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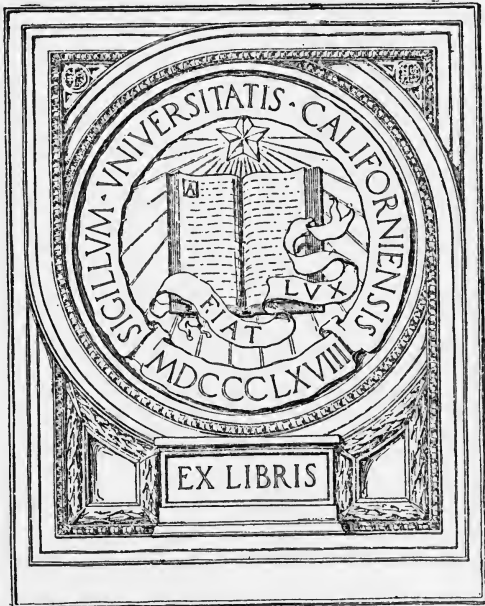
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The Lion at the Well

Lionel Josaphare

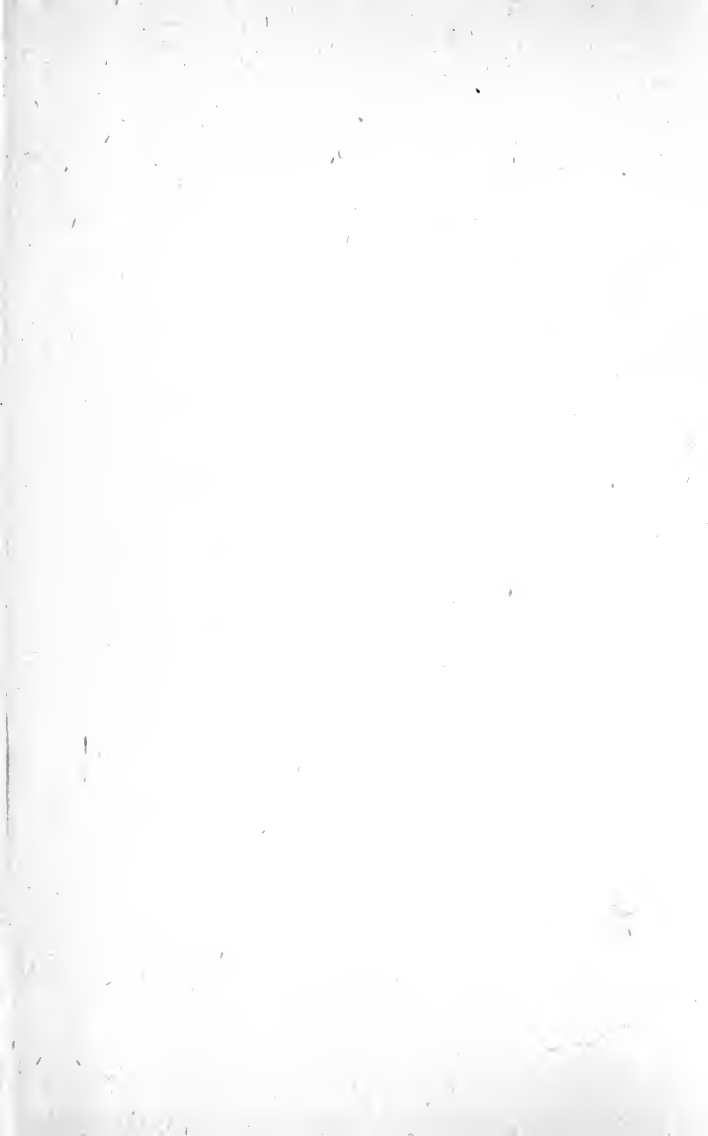
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The Lion at the Well

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Lionel Josaphare

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San Francisco

G. M. Robertson

1901

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Printed by
The Stanley-Taylor Company
San Francisco

The Lion at the Well

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The Lion at the Well.

Loved friend, for thee, and only thee,
I pen this ink-embroidery.

No more on earth,
For woe or mirth,
We'll meet.

Doubt not this tale, nor dare to see thy friend,
Whose visage weird corroborates his pains.

Thou'dst look on me, should I allow ;
Thou'dst call my voice a ghostly sough,
And peer beneath mine eaves of brow,
Asking if eyes be there, or hollow spirit.

At flare of sun, with sullen gun,
That dreamed of tiger's vein undone,
For blood and fame,
I chased for game,
Alone.

My scribbling feet on earth's fair parchment blotted
Until the sun fell smoking out of heaven.

No more a circle or a shield,
Like wax it melted on the field.
The day was wrapped and redly sealed ;
But that same night had things to show to me.

O'er highland crag, my legs I drag ;
Nor yet the death of lean-ribbed stag,
I lost my gun.
My friendly gun
Slipped from me.

I saw it at the bottom of a chasm.
I saw a fangy thing, like to an entrail,
With yellowish-green belly glide
Over my gun that was my pride,
That must for evermore betide
With rock and reptile in a futile gorge.

