

## *The Water-Drops*

### *A Fairy Tale*

From: Charles "Dickens' Shorter Tales, Choice Stories From Dickens' Household Words" (undated, but mid 1800s)

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### **I. The Suitors of Cirrha, and the Young Lady; With a Reference to Her Papa**

Far in the west there is a land mountainous, and bright of hue, where in the rivers run with liquid light; the soil is all of yellow gold; the grass and foliage are of resplendent crimson; where the atmosphere is partly of a soft green tint, and partly azure. Sometimes on summer evenings we see this land, and then, because our ignorance must refer all things that we see, to something that we know, we say it is a mass of clouds made beautiful by sunset colors. We account for it by principles of Meteorology. The fact has been omitted from the works of Kaemtz or Daniell; but, notwithstanding this neglect, it is well known in many nurseries, that the bright land we speak of, is a world inhabited by fairies. Few among fairies take more interest in man's affairs than the good Cloud Country People; this truth is established by the story I am now about to tell

Not long ago there were great revels held one evening in the palace of King Cumulus, the monarch of the western country. Cirrha, the daughter of the king, was to elect her future husband from a multitude of suitors. Cirrha was a maiden delicate and pure, with a skin white as unfallen snow; but colder than the snow her heart had seemed to all who sought for her affections. When Cirrha floated gracefully and slowly through her father's hall, many a little cloud would start up presently to tread where she had trodden. The winds also pursued her; and even men looked up admiringly whenever she stepped forth into their sky. To be sure they called her Mackerel and Cat's Tail, just as they call her father Ball of Cotton; for the race of man is a coarse race, and calling bad names appears to be a great part of its business here below.

Before the revels were concluded, the King ordered a quiet little wind to run among the guests, and bid them all come close to him and to his daughter. The he spoke to them as follow:

"Worthy friends! there are among you many suitors to my daughter Cirrha, who is pledged this evening to choose a husband. She bids me tell you that she loves you all; but since it is desirable that this our royal house be

strengthened by a fit alliance with some foreign power, she has resolved to take as husband one of those guests who have come hither from the principality of Nimbus."

Now, Nimbus is that country, not seldom visible from some parts of our earth, which we have called the Rain-Cloud. "The subjects of the Prince of Nimbus," Cumulus continued, "are a dark race, it is true, but they are famed for their beneficence."

Two winds, at this point, raised between themselves a great disturbance, so that there arose a universal cry that somebody should turn them out. With much trouble they were driven out from the assembly; thereupon, quite mad with jealousy and disappointment, they went howling off the sea, where they played pool-billiards with a fleet of ships, and so forgot their sorrow.

King Cumulus resumed his speech, and said that he was addressing himself, now, especially to those of his good friends who came from Nimbus. "Tonight, lest them retire to rest, and early the next morning let each of them go down to Earth; whichever of them should be found on their return to have been engaged below in the most useful service be Cirra's husband.

Cumulus, having said this, put a white nightcap on his head, which was the signal for a general retirement. The golden ground of his dominions was covered for the night, as well as the crimson trees with cotton. So the whole kingdom was put properly to bed. Late in the night the moon got up, and threw over King Cumulus a silver counterpane.

## II. The Adventures of Nebulus and Nubis

The suitors of the Princess Cirra, who returned to Nimbus, were a-foot quite early the next morning, and petitioned their good-natured Prince to waft them over London. They had agreed among themselves, that by descending there, where men were densely congregated, they would have a greater chance of doing service to the human race. Therefore the Rain-Cloud floated over the great City of the World, and, as it passed at sundry points, the suitors came down upon raindrops to perform their destined labor. Where each might happen to alight depended almost wholly upon accident; so that their adventures were but little better than a lottery for Cirra's hand. One had been the most magniloquent among them all, fell with his pride upon the patched umbrella of an early breakfast woman, and from thence was shaken off into a puddle. He was splashed up presently, mingled with soil, upon the corduroys of a laborer, who stopped for breakfast on his way to work. From thence, evaporating, he returned crest-fallen to the Land of Clouds.

