

1863

THE MAJESTY OF JUSTICE

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. *The Majesty of Justice* (1863) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines: They passed beneath the College gate; / And down the High went slowly on;...

THE MAJESTY OF JUSTICE

AN OXFORD IDYLL

THEY passed beneath the College gate; And down the High went slowly on; Then spake the Undergraduate To that benign and portly Don: "They say that justice is a Queen A Queen of awful Majesty Yet in the papers I have seen Some things that puzzle me.

"A Court obscure, so rumour states, There is, called 'Vice-Cancellarii', Which keeps on Undergraduates, Who do not pay their bills, a wary eye.

A case I'm told was lately brought Into that tiniest of places, And justice in that case was sought As in most other cases.

"Well! Justice as I hold, dear friend, Is Justice, neither more than less: I never dreamed it could depend On ceremonial or dress.

I thought that her imperial sway In Oxford surely would appear, But all the papers seem to say She's not majestic here."

The portly Don he made reply, With the most roguish of his glances, "Perhaps she drops her Majesty Under peculiar circumstances." "But that's the point!" the young man cried, "The puzzle that I wish to pen you in How are the public to decide Which article is genuine?"

"Is't only when the Court is large That we for 'Majesty' need hunt? Would what is Justice in a barge Be something different in a punt?"

"Nay, nay!" the Don replied, amused, "You're talking nonsense, sir! You know it!"

Such arguments were never used By any friend of Jowett.”

“Then is it in the men who trudge (Beef-eaters I believe they call them) Before each wigged and ermined judge, For fear some mischief should befall them? If I should recognise in one (Through all disguise) my own domestic, I fear ‘twould shed a gleam of fun Even on the ‘Majestic!’”The portly Don replied, “Ahem!

They can’t exactly be its essence: I scarcely think the want of them The ‘Majesty of Justice’ lessens.

Besides, they always march awry; Their gorgeous garments never fit: Processions don’t make MajestyI’m quite convinced of it.”

“Then is it in the wig it lies, Whose countless rows of rigid curls Are gazed at with admiring eyes By country lads and servant-girls?” Out laughed that bland and courteous Don: “Dear sir, I do not mean to flatterBut surely you have hit upon The essence of the matter.

“They will not own the Majesty Of Justice, making Monarchs bow Unless as evidence they see The horsehair wig upon her brow.

Yes, yes! That makes the silliest men Seem wise; the meanest men look big: The Majesty of Justice, then, Is seated in the WIG.” March 1863.

THE END