From cliff and scar I traveled far,
Groping along without a star,
 To say, at least,
 “Here’s west,” or “east,”
 Or “north!”

No wink or meaning moved the face of night,
That, like a dumb and hideous giant, gaped.
 Much too exhaust to be alarmed,
 I slept upon the sod unarmed,
 And roused before the day unharmed,
And waited for the sun to give me light.

With dash, with glee, the sun flung free
Its colors and its chivalry.
 I felt my health
 Had left by stealth,
 From thirst.

Soon on the world the blue-enameled sky
Was spotless, save of that one spot, the sun ;
 But showed me not a brook or drain.
 On, onward I, on all in vain,
 Still stuck dead-centered in the plain,
Tasting a thousand ways ; but all were dry.

Then it befell I found a well,
A lowly, rocky, sun-drawn well,
Down twenty feet,
And flashing heat —
But water !

The steep descent was coigned with granite prisms,
Bottomed but thinly by this muslin pool.
So did the wrinkles of my brain
Therewith close cuddle to explain
How we might use ourself amain
And violate the beverage below.

While thus I sat, engaged thereat,
I saw before me, on the flat,
A beastly scare,
With sacred stare,
A lion.

Slowly and draggle-tailed, he crawled his ground,
Lifting to bay defiance at the skies.
With all the bankrupt strength he owns,
Shag-necked and drouthy-skinned, he moans,
Dishonorable crate of bones,
Unlionlike he creaketh towards the well.

His head holds low ; he sees the flow ;

His eyes with double anger grow.

The curb he rakes ;

The crag he breaks ;

And roars.

I knew not how to run or stay. But while
He gazed below, I solved my thoughts as these :

To flee was daring miles of thirst ;

To stay, I must the lion durst.

I stayed, still guessing which the worst.

And then he saw me. Still, still, still stood I.

The air that lies between us dries

In the hot encounter of our eyes.

But mine he brooked

Not long, and looked

Away.

Emboldened by his fear, I did advance,

Hanging discreetly to the cliffy brink ;

But when his maneship saw my bent,

Enraged at my emboldenment,

Warning across the cave he sent,

And, doubtful of his temper, I desisted.

All through the day, with noisy bray,
The jealous brute opposed my way.

At night his rage
I could not guage,
But watched him.

Catting this hole of waters, sat we, or
Consulted mutual oracles, our eyes.

“ O star of waters, far-off pool,
Rise out thy rocky vestibule !
Have pity on a thirsty fool —
Come back, thou dreamy-rising, swindling water ! ”

“ With whiskered maw and bludgeon paw,
Thou brawling brute, thou wouldst abawe
My thirst from that,
Thou swollen cat,
Thou hell-child ! ”

He blinks. Upon the porches of his back
The wan day sits. The beast thinks to affright me.
Give me a sword of sweetsome line ;
Spend me a blade of razor spine,
Or lend a knife ; I'll kill that swine,
Rip him of tripe and entrail and disbowel 'im.

Still live his eyes, his tawny eyes.
More than his claws, I fear his eyes.

An atheist
He is, I wist,
I know.

For did not God give us to lord these beasts?
And that proud criminal will not obey me.

The drilling zigzag of those eyes
Glamors and sprays and multiplies.

The light behind them never dies,
But shines and lives and waits for me to die.

My tongue is kept, while waves unwept
Go vagrant by their banks unstept,

While salmon souze,
While dogs carouse

In waters —

Eternal waters balancing 'twixt earth
And heaven. Come, O thou, some water now!

While I am death of dry-lipped ills,
Some devil-fish is in its fills,

Is looting gallons through its gills,
Of other, damned, complacent, lipping waters.

The lion roared his concave hoard
Of thunders. But our God ignored.

Be still, thou lion,

Throated of iron,

Roar not !

Great God, untake the devil from my throat !
Take — no. Thou dost not hear, thou dost not care.

O sky, is God my spirit spurning ?

Or is he strengthless of discerning

The solemn soul to heaven turning ?

Death laughs reply and into my face coughs.

I could not speak ; could meanly wreak
From my hot throat a thin, dry squeak.

Over a mass

Of broken glass,

I breathed.

Another night, and then the morning glee-song

Will be my lullaby. And after that,

For others will come other days ;

The sun will rise and seek its ways ;

And western window-panes will blaze,

While I lie here out-thirst before a lion.

I dreamt the twinkled heaven sprinkled
Star-drops, that on the waters tinkled —

A fantasy

On cloud and tree

And well.

I dreamt I wanted to jump down. I saw
My hacked and haggled flesh blood-sopped and oozing,
Quenching the rocks with crimson slime —
My blood, wretch of a strange-wrought crime.

I woke, a beggar brat of Time,

A note once bugled, and then heard no more.

A fingering loon, defunct, bestrewn,
All night I crouched beneath the moon,

With wide eyes clear,

In ugly fear

Of dreaming.

Had mine earth nourished me to cast away ?

Was I as worthless as a clump of snow,

Patted compactly round and well

And thrown into a careless hell ?

Even the lion can not tell.

This tragedy without an audience goes on.