Among the suitors there were two kind-hearted fairies, Nebulus and Nubis, closely bound by friendship to each other. While they were in conversation, Nebulus, who suddenly observed that they were passing over some unhappy region, dropped, with a hope that he might bless it. Nubis passed on, and presently alighted on the surface of the Thames.

The district which had wounded the kind heart of Nebulus was in a part of Bermondsey, called Jacob's Island. The fairy fell into a ditch; out of this, however, he was taken by a woman, who carried him to her own home, among other ditchwater, within a pail. Nebulus abandoned himself to complete despair, for what claim could he now establish on the poor fairy we may gather from a description given by a son of man of the sad place to which he had descended. "In this Island may be seen, at any time of the day, women dipping water, with pails attached by ropes to the backs of the houses, from a foul fetid ditch, its banks coated with a compound of mud and filth, and strewn with offal and carrion; the water to be used for every purpose, culinary ones not excepted; although close to the place whence it is drawn, filth and refuse of various kinds are plentifully showered into it from the outhouses of the wooden houses overhanging its current, or rather slow and sluggish stream; their posts or supporters rotten, decayed, and, in many instances broken, and the filth dropping into the water, to be seen by any passer by. During the summer, crowds of boys bathe in the putrid ditches, where they must come in contact with

abominations highly injurious.” (Report of Mr. Bowie on the cause of Cholera in Bermondsey). So Nebulus was carried in a pail out of the ditch to a poor woman’s home, and put into a battered saucepan with some other water. Thence, after boiling, he was poured into an earthen tea-pot over some stuff of wretched flavor, said to be tea. Now thought the fairy, after all, I may give pleasure at the breakfast of these wretched people. He pictured to himself a scene of love as preface to a day of squalid toil, but he experienced a second disappointment. The woman took him to another room of which the atmosphere was noisome; there he saw that he was destined for the comfort of a man and has tow children, prostrate upon the floor beneath a heap of rags. These three were sick; the woman swore at them, and Nebulus shrunk down into the bottom of the tea-pot. Even the thirst of fever could not tolerate too much of this contents, so Nebulus, after a little time, was carried out and thrown into a heap of filth upon the gutter.

Nubis, in the meantime, had commenced his day with hope of a more fortunate career. On falling first into the Thames he had been much annoyed by various pollutions, and been surprised to find, on kissing a few neighbor drops, that their lips tasted inky. This was caused, they said, by chalk pervading the whole river in the proportion of sixteen grains to the gallon. That was what made their water inky to the taste of those who were accustomed to much purer draughts. “It makes,” they explained, “our river-water hard, according to man’s phrase; so hard as to entail on multitudes who use it, some disease, with much expense and trouble.”

“But all the mud and filth,” said Nubis, “surely no man drinks that?”

“No,” laughed the River-Drops, “not all of it. Much of the water used in London passes through filters, and a filter suffers no mud or any impurity to pass, except what is dissolved. The chalk is dissolved, and there is filth and putrid gas dissolved.”

“That is a bad business,” said Nubis, who already felt his own drops exercising that absorbent power for which water is so famous, and incorporating in their substance matters that the Rain Cloud never knew.

Presently Nubis found himself entangled in a current, by which he was sucked through a long pipe into a meeting of Water-Drops, all summoned from the Thames. He himself passed through a filter, was received into a reservoir, and, having asked the way of friendly neighbors, worked for himself with small delay a passage through the mainpipe into London.

