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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hunting of the Snark: The Beaver's Lesson (5/8)

They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;
They pursued it with forks and hope;
They threatened its life with a railway-share;
They charmed it with smiles and soap.
Then the Butcher contrived an ingenious plan
For making a separate sally;
And had fixed on a spot unfrequented by man,
A dismal and desolate valley.
But the very same plan to the Beaver occurred:
It had chosen the very same place:
Yet neither betrayed, by a sign or a word,
The disgust that appeared in his face.
Each thought he was thinking of nothing but "Snark"
And the glorious work of the day;
And each tried to pretend that he did not remark
That the other was going that way.
But the valley grew narrow and narrower still,
And the evening got darker and colder,
Till (merely from nervousness, not from goodwill)
They marched along shoulder to shoulder.
Then a scream, shrill and high, rent the shuddering sky,
And they knew that some danger was near:
The Beaver turned pale to the tip of its tail,
And even the Butcher felt queer.

He thought of his childhood, left far far behind—
That blissful and innocent state—
The sound so exactly recalled to his mind
A pencil that squeaks on a slate!
"Tis the voice of the Jubjub!" he suddenly cried.
(This man, that they used to call "Dunce.")
"As the Bellman would tell you," he added with pride,
"I have uttered that sentiment once.
"Tis the note of the Jubjub! Keep count, I entreat;
You will find I have told it you twice.
'Tis the song of the Jubjub! The proof is complete,
If only I've stated it thrice."
The Beaver had counted with scrupulous care,
Attending to every word:
But it fairly lost heart, and
outgrabe in despair,
When the third repetition
occurred.
It felt that, in spite of all possible
pains,
It had somehow contrived to lose
count,
And the only thing now was to
rack its poor brains
By reckoning up the amount.
"Two added to one—if that could
but be done,"
It said, "with one's fingers and thumbs!"
Recollecting with tears how, in earlier years,
It had taken no pains with its sums.



“The thing can be done,” said the Butcher, “I think.
The thing must be done, I am sure.
The thing shall be done! Bring me paper and ink,
The best there is time to procure.”

The Beaver brought paper, portfolio, pens,
And ink in unfailing supplies:
While strange creepy creatures came out of their dens,
And watched them with wondering eyes.
So engrossed was the Butcher, he heeded them not,
As he wrote with a pen in each hand,
And explained all the while in a popular style
Which the Beaver could well understand.
“Taking Three as the subject to reason about—
A convenient number to state—
We add Seven, and Ten, and then multiply out
By One Thousand diminished by Eight.
“The result we proceed to divide, as you see,
By Nine Hundred and Ninety Two:
Then subtract Seventeen, and the answer must be
Exactly and perfectly true.
“The method employed I would gladly explain,
While I have it so clear in my head,
If I had but the time and you had but the brain—
But much yet remains to be said.
“In one moment I’ve seen what has hitherto been
Enveloped in absolute mystery,
And without extra charge I will give you at large
A Lesson in Natural History.”
In his genial way he proceeded to say
(Forgetting all laws of propriety,

And that giving instruction, without introduction,
Would have caused quite a thrill in Society),
"As to temper the Jubjub's a desperate bird,
Since it lives in perpetual passion:
Its taste in costume is entirely absurd—
It is ages ahead of the fashion:
"But it knows any friend it has met once before:
It never will look at a bribe:
And in charity-meetings it stands at the door,
And collects—though it does not subscribe.
"Its' flavour when cooked is more exquisite far
Than mutton, or oysters, or eggs:
(Some think it keeps best in an ivory jar,
And some, in mahogany kegs:)
"You boil it in sawdust: you salt it in glue:
You condense it with locusts and tape:
Still keeping one principal object in view—
To preserve its symmetrical shape."
The Butcher would gladly have talked till next day,
But he felt that the lesson must end,
And he wept with delight in attempting to say
He considered the Beaver his friend.
While the Beaver confessed, with affectionate looks
More eloquent even than tears,
It had learned in ten minutes far more than all books
Would have taught it in seventy years.
They returned hand-in-hand, and the Bellman,
unmanned
(For a moment) with noble emotion,
Said "This amply repays all the wearisome days
We have spent on the billowy ocean!"

Such friends, as the Beaver and Butcher became,
Have seldom if ever been known;
In winter or summer, 'twas always the same—
You could never meet either alone.
And when quarrels arose—as one frequently finds
Quarrels will, spite of every endeavour—
The song of the Jubjub recurred to their minds,
And cemented their friendship for ever!