fooled, for he stopped patting the snake made of pennies, and sharpening his fingernails, and the soldiers ceased whetting their swords. They thought Marmaduke was performing circus tricks for their entertainment.

As soon as he was through standing on his head, he had run away, of course, to get out of the way of the earthquake which he knew would come. But the robbers thought he was just running back to his dressing-room, as all acrobats do, and would come back again for his bow. But he didn't. And after five minutes, just as the Coal Giant had promised, there came a great roar and a mighty tremble, and Choo Choo Choo and all his soldiers were blown up in the air, and when they came down they fell on their heads and knocked their brains out. Then Marmaduke came back—to find them all dead—stone dead.

And he thought it was very kind of the Coal Giant in the Pit in the center of the Earth to help him out with that little favor.

But now all the million tea-Chinamen, who had seen the great happening, fell down on their knees. They thought Marmaduke must have come from Heaven, to work such wonders.

So they dressed him all up in a blue mandarin's coat, which they found in the palanquin. It was covered with pretty snakes, all embroidered in scarlet and gold. And they gave him a cap like a saucer turned upside down and made of gold, and he looked all dressed up for a party.

I guess the million Chinamen thought he did, too, and that they must get up a party for him, for they led him to the great Pagoda which stood on the top of the hill, and which, they told him, was the highest anywhere in the world.

When they reached it, Marmaduke saw that it had many stories, which grew smaller as they mounted nearer the sky. And each had roofs curving like skis at the end. It was all pink-colored, too, with stripes, and he saw that it was built of peppermint!

He was minded to eat it as Hansel and Gretel had eaten their sugar house, but he didn't, because Ping Pong said it was sacred.

On a throne of stone, inside the Pagoda, sat an old jolly Billiken, also of stone, and shaped just like an egg, with his hands across his tummy and his legs crossed under him.

Now all the million Chinamen had followed Marmaduke, their slippers going "clippity clop," on the pavement of the courtyard. They thought he must be very wonderful to make the earthquake that killed Choo Choo Choo, and they wanted him to sit on the great stone throne of the Billiken. But Marmaduke wouldn't let them. He didn't want to take the seat of the old Billiken when the old fellow had sat there for three thousand years and more.

Billiken, however, had an idea about that. Probably he thought he had been sitting there long enough, for he uncrossed his stone arms from his stone tummy, unwriggled his stone feet, and stood up, stretching and yawning.

"My, but that was a long sleep," he said, and Marmaduke nodded his head. Three thousand years was considerable of a sleep.

Then the Billiken stretched out his hand to shake Marmaduke's. The little boy thought it

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

felt very cold, but his new friend's face looked jolly enough.

"Hello!" said the Billiken, "have a game?"

"A game of what Mr. Billiken?" Marmaduke replied.

"Oh, any old thing. What's the latest?"

Marmaduke thought for a moment.

"Well, there's Duck on the Rock," he suggested, "or Roly Poly."

"Duck on the Rock sounds interesting, let's try that."

Then he waved to the other little stone images all around him.

"Come on, fellows, let's play Duck on the Rock. But how do you play it?" he added to Marmaduke, as they reached the courtyard.

"Oh," replied that little boy, "it's easy. You just place a little rock on a big one, and you each stand on the line with rocks in your hand, an' take turns trying to knock the little one off the big one."

"Suits me," said Billiken, "here, you, stand on my head." And he picked up one of the little stone images and set him upon his own head, that was shaped so like an egg.

"Now shoot," he commanded Marmaduke, "let's see how it goes."

And Marmaduke did as he was bid, and he knocked off the little stone image from the old Billiken's head.

They kept up the game for quite a while, but at last Marmaduke made a wild shot. The rock which he threw went high up in the air and knocked a pink gable off the Peppermint Pagoda.

At this, all the million Chinamen, who had been watching the game respectfully from a distance, set up a howl. They thought it was a sin to smash their pagoda, and that Marmaduke ought to be punished.

So, one and all, they made a rush for him, but again he remembered the Coal Giant's advice. He tapped the ground three times with his right foot, three times with his left, and three times, standing on his head.

Then, after he had run to safety, there came as pretty an earthquake as ever you saw. It didn't kill all the million little Chinamen, but it threw them down on the ground, knocking the wind out of their million tummies completely. And, of course, after that they were very good, being afraid of Marmaduke, as well they might be.

Now, just at this time, the Queen happened by in a magnificent palanquin of cloth of gold. When she saw the trick that Marmaduke had performed, she, too, thought he must have come down from the sky, and she sent her chief officer, the mandarin, to fetch the strange little boy to the Palace.

He was glad to accept the invitation, for he was getting pretty hungry by now. But they had to go through many beautiful grounds with strange summer-houses, and high walls, and ponds with rainbow goldfish swimming in them, before they reached the main part of the palace itself. Then the Queen sat down on her throne, with her mandarins around her, all dressed in those funny coats like pajama-tops and embroidered with red dragons, and gold birds with great wings, and all sorts of queer things.

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

The Queen seemed a little out of sorts, for, when he came to the throne, she said to him sharply,—

“Show me a trick, or I’ll cut your head off.”

Marmaduke was puzzled. He didn’t know just what to do. He didn’t want to start another earthquake. That was only to be used in times of great danger. He’d better try something else first. So he felt in his pockets once more, to see what he could find, and brought out the little pack of cards with which he had played with the Coal Giant.