Bewildered by his long, dark journey underground, Nubis at length saw light, and presently dashed forth out of a tap into a pitcher. He saw that there was fixed under the tap a water-butt, but into this he did not fall. A crowd of women holding pitchers, saucepans, pails, were chattering and screaming over him, and the anxiety of all appeared to be to catch the water as it ran out of appeared to be to catch the water as it ran out of the tap, before it came into the tub or cistern. Nubis rejoiced that his good fortune brought him to a district in which it might become his privilege to bless the poor, and his eye sparkled as his mistress, with many rests upon the way, carried her pitcher and a heavy pail upstairs. She placed both vessels, full of water, underneath her bed, and then went out again for more, carrying a basin and a fish-kettle. Nubis pitied the poor creature, heartily wishing that he could have poured out of a tap into the room itself to save the time and labor of his mistress.

The pitcher wherein the good fairy lurked, remained under the bed trough the remainder of that day, and during the next night, the room being, for the whole time, closely tenanted. Long before morning, Nubis felt that his own drops and all the water near him had lost their delightful coolness, and had been busily absorbing smells and vapors from the close apartment. In the morning, when the husband dipped a teacup in the pitcher, Nubis readily ran into it, glad to escape from his unwholesome prison. The man putting the water to his lips, found it so warm and repulsive, that, in a pet, he flung it form the window, and it fell into the water-butt beneath.

The water-butt was of the common sort, described thus by a member of the human race:-- “Generally speaking, the wood becomes decomposed and covered with fungi; and indeed, I can best describe their condition by terming them filthy.” This water-butt was placed under the same shed with a neglected cesspool, from which the

water—ever absorbing—had absorbed pollution. It contained a kitten among other trifles. “How many people have to drink out of this butt?” asked Nubis. “Really I cannot tell you,” said a neighbor Drop. “Once I was in a butt in Bethnal Green, twenty-one inches across, and a foot deep, which was to supply forty-eight families. (Report of Dr. Gavin). People store for themselves, and when they know how dirty these tubs are, they should not use them.” “But the labor of dragging water home, the impossibility of taking home abundance, the pollution of keeping it in dwelling-rooms and under beds.” “Oh, yes,” said the other Drop; “all very true. Besides, your water is not of a sort to keep. In this tub there is quite a microscopic vegetable garden, so I heard a doctor say who yesterday came hither with a party to inspect the district. One of them said he had a still used only for distilling water, and that one day, by chance, the bottoms of a series of distillations boiled to dryness. Thereupon, the dry mass became heated to the decomposing point, and sent abroad a stench plain to the dullest nose as the peculiar stench of decomposed organic matter. It infected, he said, the produce of many distillations afterwards. (Evidence of Mr. J.T. Cooper, Practical Chemist).

“I tell you what,” said Nubis, “water may come down into this town innocent enough, but it’s no easy matter for it to remain good among so many causes of corruption. Heigho!” Then he began to dream of Princess Cirrha and the worthy Prince of Nimbus, until he was aroused by a great tumult. It was an uproar caused by drunken men. “Why are those men so?” said Nubis to his friend. “I don’t know,” said the Water-Drop, “but I saw many people in that way last night, and I have seen them so at Bethnal Green.” A woman pulled her husband by, with loud reproach for his visits to the beer-shop. “Why,” cried the man, with a great oath, “where would you have me go for drink?” Then, with another oath, he kicked the water-butt in passing—“You would not have me to go there!” All the bystanders laughed approvingly, and Nubis bade adieu to his ambition for the hand of Cirrha.

### **III. Nephelo Goes into Polite Society, and then into a Dungeon—His Escape, Recapture, and His Perilous Ascent into the Sky, Surrounded by a Blae of Fire**

Nephelo was a light-hearted subject of the Prince of Nimbus. It is he who often floats, when the whole cloud is dark, as a white vapor on the surface. For love of Cirrha, he came down behind a team of rain-drops and leaped into the cistern of a handsome house at the west end of London.

Nephelo found the water in the cistern greatly vexed at riotous behavior on the part of a large number of animalcules. He was told that Water-Drops had been compelled to come into that place, after undergoing many hardships, and had unavoidably brought with them germs of these annoying creatures. Time and place favoring, nothing could hinder them from coming into life; the cistern was their cradle, although many of them were already anything but babes. Hereupon, Nephelo himself was dashed at by an ugly little fellow, who might be a small Saint George, pounced at the dragon, and the heart of the poor fairy was the scene of contest.

