

## TOM THUMB.

**L**ONG, long ago, in the days of good King Arthur, lived a very wonderful magician and enchanter, known as Merlin.

One day, while on a long journey, feeling hungry and tired, he looked round for a place in which to get rest and refreshment, and soon caught sight of a labourer's cottage.

Merlin walked in; and whether it was that his long beard inspired respect, or whether it was that the people of the house were nice kindly folks, it is certain that the enchanter could not have been better received had he been King Arthur himself. The best bread and a bowl of new milk were placed before him, and the good woman, in particular, seemed most anxious to please her guest.

Merlin, however, saw that something was troubling his hosts, and as he rested he tried to find out the cause of their grief. The wife would not reply; but the husband, after

scratching his head a long while without finding any ideas, answered "that they were sorry because they had no children."

"If we only had a son, sir," he went on, "even a very little one, no bigger than my thumb, we should be as happy as the days are long."

Merlin was very fond of a joke, and the idea of this great strapping ploughman having a son no bigger than his thumb amused him intensely.

"You shall have your wish, my friend," said the magician with a smile; and after bidding them farewell he went away.

You may fancy that a man like Merlin had many friends among the fairies. Even Oberon, the Fairy King, knew him and loved him. What was of more importance in this case, Merlin was also very friendly with the Queen of the Fairies. Immediately on his return from his journey he went to her and told of his visit to the cottage and of the ploughman's strange request. Both agreed that it would be a fine jest to let the good man have exactly what he had asked for, neither more nor less.

Not a great while afterwards the ploughman's wife had a son; but you can imagine

the worthy man's surprise when he first saw him, for the baby was exactly the size he had asked for—as big as his thumb! In every respect it was the prettiest little doll baby you could wish to see. The Queen of the Fairies herself came in soon after it was born, and summoned the most skilful of her followers to clothe the little stranger as a fairy child should be clothed. A fairy verse tells us :

An acorn hat he had for his crown ;  
His shirt it was by spiders spun ;  
His coat was woven of thistle-down ;  
His trousers up with tags were done ;  
His stockings, of apple-rind, they tie  
With eye-lash plucked from his mother's eye ;  
His shoes were made of a mouse's skin,  
Nicely tanned, with the hair within.

Strange to say, Tom, although he grew older, as everybody has to, never grew bigger; so that the ploughman often wished he had merely asked for a son without saying anything about the young gentleman's size. And he agreed with his wife in wishing he had not mentioned his thumb, or that Merlin had not granted his wish so exactly to the letter; for he feared such a little fellow would never be able to defend himself against the rude boys of the village. But the ploughman

need have had no fears, for what Tom lacked in size he made up for in cunning, and this made him, a match for any urchin in the place.

For instance, when he played at "cherry-stones" with the village boys and lost all his stones he would creep into the bags of the winners, and steal his losings back again. The boys could not at first understand how it was that Tom Thumb always won, but at last he was caught in the act, and the owner of the bag, an ugly, ill-natured boy, cried out, "Ah, Master Tom Thumb! I've caught you at last! and now won't I reward you for thieving!" Then he pulled the strings of the bag so tightly round Tom's neck as almost to strangle him, and gave the bag shake after shake, which knocked all the cherry-stones against Tom's legs like so many pebbles, and bruised him sadly. At last Tom was allowed to come out and run home, rubbing his shins ruefully, and promising he would "play fair" next time. But the boys saved him all trouble in the matter by refusing to play with him at all.

The next scrape Tom got into was a rather serious one. One day his mother was making

a batter pudding; and Tom, who, like a good many children, was rather fond of putting his nose into what did not concern him, climbed to the edge of the bowl to see if his mother mixed it properly, and to remind her, if necessary, about such little matters as putting plenty of sugar in. As he sat on the edge of the bowl his foot slipped and he went into the batter heels over head; in fact, plunged into it as boys splash into a swimming bath. The batter got into his mouth, so that he could not cry out; and he kicked and struggled so that he was soon covered with batter and quite disappeared in the thick, sticky pudding. His mother chanced to be looking round at the time, and did not see what happened. Then the pudding was tied up in a cloth and popped into the pot to boil. The water soon grew hot, and poor Tom began to kick and plunge with all his might. His mother, who had stirred him round and round, thinking that he was something in the nature of a lump of suet (for Tom, being covered with batter, could not be seen), wondered what caused the pudding to keep bumping against the top and sides of the pot; so she took off the lid to see. Greatly surprised was she to behold the

When Tom went with his mother to milk the cow, she wisely tied him to a thistle with a needleful of thread, lest he should be blown away. But the cow, in cropping the thistles, happened to choose the very one to which tiny Tom was tied, and gulped thistle and boy in a single mouthful.



pudding hobbing up and down in the pot, dancing a sort of hornpipe all by itself. She could scarcely believe her eyes, and was very much frightened. At last, deciding that the pudding must be bewitched, she determined to give it to the first person who came by.

