

The Magnanimity of the Lord Mayor

By Virginia Woodward Cloud

The Secretary sat before the table, with his quill pen ready, and yards of foolscap, and red tape and seals, awaiting the august signature of the Lord Mayor. In his cushioned chair reposed the Lord Mayor. His becurled wig was upon a stand beside him; he settled himself comfortably to consider the pleas of his tenantry respecting their rents.

"The cottages westward of Durley-Green," read the Secretary rapidly, "all damaged by the river and found leaking." The Lord Mayor straightway spread a cambric handkerchief over his head, and, closing his eyes, folded his hands.

"—First; cottage of Goody Todd flooded by the river rising. Can she—"

"No," said the Lord Mayor.

The Secretary laid the paper down and took up another.

"—Second; cottage of Widow Dow unroofed; children ill; will your lordship—"

"No," said the Lord Mayor.

"—Third; Dame Hodge bedridden; cannot pay rent; will your lordship—"

"No," said the Lord Mayor.

With a second sigh the Secretary took up another.

"—Joris Green, overseer, states whereas the hands in the mill cannot buy food with such poor pay as they now receive, will your lordship consent—"

"No," said the Lord Mayor. His eyes were closed; his face calmly content.

"Are they all to be '*No*,' your lordship?" asked the Secretary, playing with the crimson seals.

"Eh?" the Lord Mayor's head came forward suddenly. "*No*? Of a certainty! What might a horde of ignorant peasant folk have to do with the Lord Mayor of Durley-Cross? Bid them set to work upon the arches and garlands for my

birthday fête on the morrow. The Duke of Tumbledown will be present."

"I fear, my lord, that the peasantry are not in a mood to—a—fitly celebrate your lordship's birthday," began the Secretary. "They are, you know, but ignorant folk, and many of them, I find, are—in fact—hungry and—a—suffering. If your lordship would condescend to—a—act at once, to-day, there may yet be time to turn the tide. But I fear that as your lordship says 'No' to all these pleas, the celebration to-morrow will not be—"

The Secretary paused. His lordship's mouth was open, and from it issued a sound which seemed to say,

"Truffles . . . truffles . . . truffles for tea. . . ."

The Secretary bit the end of his pen, and gazed first at the Lord Mayor's placid countenance and then at the documents upon the table.

The flies buzzed upon the pane, and the Lord Mayor snored in his chair, and the Secretary pondered. Suddenly his aspect changed to one of determination. Paper after paper he reopened and touched with his pen. Then, with a smile of satisfaction, he gathered them together and arose. Softly he approached the sleeping figure and lifted the massive gold chain from his neck, and the monstrous wig from beside him. Then, noiselessly, the Secretary bore them into the Lord Mayor's retiring-room, and closed the door.

Soon after the Lord Mayor's coach was called, and a pompous figure, covered by the crimson robe in which his lordship drove abroad, and wearing his lordship's curled wig and golden chain, entered the coach and was driven through the Lord Mayor's gates. Strange to relate, the yellow coach did not dash through the market-place of Durley-Cross, scattering the street urchins and leaving a gaping crowd of idlers staring after. It rolled out upon the highway towards Durley-Green, the abode of the peasant folk.

All along the road the stately, scarlet form bowed right and left from the coach windows, so amazing the poor country folk that many of them forgot to courtesy at all; for the Lord Mayor was not reputedly affable.

It was noticeable that wherever the arches were being built for the Lord Mayor's birthday fête, the work was but half done, whilst workmen sat by the roadside brooding moodily, or stood in groups muttering to one another, with lowering looks as the yellow coach appeared, and stood gazing in astonishment as the scarlet figure within bowed to them. All through Durley-Green women stood trembling in the doorways as the yellow coach drew near, and children hid behind their mothers in fear.

But at each humble abode a lackey sprang down from the coach and unrolled a document, and read it aloud, whereupon exclamations of wonder and delight broke from the inmates of the cottages, and blessings were heaped upon the head of the Lord Mayor of Durley-Cross.

The mill-wheel had stopped, and men were standing about sulkily, and no cap was doffed and no bow made as the Lord Mayor's coach rolled towards them. But, lo! when the lackey sprang down and read aloud the overseer's report and the response of the Lord Mayor, a marvelous change took place. The men looked at each other, unable to believe their eyes, and as the coach rolled away cheer upon cheer broke forth. Then the scarlet figure in the coach leaned forward and waved his hand.