After awhile there was an arrival of fresh water from a pipe, the flow of which stirred up the anger of some decomposing growth which lined the sides and bottom of the cistern. So there was a good deal of confusion caused, and it was some time before all parties settled down into their proper places.

“The sun is very hot,” said Nephelo. “We all seem to be getting very warm.” “Yes, indeed,” said a Lady-Drop; “it’s not like the cool Cloud Country. I have been poisoned in the Thames, half filtered, and made frowzy by standing, this July weather, in an open reservoir. I’ve traveled in pipes laid too near the surface to be cool, and now am spoiling here. I know if water is not cold it can’t be pleasant.” “Ah,” said an old Drop, with a small eel in one of his eyes; “I don’t wonder at hearing tell that men drink wine, and tea, and beer.” “Talking of beer,” said another, “is it a fact that we’re of no use to the brewers? Out character’s so bad, they can’t rely on us for cooling the worts, and so sink wells, in order to brew all the year round with water cold enough to suit their purposes.” “I know nothing of beet,” said Nephelo; “but I know that if the gentlemen and ladies in the cistern were as cold as they could wish to be, there wouldn’t be so much decomposing going on among them.” “Your turn in, sir.” Said a polite Drop, and Nephelo leaped nimbly through the place of exit into a china jug placed ready to receive him.

He was conveyed across a handsome kitchen by a cook, who declared her opinion that the morning's rain had caused the drains to smell uncommonly. Nephelo then was thrown into a kettle.

Boiling is to an unclean Water-Drop, like scratching to a bear, a pleasant operation. It gets rid of the little animals by which it had been bitten, and throws down some of the impurity with which it had been soiled. So, after boiling, water becomes more pure, but it is, at the same time, more greedy that ever to absorb extraneous matter. Therefore, the sons of men who boil their vitiated water ought to keep it covered afterwards, and if they wish to drink it cold, should lose no time in doing so. Nephelo and his friends within the kettle danced with delight under the boiling process. Chattering pleasantly together, they compared notes of their adventures upon earth, discussed the politics of Cloud-Land, and although it took them nearly twice as long to boil as it would have done had there been no carbonate of lime about them, they were quite sorry when the time was come for them to part. Nephelo then, with many others, was poured out into the urn. So he was taken to the drawing-room, a hot iron having, in a friendly manner, been put down his back, to keep him boiling.

Out of the urn into the tea-pot; out of the teapot into the slop-basin; Nephelo had only time to remark a matron tea-maker, young ladies knitting, and a good-looking young gentleman upon his legs, laying the law down with a teaspoon, before (the fairy, not the gentleman) was smothered with a plate of muffins. From so much of the conversation as Nephelo could catch, filtered through muffin, it appeared that they were talking about tea.

"It's all very well for you to say, mother, that you're confident you make tea very good, but I ask – no, there I see you put six spoonfuls in for five of us. Mother, if this were not hard water – (here there was a nose as of a spoon hammering upon the iron) – two spoonfuls less would make tea of a better flavor and of equal strength. Now, there are three hundred and sixty-five times and a quarter tea-times in the year –"

"And how many spoonfuls, brother, to the quarter of a tea-time?"

"Maria, you've no hear for figures, I say nothing of the tea consumed at breakfast. Multiply –"

"My dear boy, you have left school; no one asks you to multiply. Hand me the muffin."

Nephelo, released, was unable to look about him, owing to the high walls of the high walls of the slop-basin which surrounded him on every side. The room was filled with pleasant sunset light, but Nephelo soon saw the coming shadow of the muffin-plate, and all was dark directly afterwards.