“I’ll teach you how to play”— “Old Maid,” he was going to say, but he stopped in time. He thought that maybe the Queen had never been married and she’d be insulted if he asked her to play Old Maid. Then, too, she might insult him back by cutting his head off. And nobody could stand an insult like that. So he just said,—

“Casino is a fine game.”

But “No,” the Queen replied angrily, “I played that long before you were born. And my honorable ancestors played it before me.”

Again Marmaduke felt in his pockets, hoping to find something that would help him out. He drew forth a penny, a fishhook, a dried worm, two marbles, and—there—just the thing—the game of Authors, which Aunt Phrony had given him for his birthday.

“I’ll tell you what,” he told the Queen, “let’s play Authors. There’s nothing better than that.”

“Authors, authors—” the Queen replied, tapping her foot impatiently, “what are they?”

“Oh, people who write books and stories an’ things. It’s very nice.”

So he explained to the Queen all about them, about Longfellow and Whittier and all the rest. He really didn’t know so very much about them, you see, but he had played the game so often that he knew the cards and names “most by heart.”

“Gracious!” exclaimed the Queen—in Chinese, of course. “Whittier and Longfellow— what pretty names! But haven’t you got Confucius there, somewhere?” Confucius, you see, was a man who wrote in Chinese long years ago, and he was one of her pet authors.

Marmaduke shuffled the cards all over, but couldn’t seem to find that name.

“I guess he’s been lost,” he said politely, so as not to hurt her feelings and lose his head, “but I’ll tell you what”—he added, pointing to a picture of Dickens— “we can call this man Confoundit just as well.”

“Confucius, not Confoundit,” the Queen corrected him crossly, then she looked at the card. “That’ll do, I suppose. That author has a kind face and a real long beard. It’s not half bad.”

She chose Marmaduke for her partner, and they played against the two tallest mandarins in the red dragon coats.

The Queen and Marmaduke beat the old mandarins badly, due to Marmaduke’s fine playing. And the Queen was so pleased that she exclaimed,—

“After all, I won’t cut off your head. You see, it might stain that pretty rug, I guess we’d better have tea and a party instead.” Then she added,— “By the way, do you drink tea?”

“Yes, thank you,” he replied, “but make it ‘cambric.’”

“All right if you prefer it,” she remarked, “but I call it silly to spoil a good drink that way.”

Then she clapped her hands, and her servants came running in, with huge trays of won-

## 15. The Peppermint Pagoda

---

derful foods in their arms. And the Queen and the mandarins, Marmaduke and Wienerwurst, and Ping Pong, Sing Song, and Ah See, all sat around the throne, drinking out of the little blue cups and eating the strange food. It made Marmaduke's eyes almost pop out of his head to see the way the Queen and her mandarins, and his three little yellow friends, devoured those dishes,—the stewed rats, the fricasseed shark's fins, and the old birds' nests. Now Wienerwurst didn't seem to object to that sort of food at all, but "licked it right up" like the Chinamen. Marmaduke chose other things instead,—some pickled goldfish, candied humming-birds' tongues, some frozen rose-petals, whipped cloud pudding, and a deep dish of spiced air from the sky, with dried stars for raisins. And, to wash it all down, he had a little blue cup of tea, "cambric" of course, quite as his mother would have wished.

Seeing that he was growing drowsy from such a big meal, the Queen took pity on him and said he could lean back against the golden throne and take a nap.

But first she called the mandarin who was in charge of the Fire-cracker Treasury, where they kept all the finest fire-crackers in the world, and ordered him to bring Marmaduke some. Soon the mandarin came back, and, with him, six servants, with trays heaped high with the prettiest and the fanciest fire-crackers ever boy or man saw. They were wrapped in rose-colored silk paper, with gold letters on the paper, and dragons, too, with great eyes and fiery forked tongues.

The six servants and the mandarin filled all Marmaduke's seven pockets with the packs of fire-crackers, and tied one on Wienerwurst's tail. Then they handed him some bundles of extra-fine punk sticks. It wasn't at all like ordinary punk, but very sweet-smelling.

He lighted one stick, and it smelled so like incense, and he felt so drowsy and nice, that he started to fall asleep. The lighted punk fell lower and lower until it touched one of the fire-cracker-packs. The silk paper began to curl and grow black, then it burst into flames. There was a sputter, then a crackle like the firing of many rifles, and then a great roar. My, but those were powerful fire-crackers. One pack exploded—and he was blown through the palace. Another—and over the Peppermint Pagoda he flew. Still another went off, and he was tossed clean over the Great Wall to the mouth of the hole down which he had come that very same day.

Then the last pack went—bang! and he was blown through the hole, Wienerwurst after him, up, up, up, past the Coal Giant and the Furnace Pit, and up, up, up, until he saw, just above him, the little circle of light again.

Out of it he flew—and—all of a sudden his head cleared, and he saw he was sitting back at home once more, sitting against the cedar post, and the Toyman was rubbing his head.

"Never mind," the Toyman was saying, "It'll feel better soon. And how did you like China?"

The head did feel better "pretty soon." Anyway, he didn't mind it a bit. It was worth a headache, as the Toyman said, to have seen the wonderful land of China.