She had not long to wait before a travelling tinker passed, crying, "Pots and kettles to mend, oh!—pots and kettles to mend, oh!"

Tom's mother beckoned him in and gave him the pudding. The tinker, delighted to have so fine a pudding for his dinner, thanked the good woman, put it in his wallet, and trudged merrily on. But he had not gone far before he felt a funny sort of "bump—bump—bump!" in his wallet. At first he thought a rat had somehow got in, and opened the bag to see; but to his horror, he heard a voice from inside the pudding calling, "Hullo! hullo! hul-l-l-o-o!" There was the pudding moving in his bag, and two little feet sticking out of it, wriggling in the funniest way possible.

At this the tinker stared till his eyes almost started from his head, for he had never seen a pudding with feet before. The voice



cried, "Let me ou-u-ut! Let me ou-u-ut!" and the pudding kicked and danced in a most alarming manner.

The tinker, greatly frightened, at once granted the request made, as he thought, by the pudding: he not only "let" it out but "flung" it out, right over the hedge. Then he took to his heels, and ran as hard as he could for more than a mile without once stopping to look behind. As for the pudding, it fell into a dry ditch with a great splodge, breaking into five or six pieces. Tom crept out, battered all over and battered inside.

He managed, however, to get home, crawling along like a fly that has been rescued from the cream jug. His mother was only too glad to see him; and having, after much trouble, washed the batter off, she put him to bed.

Another day Tom went with his mother to milk the cow. As it was rather windy, his mother wisely tied her little son to a thistle with a needleful of thread, lest he should be blown away. But the cow, in cropping the thistles, happened to choose the very one to which tiny Tom was tied, and gulped thistle and boy in a single mouthful. Tom, finding

himself in a large red cavern, with two rows of great white "grinders" going "champ—champ!" cried out with fright, "Mother! Mother!"

"Where are you, Tommy, my dear?" cried the good woman in alarm.

"Here, mother!" screamed Tom; "in the brown cow's mouth!"

The mother began to weep and wring her hands, for she thought her dear little boy would be crushed into a shapeless mass; but the cow, surprised at such strange noises in her throat, opened her mouth wide and dropped Tommy on the grass. His mother was only too glad to clap him up in her apron and run home with him.

Tom was rather forward for his age, and still more so for his size, and he soon thought he ought in some way to make himself useful. To indulge the little man, his father made him a whip of a barley straw to drive the plough horses. Tom thought this very grand, and used to shout at the horses and crack his whip in fine style; but as he could never strike a horse higher than the hoof, it is doubtful whether he was of much use. One day, as he stood on a clod to aim a

blow at one of the horses, his foot slipped, and he rolled over and over into a deep furrow. A raven hovering near picked up the barley-straw whip and little Tommy at one gulp. Up through the air the little man was whisked, so swiftly that it took his breath away; but presently the raven stopped to rest on the terrace of a castle belonging to a giant called Grumbo. Here the raven dropped Tom, and old Grumbo, coming soon after on the terrace for a walk, spied him perched upon a stone. Without thinking, the cruel monster snapped him up and swallowed him, clothes and all, as if he had been a pill. But Grumbo would have been wiser had he left Tom alone; for the little boy at once began to jump and dance in such a way as to make the greedy giant very uncomfortable.

Grumbo kicked and roared, and rubbed himself in the place which would have been "under his pinny" if he had worn one; but the more he rubbed, the more Tom danced, until at last the giant became dreadfully unwell. He opened his mouth, and his inside feelings seemed to grow worse and worse, until suddenly the little passenger came flying out, right over the terrace, into the sea.

A big fish happened to be swimming by at the time, and seeing little Tom whirling through the air, took him for a kind of May fly. So he opened his mouth and swallowed. Poor Tom was now in worse plight than ever; for if he made the fish set him free, as he had made the giant, he would only have been dropped in the sea and been drowned; so his only chance was to wait patiently in the hope that the fish would be caught. It was not long before this happened; for the fish was a greedy fellow, always in search of something to eat, and never satisfied. He snapped up a bait hanging at the end of a fishing-line, and in another instant was wriggling and writhing with the hook through his gills. He was dragged up, and the fisherman, seeing what a splendid fellow he was, thought he would present him to King Arthur. So, having killed his prize, the fisherman made his way to Court, where he received a warm welcome in the royal kitchen.

The fish was much admired, and the cook took a knife and proceeded to cut it open. What was his surprise when Master Tom popped up his head, and politely hoped that cookee was "quite well!"