"Taking cooking, mother. M. Soyer (evidence before the Board of Health) says you can't boil many vegetables properly in London water. Greens won't be green; French beans are tinged with yellow, and peas shrivel. It don't open the pores of meat, and make it succulent, as softer water does. M. Soyer believes that the true flavor of meat cannot be extracted with hard water. Bread does not rise so well when made with it. Horses –"

"My dear boy, M. Soyer don't cook horses."

"Horses, Dr. Playfair tells us, sheep, and pigeon, will refuse hard water if they can get it soft, though from the muddiest pool. Race-horses, when carried to a place where the water is notoriously hard, have a supply of softer water carried with them to preserve their good condition. Not to speak of gripes, hard water will assuredly produce what people call a staring coat."

"Ah, no doubt, then, it was London water that created Mr. Blossomley's blue swallow-tail."

"Maria, you make nonsense out of everything. When you are Mrs. Blossomley –"

"Now pass my cup."

There was pause and a clatter. Presently the muffin-plate was lifted, and four times in succession there were black dregs thrown into the face of Nephelo. After the perpetration of these insults he was once again condemned to darkness.”

“When you are Mrs. Blossomley, Maria,” so the voice went on, “when you are Mrs. Blossomley, you will appreciate what I am now going to tell you about washerwomen.”

“Couldn’t you postpone it, dear, until I am able to appreciate it. You promised to take us to Rachel tonight.”

“As for you, Catherine, Maria teaches you, I see, to chatter. But if Mrs. B would object to the reception of a patent mangle as a wedding present from her brother, she had better hear him now. Washerwoman’s work is not a thing to overlook, I tell you. Before a shirt is worn out, there will have been spent upon it five times its intrinsic value in the washing-tub. The washing of clothes costs more, by a great deal, than the clothes themselves. The yearly cost of washing to a household of the middle class amounts, on the average, to about a third part of the rental, or a twelfth part of the total income. Among the poor, the average expense of washing will more probably be half the rental if they employ the Model Washhouses. The weekly cost of washing to a poor man averages certainly not less than fourpence halfpenny. Small tradesmen, driven to economize in linen, spend perhaps not more than nincepence; in the middle and upper classes, the cost weekly varies from a shilling to five shillings for each person, and amounts very often to a larger sum. On these grounds, Mr. Bullar, Honorary Secretary to the Association for Promoting Baths and Washhouses, estimates the washing expenditure of London at a shilling a week for each inhabitant, or, for the whole, five millions of pounds yearly. Professor – “

“My dear Professor Tom, you have consumed four of your twelve minutes.”

“Professor Clark judges from such estimates as can be furnished by the trade, that the consumption of soap in London is fifteen pounds to each person per annum – twice as much as is employed in other parts of England. That quantity of soap costs six-and-eightpence; water, per head, costs half as much, or three-and-fourpence; or each man’s soap and water costs throughout London, on an average, ten shillings for twelve months. If the hardness of the water be diminished, there is a diminution in the want of soap. For every grain of carbonate of lime dissolved in each gallon of any water, Mr. Donaldson declares two ounces of soap more for a hundred gallons of that water are required. Every such grain is called a degree of hardness. Water of five degrees of hardness requires, for example, two ounces of soap; water of eight degrees of hardness, then will need fifteen; and water of sixteen degrees, will demand thirty-two. Sixteen degrees, Maria, is the hardness of Thames water – of the water, mother, which has poached upon your tea-caddy. You see, then, that when we pay for the soap we use at the rate of six-and-eightpence each, since the unusual hardness of our water causes us to use a double quantity, every man in London pays at an average rate of three-and-fourpence a year his tax for a hard water through the cost of soap alone.”

“Now you must finish in five minutes, brother Tom.”

“But soap is not the only matter that concerns the washerwoman and her customers. There is labor, also, and the wear and tear; there is a double amount of destruction to our linen, involved in the double time of rubbing and the double soaping, which hard water compels washerwomen to employ. So that, when all things have been duly reckoned up in our account, we find that the outlay caused by the necessities for washing linen in a town supplied like London with exceedingly hard water, is four times greater than it would be if soft water were employed. The cost of washing, as I told you, has been estimated at five millions a year. So that, if these calculations be correct, more than three millions of money, nearly four millions, is the amount filched yearly from the Londoners by their hard water through the washtub only. To that sum, Mrs. Blossomley, being of a respectable family and very partial to clean linen, will contribute of course much more than her average proportion.”