Here is my end. Feebly contend
My lungs for air that soon will blend
 With random breezes,
 With careless breezes,
 And be lost.

Upward illumines the sun, that mouldered ball,
And lays its tax on my unwatered hours.
 No hissing brooklet on the view ;
 No clouds are hung along the blue ;
 No trees with jewelry of dew.
The lion sees the sky, the plain, the man.

Hush ! Hush ! They come, with fife and drum.
I comprehend that far-borne hum.
 Thanks, God, to thee,
 They tread for me —
 Saved I !

The Hindu man with rubied coat, he comes.
Come golden manes and brazen hoofs and sphinxes,
 The loup-garou with loud bassoon,
 The dog with evil eye, the loon,
 The vampire-bat, the jibberune,
Awing, afoot, in caravans and coaches.

Stop! Hold! They're gone! Bewinged, out-
flown,

Blue-burst in air and upward blown ;

Away and lethed,

Nor have bequeathed

• A sigh.

The sun comes down, a little, upright circle,

And tips the horizontal rim of earth ;

And earth sucks in the little rimmer ;

The saturated sky is dimmer ;

E'en then a glow and now a glimmer.

The lights are out and cobwebs float the air.

The lion's jowl was flecked afoul

With his diphthongal reach to howl.

His paws were bled ;

He buffeted

The rocks.

This exiled king of beasts, with feazled crown

And fag-end tail, did dialogue the well.

This royalist, in pride yet strong,

Was thought. A puff of dust went wrong.

Leapt, like an uncoiled snake, endlong,

The lion, down, engulfed, loud-fighting, down.

Thus was the vault of sun-cracked gault
By lordly beast shook with assault.

Caves were unrocked,

And streams unlocked

To flow.

Not in my dreams, but in the very day,
The virtuous waters rose to where I kneeled.
And I deforced the flood with whips,
Derived the pleasure through my lips,
Bedrenched my face and sucked the drips,
And quaffed and laved and stood and stalked away.

Here rest I now, as griefs allow ;
My face is raked from chin to brow

With lines that cling —

Time's gardening

Of wrinkles.

The lion's bones are white below the well.
Fragmental rocks weigh on his broken ribs,
While here I bend and grieve and think
Or give my thirsty pen a drink
Of brightest, blackest, coolest ink,
And write of my companion at the brink.

The Grasshopper and the
Butterfly

The Grasshopper and the Butterfly.

By a fern, near a hedge,
Near a fair garden's edge,
With his pride in his eye and his foot on a stone,
With his chin on his chest,
A Grasshopper pressed,
Awaiting his love ; and he waited alone.

She displayed to his eyes,
A bewildering prize,
A Butterfly stained with a passion of dyes.
Now at stop and now flirting,
Half come, half reverting,
She descends to her lover in bashful surprise.

Dark was he ; and she, fair.
They were fated to pair
By the angels in heaven who make lovers' matches.
He was firm ; she uncertain.
Like cornice and curtain
One holds to the other ; one falls and one catches.

The vermilion glows
Of the ripe, fleshy rose,
With lilac in flames and golden-spoked gleams,
Rejoice on her wings ;
And the summer day sings
In the stress of her beauty and opulent beams.

Arabesque and bespangled,
Illumined and angled,
With silver dust shaken, with green shadows grained
With rococo-spun tracings
And filigree lacings,
The quaking fly rested in tremors unfeigned.

And demurely she wisted,
And shyly she listed
The tale of his love that was frenzied and free.
While his eye was aghast,
All trifling was past —
He was jealous and wroth of the bumblebee.

Well may the fly tremble,
Nor seek to dissemble ;
When in anger the hopper was reckless in tone.
And her little head rings
At the terrible things
That he threatens to do if she looks at the drone.

Then she wept on his breast,
And the fellow confessed,
With a low-chuckled laugh, that he did not mean half
Of what he had said.
And he stroked her poor head,
And he stilled her alarms with his libertine chaff.

He said : “ Oh, thine eyes
Are like the sunrise,
Except that the sun is only one !
And more brilliance have you,
For of eyes you have two.”
So was invoice in full of her glamors begun.

“ Thy mouth is as thin
As the head of a pin,
Thy breath is as sweet as jessamine.
Thy footing light
Dost never blight
The skin of the tulip when it is white.”

They made love for a while
On top of a stile ;
They loved it throughout the afternoon.
At the hour of nine,
On the blue-grape vine,
They loved 'neath the eyes of the chaperon moon.

Like a swirling sirocco
 In panting Morocco,
 His passion, at rampant, devastated his soul.
 He neglected his rations
 And usual vocations ;
 At the gateway of Love he paid heavy toll.

Though his love was cyclonic,
 'Twas needly platonic ;
 Her soul was pale as a gleam of the moon.
 Then he spat out brown juice,
 And exclaimed " Oh, the deuce !"
 While she wished she had died in her silken cocoon.

So their pathos was short ;
 There's no more to report,
 Save that she is dead, she is dried, she is stricken,
 Collected with flies,
 With a pin through her thighs,
 And her hero was nabbed and gulped by a chicken.

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