

BILLY the BULL!

42

THE FIRST CHAPTER THE KING OF BEASTS!

BILLY, the bull at Brooks' Farm, had always enjoyed a bad reputation. The village of Mount Green had always been scared of him. He was not exactly pretty to look at.

Timkins, the donkey, had the temerity to trespass in Billy's special paddock.

Timkins was more than a bit of an ass, and he thought he could get away with it. But the village still remembers the sight of the ass showing a clean pair of heels with Billy after him in full cry!

Billy the bull had always enjoyed a bad reputation at Brooks' Farm—until an escaped lion gave him his chance to prove his worth.

Although the bull showed his sullen side to some people, he was quite different with Peter Brooks.

Peter was the favourite of everybody on the farm, including Jim Croft, the big overseer, who had a knowing expression in his keen grey eyes.

Peter was eleven years old, and always enjoyed a ride on Billy's back. He could do almost anything with the bull. When he entered the paddock, Billy would always trot up to see if Peter wanted a ride. If Peter did, there was Billy's broad back all ready and waiting for the expedition.

It was this friendship with Peter which made Croft, the husky overseer, stand up for the bull when certain timorous folk declared that he was not safe and that he should be turned into beef.

"He's safe enough with Peter, anyway," Jim Croft would always say.

The overseer would have had the surprise of his life, used as he might be to the uncertainties of bulls, had he realised that the old farm was actually the destination of a certain visitor from the coast whose temper was, to say the least, unreliable.

This stranger trotted along across country, keeping himself to himself. He growled at some children at a cottage who threw stones at him. Little did they know, as they scampered indoors, that the dusky fellow was the king of beasts, and had come to Brooks' Farm in search of food.

The lion was a really magnificent fellow, and his tawny skin was hardly noticeable as he slinked into the shadow of the big hayrick.

He moved furtively, as if half afraid of being seen; but, of course, he was not frightened, for he was a lion, a regular African king of beasts, powerful, daring, and ready for anything.

A lion is never scared. He has his reputation for dauntless courage to maintain.

But the place in which this particular lion found himself was extremely strange, and his experiences had been odd, even fantastic, ever since he had skilfully dodged his keepers at the port some forty miles away.

He had been shipped over from Beira at great expense by a learned and peculiar professor gentleman who lived some half a dozen miles from the farm.

This professor had a small zoo in his own park, and the country folk

told extraordinary stories of what they heard of this private menagerie.

This was the first time he had introduced a lion to the company, and ill luck had attended the venture, for the newcomer had not taken kindly either to the voyage or to his keepers. He had just waited for an opportunity to make a break for freedom. The chance came at the quay during a moment when the men who had him in their charge were off guard.

The lion glided off like a shadow behind a stock of timber, and then made his way down a lane between bales of heavy merchandise.

It was early in the morning, with most people in bed and asleep, so that the runaway was able to make a clear bolt for the open country. There it felt a trifle more at home than on board ship, though not a great deal, for the land was unfamiliar. There were no rolling plains worth mentioning, no jungles and forests.

The lion slunk along behind hedges, for he was somewhat nervous after all he had been through.

But he did not hesitate a moment when he felt hungry and caught sight of a small pig snouting for acorns at the edge of a grass track.

One squeal, and the pig was dead, and the lion went on his way much heartened by his meal.

It was late in the afternoon when he reached Brooks' Farm, for he had tarried to appease a healthy appetite with a few incautious rabbits.

The farm-hands had been busy all the morning at the farm with the sacks of hops which were coming in from the fields, and there was a pleasant smell floating out from the steeple-shaped oast-houses where the hops were dried.

Jim Croft, the overseer, was stepping down the fenced path which led

from the low, rambling farmhouse to the outbuildings and the oast houses when Jumbo, his terrier dog, who always kept as close to Jim as his shadow, gave a growl, and stood still.

Jumbo was looking terrified, for there was a curious whiff in the air, something which the dog knew meant danger, though he could not explain what it was.

Next moment Croft saw a lithe form glide from behind the haystack, and move towards the chicken run.

"What's that?" he muttered to himself, and coming suddenly to a halt.