“Well, Mr. Orator, I was not listening to all you said, but what I heard I do think much exaggerated.”

"I take it, sister, from the Government Report; oblige me by believing half of it, and still the case is strong. It is quite time for people to be stirring."

"So it is, I declare. Your twelve minutes are spent, and we will always be ready for the play. If you talk there of water, I will shriek."

Here there arose a chatter which Nephelo found to be about matters that, unlike the water topic, did not at all interest himself. There was a rustle and a movement; and a creaking noise approached the drawing room, which Nephelo discovered presently to be caused by papa's boots as he marched upstairs after his post-prandial slumberings. There was more talk uninteresting to the fairy; Nephelo, therefore, became drowsy; his drowsiness might at the same time have been aggravated by the close confinement he experienced in an unwholesome atmosphere beneath the muffin-plate. He was aroused by a great clattering; this the maid caused who was carrying him down stairs upon a tray with all the other tea-things.

From a sweet dream of nuptial with Cirrha, Nephelo was awakened to the painful consciousness that he had not yet succeeded in effecting any great good for the human race; he had but rinsed a teapot. With a faint impulse of hope the desponding fair noticed that the slop-basin in which he sat was lifted from the tray, in a few minutes after the tray had been deposited upon the kitchen dresser. Pity poor Nephelo! By a remorseless scullerymaid he was dashed rudely from the basin into a trough of stone, from which he tumbled through a hole placed there on purpose to engulf him, - tumbled through into a horrible abyss.

This abyss was a long dungeon running from back to front beneath the house, built of bricks - rotten now, and saturated with moisture, Some of the bricks had fallen in, or crumbled into nothingness; and Nephelo saw that the soil without the dungeon was quite set. The dungeonfloor was coated with pollutions, traveled over by a sluggish shallow stream, with which the fairy floated. The whole dungeon's atmosphere was foul and poisonous. Nephelo found now what those exhalations were which rose through every opening in the house, through vent-holes and the burrowings of rats; for rats and other venom tenanted this noisome den. This was the pestilential gallery called by the good people of the house, their drain. A trap door at one end confined the fairy in the place with other Water Drops, until there should be collected a sufficient body of them to negotiate successfully for egress.

The object of this door was to prevent the ingress of much more foul matter from without; and its misfortune was, that in so doing it necessarily pent up a concentrated putrid gas within. At length Nephelo escaped; but, alas! it was from a Newgate to a Bastille - from the drain into the sewer. This was a long-vaulted prison running near the surface underneath the street. Shaken by the passage overhead of carriages, not a few bricks had fallen in; and Nephelo hurrying forward, wholly possessed by the one thought-could he escape? - fell presently into a trap. An oyster-shell had fixed itself upright between two bricks unevenly jointed together; much solid filth had grown around it; and in this Nephelo was caught. Here he remained for a whole month, during which time he saw many floods of water pass him, leaving himself with a vast quantity of obstinate encrusted filth unmoved. At the month's end there came some men to scrape, and sweep, and cleanse; then with a sudden flow of water, Nephelo was forced along, and presently, with a large number of emancipated foulnesses, received his discharge from prison, and was let loose upon the River Thames.

Nephelo struck against a very dirty Drop.

"Keep off, will you?" the Drop exclaimed.

"You are not fit to touch a person, sewer-bird."

"Why, where are you from, my sweet gentlemen?"

"Oh! I? I've had a turn through some Model Drains. Tubular drains they call'em. Look at me; isn't that clear?"

“There’s nothing clear about you,” replied Nephelo. “What do you mean by Model Drains?”