You can fancy the amazement this unexpected arrival caused. King Arthur was quickly informed that a wee knight, of extraordinary height, had come to Court, and Master Tom met with a very hearty reception. The King made him his dwarf, and he soon became the favourite of the whole Court as the funniest, merriest little fellow they had ever seen.

In dancing Tom greatly excelled; and it became a custom with the King to place him on the table for the diversion of the company. But Tom could also run and jump with wonderful agility, and was sometimes known to leap over a thread stretched across the table at a height of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Once he tried to leap over a reel of cotton that was put up on end on the table; but that was too much for him, and he fell over and hurt himself. He had at least as much cleverness in his head as in his heels, if not more. The Queen soon grew very fond of him; and as for King Arthur he scarcely ever went hunting without having Tom Thumb riding astride on his saddle-bow. If it began to rain, the little man would creep into the King's pocket, and lie there snug and warm until the shower was over; and sometimes the

King would set him to ride upon his thumb, with a piece of silk cord passed through a ring for a bridle, and a whip made of a tiny stalk of grass.

One day King Arthur questioned Tom about his parentage and birth, for he was naturally curious to know where his clever little page came from.

Tom replied that his parents were poor people, and that he would be very glad of an opportunity to see them. To this the King freely consented; and that he should not go empty-handed, gave him an order on the royal treasury for as much money as he could carry. Tom made choice of a silver three-penny piece, and, having procured a little purse, with much difficulty tied it on his back. His burden made his progress very slow and hard, but he managed at last to reach home safely, having travelled half a mile in forty-eight hours.

There was great rejoicing on the part of his parents, for they had feared he was dead. Especially were they surprised at the large sum of money he had brought. A walnut shell was placed for him by the fire-side, and his parents feasted him on a hazel-nut. But

they were not so careful as they should have been, for they allowed him to eat the whole nut in three days, whereas a nut generally lasted him for a month. The consequence was that Tommy was ill and had to lie three days in the walnut-shell.

When he got well he thought it time to return to his duties at the palace; and his mother, though loth to part with him, took him in her hand, and with one puff blew him all the way to King Arthur's Court.

Here a sad disaster was in store for Tom—greater than any he had yet met. His mother had hoped he would have the good fortune that had always attended him: for indeed little Tom Thumb had gone through dangers enough to have killed three ordinary men. If she had thought of this danger she would doubtless have taken him back herself; but she trusted to chance. And indeed if the wind had been a little stronger, or a little steadier, he would have alighted quite safely; but instead of doing so, the little man came down—splash!—into a bowl of furmenty, a kind of soup of which the King was very fond, and which the royal cook was then carrying across the courtyard for the King's special enjoyment.





The Queen of the Fairies sent him flying once more to the Court.

The splash sent the hot<sup>4</sup> furmenty into the cook's eyes, and he dropped the bowl.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" he cried as he watched the rich liquor run away and thought how angry and disappointed the King would be.

Then, to save his own skin, the artful cook pretended that Tom had played the trick on purpose to be disrespectful to His Majesty. So poor Tom was placed on his trial for high treason, found guilty, and sentenced to be beheaded.

Alarmed at the cruel sentence, he looked round for a way of escape; and seeing a miller listening to the proceedings, with his mouth wide open like a great cavern, Tom, with a sudden bound, sprang down the miller's throat, unseen by all, and unknown even to the miller himself.

The prisoner having escaped, the court broke up, and the miller, who had got a touch of the hiccups, hurried home. Now Tom, having escaped from his stern judges, was equally desirous to do so from the miller's interior, which reminded him of the days when he had been swallowed by the brown cow. So, thinking the miller ought to know what was in his inside, Tom danced so many jigs and

cut so many capers that the poor man, in a state of great alarm, sent messengers in every direction for medical aid; and he soon had the satisfaction of being surrounded by five learned men, among whom a fierce dispute arose as to the nature of his illness. One said that watching the mill sails turn had made him giddy; a second said that this could hardly be, for the miller was used to seeing them turn. The third declared the patient must have swallowed some water by mistake, for he certainly was not used to that, and it had disagreed. The dispute lasted so long that the miller, growing tired, gave a great yawn. Tom saw his chance and sprang out, alighting on his feet in the middle of the table. The miller, seeing who the little creature was, and remembering how he had tormented him, flew into a great rage and flung Tom out of the open window into the river.