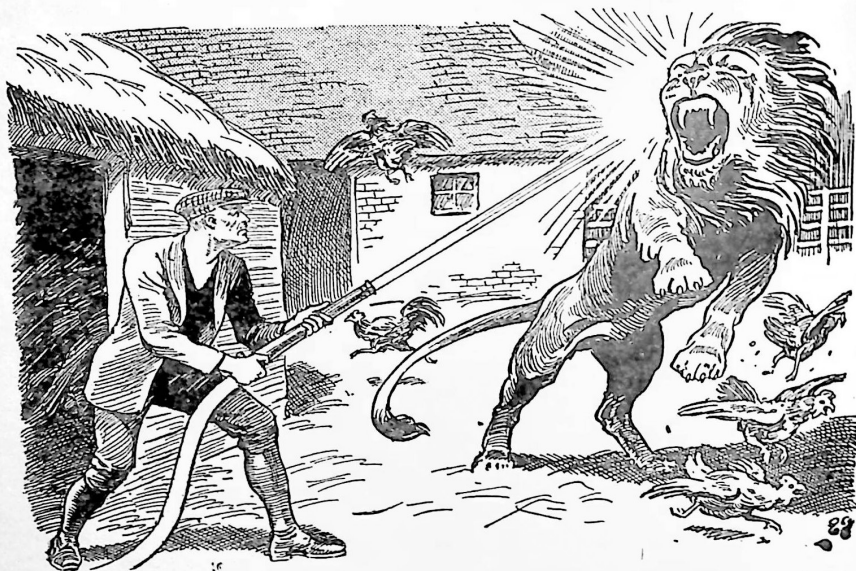
He knew the next second, and thought he must be dreaming, for what he saw was a lion.

In a flash the alarm had been given amongst the inhabitants of the

poultry run. A moody old nervous hen set up a cry and flapped for safety to the nearest shed. The ducks, which had been making in single file through the long grass to the pond, broke their alignment and fled quacking in disorder. A fat old sow, busy at the mash tub in the large sty by the pump, suspended feeding operations and set up such a squealing that alarmed everybody.

Jim Croft had to do something. His main idea was to drive off the unwelcome visitor and keep it from getting near the horses, which had just come in with the wagons from the distant hop gardens.

Making a dash for the hydrant used for sluicing out the yards, he yelled to Wilks, one of the farm hands, to get the pump going.



Swoosh! Croft suddenly turned on the hose and the lion got what it least expected! Water swamped full in its face, the force of the rush making the beast swing round.

"Hurry!" he roared. "We must scare the beast off!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER

BILLY TO THE RESCUE!

As the lion crept cautiously onwards, smelling another meal in the well-stocked farm, he found himself faced by Croft who was armed with what looked like a long gun with a tail.

The lion paused in the sunshine which flooded the stretch of coarse grass, his tail lashing, and his low roar giving Croft a woozy feeling, as he admitted afterwards over a pipe at the Flower Pot.

But the gun did not fire, and the lion came on.

Croft backed towards a low woodshed, the lion growling savagely.

Then—swoosh! The lion got what it had never expected! Not fire, but water. It swamped full in his face, the force of the rush making the beast swing round.

Before the lion could recover his wits he was caught by another gush of water.

He growled again and leaped, but not at Croft. His aim was the thatched roof of the shed, and he reached this point of safety, clawing and tearing the thatch as he struggled upwards to the ridge.

"Phew!" panted the overseer as he stood there, the nozzle in his hand, looking up at the lion which was shaking himself free of the water that had drenched him.

"Hallo, Jim, what've you got there?" cried a cheery voice, as young Peter Brooks came running up, his face aglow, his eyes sparkling. "Oh, a lion!"

Croft did not move his gaze from the enemy.

"You cut off home, young 'un!"

he cried anxiously. "Run, I tell you!"

Jim Croft might as well have saved his breath to cool his porridge, for Peter gave a merry laugh and came nearer. An order to run from such a sight was as useless as requesting the wind to change its direction.

"Oh, Jim, let's hold the nozzle and give it another swoosh!" begged Peter.

The lion had had quite enough. He suddenly leaped from his perch on the damp thatch, and to Croft's horror made a dash in the direction of Peter, heedless of the jet of water aimed by the overseer.

Croft gave a husky shout, and hurled himself in front of Peter, giving the lion a heavy whang with the brass hose piece as it came on.

The next second it seemed to the overseer as if he had been struck by the side of a house, as the lion charged straight at him, knocking him over like a ninepin.

The nozzle flew out of Croft's hand as he was bowled over, and dropped to the ground, a steady flow flooding the yard.

In a flash, the overseer was up and making for the lion.

"Run, Master Peter!" he roared. "Run for your life!"

Peter ran, and made a leap for the paddock fence, the furious lion after him. The youngster scrambled over the fence, his pursuer close behind, and plunged into the long grass.

Behind lumbered Croft, scared out of his life at the thought of Peter's peril, while Wilks and a bunch of farm hands closed up the rear.

The lion advanced in a series of leaps. Some mad reasoning seemed to guide the beast to the boy as if Peter were the cause of all his trouble.

When Croft threw himself forward and grabbed the beast's lashing tail, the lion only swung half round, snarling, freeing himself, seemingly without effort, and sending the overseer sprawling again.

It meant to get at Peter, there was not the slightest doubt, and the lad, frightened out of all knowledge, panted on.

Croft was up again and charging on.