“I mean I’ve come from Upper George Street through a twelve-inch pipe four or five times faster than one travels over an old sewer-bed; traveled express, no stoppage.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes. Impermeable, earthenware, tubular pipes, accurately dove-tailed. I come from an experimental district. When it’s all settled, there’s to be water on at high pressure everywhere, and an earthenware drain pipe under every tap, a tube of no more than the necessary size. Then these little pipes are to run down the earth; and there’s not to be a great brick drain running underneath each house into the street; the pipes run into a larger tube of earthenware that is to be laid at the backs of all the houses; these tubes run into larger ones, but none of them very monstrous; and so there is a constant flow, like circulation of the blood; and all the pipes are to run at last into one large conduit, which is to run out of town with all the sewage matter and discharge so far down the Thames, that no return tide ever can bring it back to London. Some is to go branching off into the fields to be manure.”

“Humph!” said Nephelo. “You profess to be very clever. How do you know all this?”

“Know? Bless you, I’m a regular old Thames Drop. I’ve been in the cisterns, in the tumblers, down the sewers, in the river, up the pipes, in the reservoirs, in the cisterns, in the teapots, down the sewers, in the river, up the pipes, in the reservoirs, in the cisterns, in the saucepans, down the sewers, in the Thames-”

“Hold! Stop there now!” said Nephelo. “Well, so you have heard a great deal in your lifetime. You’ve had some adventures, doubtless?”

“I believe you,” said the Cockney-Drop. “The worst was when I was pumped once as fresh water into Rotherhithe. That place is below high-water mark; so are Bermondsey and St. George’s, Southwark. Newington, St. Olave’s, Westminster, and Lambeth, are but little better. Well, you know, drains of the old sort always leak, and there’s a great deal more water poured into London than the Londoners have stowage room for, so the water in low districts can’t pass off at high water, and there’s a precious flood. We sopped the ground at Rotherhithe, but I thought I never should escape again.”

“Will the new pipes make any difference to that?”

“Yes; so I am led to understand. They are to be laid with a regular fall, to pass the water off, which, being constant, will be never in excess. The fall will be to a point of course below the water level, and at a convenient place the contents of these drains are to be pumped up into the main sewer. Horrible deal of death caused, Sir, by the damp in those low districts. One man in thirty-seven died of cholera in Rotherhithe last year, when in Clerkenwell, at sixty-three feet above high water, there died but one in five hundred and thirty. The proportion held throughout.”

“Ah, by the bye, you have heard, of course, complainings of the quality of water. Will the Londoners sink wells for themselves?”

“Wells! What a child you are! Just from the clouds, I see. Wells in a large town get horribly polluted. They propose to consolidate and improve two of the best Thames Water Companies, the Grand Junction and Vauxhall, for the supply of London, until their great scheme shouldn’t prove so triumphant as they think it will be.”

“What is this great scheme, I should like to know?”

“Why, they talk of fetching rain-water from a tract of heath between Bagshot and Farnham. The rain there soaks through a thin crust of growing herbage, which is the only perfect filter, chemical as well as mechanical – the



living rootlets extract more than we can, where impurity exists. Then, Sir, the rain runs into a large bed of silicious sand, placed over marl; below the marl there is silicious sand again – Ah, I perceive you are not geological.”

“Go on.”

“The sand, washed by the rains of ages, holds the water without soiling it more than a glass tumbler would, and the Londoners say that in this way, by making artificial channels and a big reservoir, they can collect twenty-eight thousand gallons a day of water nearly pure. They require forty thousand gallons, and propose to get the rest in the same neighborhood from tributaries of the River Wey, not quite so pure, but only half as hard as Thames water, and unpolluted.”

“How is it to get to London?”