As the horses galloped again up the highway a transformation was manifest. Caps were doffed and cheers filled the air. The mill-wheel was merrily turning, and workmen were flying hither and thither preparing for the morrow's fête; and all along the road the bow of the scarlet figure was received with enthusiasm. Then it settled itself with a sigh of relief as the coach re-entered the Lord Mayor's gates.

Shortly afterwards the Secretary stood before the Lord Mayor's armchair. "It is well-nigh supper-time, your lordship," he said, with a bow.

The Lord Mayor opened his eyes and stared about him. His wig was beside him and his golden chain around his neck.

"Eh? Supper-time? I remember—truffles!" said the

Lord Mayor, reaching for his wig. "Have you read the tenants' pleas?"

"All, my lord," said the Secretary.

"Signed 'No' to all?"

"All, my lord," repeated the Secretary.

The Lord Mayor yawned.

"Municipal affairs are fatiguing. It is too late to drive abroad. Bear in mind that I said Truffles."

On the following day the birthday fête of the Lord Mayor was celebrated with great pomp and splendor. His lordship, in a gorgeous new robe, strutted to and fro, pointing out the decorations to the Duke of Tumbledown, more self-satisfied, if possible, than ever.

At a distance the Secretary stood, surrounded by village folk, who now and then broke into loud cries of "*Long life to the Lord Mayor of Durley!*"

"Everywhere I hear marvelous tales of your lordship's magnanimity," said his Grace of Tumbledown.

"'Twould seem that I understand how to deal with the ignorant, your Grace," said the Lord Mayor, balancing himself upon his heels and studying the crowd through his gold-bowed eye-glass.

"A great man can afford to be generous," said his Grace. And the Lord Mayor felt greater than ever.

But by and by he sent for the Secretary.

"What might all the cheering be about now?" he asked.

"Your lordship's exceeding magnanimity," said the Secretary, bowing.

"You signed '*No*' to all the pleas?"

"All, your lordship, and they have brought blessings from the whole countryside of Durley! Such generosity was unexpected, my lord, but none the less noble."

The Lord Mayor's countenance waxed slightly purple. He eyed the Secretary, who calmly adjusted his sleeve ruffles and continued: "The mill had stopped. There would, in fact, have been no fête. And consider, your lordship—his Grace of Tumbledown!" The Lord Mayor strove to speak, but the Secretary calmly proceeded: "I recall that your lordship was fatigued yesterday with momentous matters, and forbade me to read aloud the entire list. Would it please your lordship that I do so now?"

The Lord Mayor nodded and sank into his cushioned chair, placed for the occasion beneath a canopy. And the Secretary, drawing a document somewhere from his ruffles, read rapidly, "'Goody Todd's cottage flooded, etc. Can she remain in it? *No*."

"Does his lordship refuse her another? *No*."

"Widow Dow's cottage rent unpaid, etc. Will his lordship compel her to pay rent in future? *No*."

"Dame Hodge, bedridden, etc. Will your lordship take rent from feeble and incompetent tenants? *No*."

On through the long document read the Secretary, glibly rolling off the words; and more and more purple grew the Lord Mayor's countenance.

At length his lordship sat upright, and seized his staff so suddenly that the Secretary instinctively stepped back even while the words rolled off his tongue. "How many more?" uttered the Lord Mayor.

"About a hundred, my lord, and all equally generous," said the Secretary.

The Lord Mayor grew so purple that the Secretary hastily dispatched a lackey for a glass of water. But at the instant more cheers—those of the mill hands—rent the air.

"This enthusiasm is a sufficient sign of your lordship's magnanimity," said the Duke of Tumbledown, with a bow.

The Lord Mayor struggled to his feet, and his face grew a shade less purple. "I flatter myself that the—a—celebration is a success, your Grace," he replied, when he had gotten his breath.

And the Secretary stepped aside and tied up his document with red tape.

"And magnanimity is in truth a sign of greatness," pursued his Grace.

The Lord Mayor brought the tips of his fingers together as he bowed, and his rubicund countenance beamed.

For surely a great man may be allowed a small memory.

And the Secretary flicked a speck from his immaculate ruffles and said nothing.