What would the master say if anything happened to Peter, the laughing lad whom everybody at the farm loved?

The big overseer tripped and fell, but struggled up and blundered on, tears in his eyes.

Suddenly there was another roar, but not by the lion this time. The roar came from Billy, the big bull, the huge beast that had taken more prizes than one could count, the bull with a face like a nightmare of fury, as he had been described.

Billy had been spending best part of the morning in the midst of the thick growth by the stream. This was *his* paddock, so he thought, and as he turned his massive head he saw, to his amazement, young Peter, his sworn friend, the boy who could do anything with him even in his black moments, being chased by a new sort of foe.

But Billy did not pause to consider what the new kind of foe might be. He let out another roar, and swung his massive girth round so that he could get a better view.

Peter was at his last gasp now. He tore on as he felt the hot breath of the lion behind him, and then stumbled, pitching forward as the lion's paw caught his shoulder.

He was not really hurt, though his jacket was torn.

Next second he was up again, thankful to find he was out of the chase.

It was Billy, the bull, who had matters in hand, for, as the lion made an attempt to seize Peter, the huge bull charged, head down, hurling himself forward with his immense weight, impelled by the rage of a thousand furies, fairly maddened by the thought that his pal, Peter, should be in peril.

Attack his Peter! There was something to be said about that!

The ground fairly shook as the big bull made its tornado rush.

But if Billy was ready for anything, so, too, was the lion.

The king of beasts made a lightning spring and lighted on Billy's back, only to be pitched off again by a quick swerve.

Next moment, the lion had thrown himself at his enemy's flank, and was clawing and biting, while the bull in his agony rolled on his side, well nigh crushing his assailant in the act.

Though dislodged, the lion was up again, tearing at the bull's neck, frenziedly trying to drag his enemy down.

Time after time Billy shook off his twisting, biting, writhing antagonist, but the lion returned to the charge again and again, getting under the bull's main power of attack, his deadly horns which threatened to transfix the lion every minute, as Billy stamped and let out thunderous roars.

The red of the streaming blood dyed the tawny beast's mane, and, as the lion sprang this way and that, the bull's bellowings filled the air.

It was a grim, relentless fight to the death! Billy had met his match at last, but he did not yield.

There was a hoarse shout for a gun from one of the men, but to fire at the lion might mean killing the bull.

Again Billy shook off his attacker, and then made a head-down rush, but the lion crouched and prepared for another leap, fighting to get his teeth in the bull's throat.

Billy fought head down, trampling, kicking, his whole massive frame quivering, his enormous head swaying from side to side.

For once the lion was off his guard, not ready for the bull's resistless onslaught, for Billy seemed to have rallied all his remaining strength.

He pitched suddenly forward, a vast battering ram, irresistible, and that was the end.

The lion caught the full force of the rush, tried to leap again, clawed feebly, overwhelmed by the full brunt of the bull's rage. Then he flopped sideways, growling savagely in his impotence, fought angrily against the weakness, recovered for a flash, then toppled over again to lie there at the bull's feet, pawing wildly, emitting a husky growl.

A moment more and he lay still. So may a king of beasts die, fighting to the end.

Billy, the bull, stood there, swaying rather feebly now, shaking his gigantic head as if to rid himself of a buzzing. He did not look at the dead lion, but backed slowly. There was still that swing of the massive head, while he stamped the trampled grass and bellowed faintly.

When Peter Brooks ran up, Billy the bull turned and gazed at his friend and then nosed him in a wistful, friendly style.

"Good old Billy!" said Peter. Billy, the bull, nodded contentedly when Peter put his face against his ear and whispered something. There is not the faintest doubt he understood what was said!

THE END

Our Chamber of Horrors



UNCLE BENJAMIN

By PETER TODD

MOST readers of this Annual,
And all the Greyfriars men,
The fags and prefects, short and tall,
Have heard of Uncle Ben.
My cousin 'Lonzy often says
That Uncle would be sad
And shocked by all our sinful ways—
Too bad, alas, too bad!

Alonzo is a harmless freak
Like Uncle Benjamin;
The fearful words they love to speak
Would break a fellow's chin.
"Expressions quite commensurate
With infinite exactitude!"
As Uncle Ben himself would state
In language he thinks good.

Alonzo stays with Uncle Ben
When he is not at school,
And always quotes his precepts when
A fellow plays the fool.
"My Uncle," 'Lonzy sternly cries,
"Would be quite shocked at that!"
"My aunt!" the sinful youth replies,
And makes it tit for tat!

Sometimes Alonzo's bumped a bit
Like other tiresome freaks.
"My Uncle Benjamin says it
Is bad for me!" he shrieks.
The bumpers answer with a grin,
"Yes, isn't it a shame!"
Well, fetch your Uncle Benjamin,
And he will get the same!"