“Through a covered aqueduct. Covered for coolness’ sake, and cleanliness. Then it is to be distributed through earthenware pipes, laid rather deep, again for coolness’ sake in the first instance, but for cleanliness as well. The water is to come in at high pressure, and run in iron or lead pipes up every house, scale every wall. There is to be a tap in every room and under every tap there is to be the entrance to a drain-pipe. Where water supply ends, drainage begins. They are to be the two halves of a single system. Furthermore, there are to be numbers of plugs opening in every street, and streets and courts are to be washed out every morning, or every other morning, as the traffic may require, with hose and jet. The Great Metropolis mustn’t be dirty, or be content with rubbing a finger here and there over its dirt. It is to have its face washed every morning, just before the hours of business. The water at high pressure is to set people’s invention at work upon the introduction of hydraulic apparatus for cranes, *et caetera*, which now cause much hand labor and are scarcely worth steam-power. Furthermore-”

“My dear friend,” cried Nephelo, “you are too clever. More than half of what you say is unintelligible to me.”

“But the grand point,” continued the garrulous Thames drop, “is the expense. The saving of cisterns, ball-cocks, plumbers’ bills, expansive sewer works, constant repairs, hand labor, street-sweeping, soap, tea, linen, fuel, steam-boilers now damaged by incrustation, boards, salaries, doctors’ bills, time, parish rates-”

The catalogue was never ended, for the busy Drop was suddenly entangled among hair upon the corpse of a dead cat, which fate also the fairy narrowly escaped, to be in the next minute sucked up as Nubis had been sucked, through pipes into a reservoir. Weary with the incessant chattering of his conceited friend, whose pride he trusted that a night with puss might humble, Nepho now lurked silent in a corner. In a dreamy state he floated with the current underground, and was half sleeping in a pipe under some London street, when a great noise of trampling overhead, mingled with cries, awakened him.

“What is the matter now?” the fairy cried.

“A fire, no doubt, to judge by the noise,” said a neighbor quietly. Nephelo panted now with triumph. Cirrha was before his eyes. Now he could benefit the race of man.

“Let us get you,” cried Nepho; “let us assist in running to the rescue.”

“Don’t be impatient,” said a drowsy Drop. “We can’t get out of here till they have found the Company’s turncock, and then he must go to this plug and that plug in one street, and another, before we are turned off.”

“In the meantime the fire-”

“Will burn the house down. Help in five minutes would save a house. Now the luckiest man will seldom have his premises attended to in less than twenty.”

Nephelo thought here was another topic for his gossip in the Thames. The plugs talked of with a constant water-supply would take the sting out of the Fire-Fiend.

Presently among confused movements, confused sounds, amid a rush of water, Nephelo burst into the light – into the vivid light of a great fire that leapt and roared as Nephelo was dashed against it! Through the red flames and the black smoke in a burst of steam, the fairy reascended hopeless to the clouds.

#### **IV. Rascally Conduct of the Prince of Nimbus**

The Prince of Nimbus, whose good-nature we have celebrated, was not good for nothing. Having graciously permitted all the suitors of the Princess Cirrha to go down to earth and labor for her hand, he took advantage of their absence, and, having the coast clear, importuned the daughter of King Cumulus with his own addresses. Cirrha was not disposed to listen to them, but the rogue her father was ambitious. He desired to make a good alliance, and that object was better gained by intermarriage with a prince than with a subject. “There will be an uproar,” said the old man, “when those fellows down below come back. They will look black and no doubt storm a little, but we’ll have our royal marriage notwithstanding.” So the Prince of Nimbus married Cirrha, and Nephelo arrived at the court of King Cumulus one evening during the celebration of the bridal feast. His wrath was seen on earth in many parts of England in the shape of a great thunderstorm on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July. The adventures of the other suitors, they being thus cheated of their object, need not be detailed. As each returns he will be made acquainted with the scandalous fraud practiced by the Prince of Nimbus, and this being the state of politics in Cloud-Land at the moment when we go to press, we may fairly expect to witness five or six more thunderstorms before next winter. Each suitor, as he returns and finds how shamefully he has been cheated, will create a great disturbance; and no wonder. Conduct so rascally as that of the Prince of Nimbus is enough to fill the clouds with uproar.