

1855

LAYS OF MYSTERY IMAGINATION AND HUMOUR

NUMBER 1: THE PALACE OF HUMBUG

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. Lays of Mystery, Imagination, and Humour, No. 1: The Palace of Humbug (1855)
One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines: I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls, / And each damp thing that creeps and crawls...

NUMBER 1: THE PALACE OF HUMBUG

I DREAMT I dwelt in marble halls, And each damp thing that
creeps and crawls Went wobble-wobble on the walls.

Faint odours of departed cheese, Blown on the dank, unwholesome
breeze, Awoke the never-ending sneeze.

Strange pictures decked the arras drear, Strange characters of woe
and fear, The humbugs of the social sphere.

One showed a vain and noisy prig, That shouted empty words and
big At him that nodded in a wig.

And one, a dotard grim and gray, Who wasteth childhood's happy
day In work more profitless than play.

Whose icy breast no pity warms, Whose little victims sit in swarms,
And slowly sob on lower forms.

And one, a green thyme-honoured Bank, Where flowers are
growing wild and rank, Like weeds that fringe a poisoned tank.

All birds of evil omen there Flood with rich Notes the tainted air,
The witless wanderer to snare.

The fatal Notes neglected fall, No creature heeds the treacherous
call, For all those goodly Strawn Baits Pall.

The wandering phantom broke and fled, Straightway I saw within
my head A vision of a ghostly bed, Where lay two worn decrepit

men, The fictions of a lawyer's pen, Who never more might breathe again.

The serving-man of Richard Roe Wept, inarticulate with woe: She wept, that waited on John Doe.

"Oh rouse", I urged, "the waning sense With tales of tangled evidence, Of suit, demurrer, and defence."

"Vain", she replied, "such mockeries: For morbid fancies, such as these, No suits can suit, no plea can please."

And bending o'er that man of straw, She cried in grief and sudden awe, Not inappropriately, "Law!"

The well-remembered voice he knew, He smiled, he faintly muttered "Sue!" (Her very name was legal too.)

The night was fled, the dawn was nigh:

A hurricane went raving by, And swept the Vision from mine eye.

Vanished that dim and ghostly bed, (The hangings, tape; the tape was red:) 'Tis o'er, and Doe and Roe are dead!

Oh, yet my spirit inly crawls, What time it shudderingly recalls That horrid dream of marble halls!

Oxford, 1855.

THE END