A large salmon happened to be passing and snapped him up in a moment. Soon afterwards the salmon was caught and exposed in the market-place for sale. It was bought by the steward of a great lord; but this nobleman, thinking it a right royal fish, did not eat it himself, but sent it to King Arthur as a

present. The cross old cook had the fish given to him to prepare for dinner; and when he came to cut it open, out jumped his old acquaintance, Tom Thumb. The cook was glad to be able to wreak his spite once more on his old enemy; and indeed Tom had played him too many tricks in his time, never thinking the day would come when it would be the cook's turn to play the tricks and Tommy's turn to bear them. The cook determined to have vengeance, so he seized poor Tom and carried him on a platter to the King, expecting that Arthur would order the culprit to be executed. But the King had no such idea, and besides, he was fully occupied with affairs of State, so he ordered the cook to bring Tom another day. The cook, although obliged to obey, was determined to serve Tom out while he could; so he shut him up in a mouse-trap for a whole week—and very miserable Tom felt. By the end of the week the King's anger was gone. He freely forgave Tom and ordered him a new suit of clothes and a good-sized mouse to ride on for a horse. Some time after he was even admitted to the honour of knighthood, and became known in the land as Sir Thomas Thumb.

An old song tells what a very fine little knight he was:

His shirt was made of butterflies' wings,  
His boots were made of chicken skins,  
His coat and breeches were made with pride,  
A tailor's needle hung by his side,  
A mouse for a horse he used to ride."

The mouse-steed was a very pretty present, and little Tom rode on it, morning, noon, and night, until at last it was the means of bringing him into very great danger.

One day, when Tom was riding by a farmhouse, a large cat, seeing the mouse, rushed upon it. Tom, drawing his sword, defended himself in the bravest manner possible, and managed to keep the cat at bay until King Arthur and his knights came up. But little Sir Thomas had not passed through the combat unhurt—some of his wounds were deep and dangerous. They took him home and laid him on a bed of down on an ivory couch; but still, with all possible care and kindness, he grew worse, and it seemed that he would die. But then his old friend, the Queen of the Fairies, appeared, and bore him away to Fairyland, where she kept him for several years. Then, dressing him in bright

green, she climbed an almond tree covered with blossom and sent him flying once more to the Court.

But by this time King Arthur, who had missed his little friend sadly and had often wished to have him back, was no longer there to welcome him. There had been great changes while little Sir Thomas Thumb had lived among the fairies, joining in their sports by night, and helping to make fairy rings. Good King Arthur was dead, and King Thunstone sat on the throne in his stead.

The people flocked together from far and near to see the wonderful little hero. King Thunstone asked who he was, where he lived, and whence he came; and the little man replied:

“My name is Tom Thumb,  
From the Fairies I come:  
When King Arthur shone,  
This court was my home.  
In me he delighted,  
By him I was knighted.  
Did you never hear of  
‘Sir Thomas Thumb?’”

The King and his courtiers all smiled at the little fellow's fine verses, and the King ordered a tiny chair to be made, in order that Tom

might sit on the royal table. He also caused a little palace of gold, a span high, to be built, for Tom to live in. The door was just an inch wide. Last of all, he gave him a lovely little coach to ride in, drawn by six small mice. The Queen was a rather silly woman, and because the King did not give her a new coach too, she became very jealous of Tom and told the King that he had insulted her. The King sent for him in a great rage, and to escape his fury our hero had to fly from the Court. An empty snail-shell afforded him a secure retreat for a long time, and he did not venture out till he was nearly starved.

At last the tiny fellow saw a butterfly approach his hiding-place. He sprang on its back, and it flew from flower to flower, from field to field, till at last it brought him back to King Thunstone's Court. The King, the Queen, the knights, and the cook all tried to catch the butterfly, but could not. At last poor Tom, having neither saddle nor bridle, slipped from his seat and fell into a water-can, where he was nearly drowned. The Queen vowed he should still be beheaded, and he was put back into the mouse-trap. But that night, a cat, seeing something move and

The cook carried Tom on a platter to the King, but His Majesty was fully occupied with affairs of State.





supposing it to be a mouse, patted the trap about until she broke it, and Tom was able to make another dash for freedom.

The Queen, thinking that he bore a charmed life, and must therefore be a special favourite of the fairies, at last forgave him, and he was reinstated in royal favour. After that he lived for several years, having many more wonderful adventures and fights with animals of various kinds. But we must hasten on to the last sad scene of his life, and tell how poor little Tom came by his death.

One day he was walking through the palace garden, not thinking of danger, when he felt himself seized from behind by two skinny arms, and a puff of poisonous breath came in his face: he turned round and drew his sword, and for the next quarter of an hour fought valiantly against a great spider, who had mistaken him for a fly. At last the spider, having had five of his legs cut off, turned on his back, kicked out as well as he could with the remainder, and—died! Tom was victor, but his victory had been dearly bought. The spider's poisonous breath had been too much for our brave little hero, and he fell into a wasting sickness and died.

King Thunstone and all the Court went into mourning, and even the Queen and the cook felt sorry they had ever been unkind to so brave and pleasant a little fellow.

He was buried under a rose-bush, and a neat little white marble slab was put to mark his grave.