

## JACK, THE GIANT-KILLER.

**L**ONG ago, in the reign of King Arthur, there lived in Cornwall, near the Land's End, a boy named Jack, who was the only son of a poor farmer.

Jack was a bold, fearless boy, and nothing delighted him more than to hear his father's stories about the Knights of the Round Table and their valiant deeds.

At this time there lived in England and Wales a number of giants, big bullying fellows, with great arms and legs, and a bad habit of taking what did not belong to them, especially cattle and sheep. As one of these gentry could as easily chop up a whole sheep as we could slice a mutton chop, and would think as little of consuming a whole ox as we should of eating a steak, you can fancy that the people whose property they made free with were far from pleased to see them. If there was any giant whose death Jack's neighbours particularly desired, it was the one

Making his way through the trees, Jack saw a great giant dragging along a handsome knight and a beautiful lady by the hair of their heads.



named Cormoran, a cruel monster who lived on St. Michael's Mount, a small hill that rises out of the sea near the coast of Cornwall. This Cormoran was eighteen feet high and nine feet round; so you can fancy the quantity of stuff it would 'take to make him a pair of trousers; and perhaps that was the reason why he generally wore none. He had an ugly face, and a huge mouth with pointed teeth that excited fear and horror in all who beheld them. This horrible giant used to come out of his cave whenever he was hungry, and that was very frequently, for his appetite was enormous. So when he walked through the sea at low tide right into Cornwall, people used to take good care not to be at home. However, he would rarely have his walk for nothing, for if he could not carry off the people themselves he would take away their cattle a dozen at a time, slinging them on a pole across his shoulder as a man might sling a dozen rabbits. How short a time this dozen lasted him, and how soon he came for more, was really wonderful.

When he got tired of beef, he would vary his diet by taking three or four dozen sheep and hogs; these small animals he would string

round his waist—the sheep bleating and the pigs squealing—to the great annoyance of the owners, who watched him at a distance and dared not interfere.

This had been going on for many years, so that Cormoran was a terror through all the countryside, and people were afraid even to mention his name.

At last there came a day when the giant behaved worse than usual, and Jack, young as he was, resolved to see what he could do to slay him.

He set about it thus:

Early one winter's evening he swam to St. Michael's Mount, pushing before him a raft on which were a pickaxe, a shovel, a horn, and a dark lantern. It was quite dark by the time he reached the Mount; but in the giant's cave a light showed, and Jack could see Cormoran, who had just finished his supper, picking his teeth with a hedge-stake. All night long Jack worked by the light of his dark lantern, digging a deep pit before the giant's dwelling. By dawn he had made a great hole, twenty feet deep and twenty feet broad. Not wishing the giant to see the hole, he covered it with sticks and straw, and

strewed some of the earth over them, to make it look like solid ground. He then put his horn to his mouth and blew a loud blast as a challenge to the giant to come out and fight. Cormoran woke up from his sleep with a start; and, when he saw what a little fellow stood defying him, his rage was awful.

“You saucy villain!” he roared; “you shall pay dearly for breaking my rest. I will broil you for breakfast!”

At this Jack only laughed, rousing the giant to further fury.

Seizing his great spiked club, the huge fellow strode down the hill. Jack stood perfectly still, without the least sign of fear. Then the giant stretched out his hand and was about to seize Jack, when he trod on the loose sods and sticks and tumbled headlong into the pit.

“Oho, Mr. Giant,” cried Jack, looking into the pit, “what say you now? Will nothing serve you for breakfast this cold morning but broiling poor Jack?”

The giant, more enraged than ever, made such a mighty effort to get out of the pit that the whole mountain shook, and stones and rubbish came rolling down its sides into the

hole. Jack saw there was no time to be lost. Raising his pickaxe, he struck Cormoran a blow on the crown which killed him at once.

Jack returned in triumph, and when the people heard of the giant's death they rejoiced greatly and could not say enough in praise of the farmer's brave son. The justices and great squires sent for him and declared that henceforth he should be called JACK, THE GIANT-KILLER. As a further reward they gave him a handsome sword and a belt on which was embroidered in letters of gold:

THIS IS THE VALIANT CORNISHMAN  
WHO SLEW THE GIANT CORMORAN.

Jack soon found that his title brought not only praise and honour but a good deal of danger. It frequently happens that success in one task only leads to new tasks and the necessity for still greater efforts. But Jack was so pleased with himself that he vowed he would kill every giant and ogre he could find.

It happened that there lived among the mountains of Wales a great hulking fellow who had been a special friend of Cormoran's, and had often been invited by him to dine off a couple of oxen or half a dozen sheep. When

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he heard of Cormoran's death this giant; Blunderbore by name, was very angry, and vowed vengeance against Jack should he ever have him in his power.

Nothing daunted, Jack took a journey into Wales; and one day, as he was travelling through a wood, sat down beside a fountain to rest. The day was hot, and Jack, overcome by fatigue, quickly fell asleep. As he lay there peacefully sleeping, dreaming perhaps of his victory over Cormoran, he had little idea of the peril into which he had fallen. For this was an enchanted forest, and near by, in an enchanted castle, lived old Blunderbore. While Jack slept, the giant came to the fountain for water, and as the words on Jack's belt showed clearly who he was, Blunderbore was greatly delighted.

"Aha!" he chuckled; "have I caught you, my valiant Cornishman? Now you shall pay for your tricks." He lifted the sleeping Jack on his shoulder and strode off towards his castle. The jolting woke Jack from his sleep: and you may be sure that even so brave a lad felt not a little alarmed when he found himself in Blunderbore's clutches.

The giant soon arrived at his castle, and



Jack was still more alarmed when he looked round, for on the floor were strewn the skulls and bones of many men and children who had been devoured by this cruel ogre. Blunderbore seemed to enjoy Jack's fright, and told him with a horrid grin that his favourite food was men's hearts eaten with salt and pepper, and showed pretty plainly that Jack's heart would form a part of one of his next meals.

But Blunderbore did not care to eat such a nice dish as the Giant-Killer all by himself, and went off to fetch one or two friends to supper, leaving Jack securely locked in a room. While he was away Jack heard dreadful shrieks, groans and cries from many parts of the castle, and presently a deep mournful voice solemnly chanted these lines:

“Haste, valiant stranger, haste away,  
Or you'll become the giant's prey.  
On his return he'll bring another,  
Still more savage than his brother—  
A cruel, horrid monster who,  
Before he kills, will torture you—  
Haste, valiant stranger, haste away,  
Lest you become the giant's prey.”

These dreadful warnings and the horrible sights he had seen for a time took all the pluck from Jack, but he was not one to give way to

despair. He ran to the window to see if he could discover any means of getting away. A single glance showed that he would never be able to leap out. The window was too high for him and, moreover, was right over the gate of the castle. Then—horror!—he saw the two giants coming along arm-in-arm, grinning and chuckling as they thought of the feast in store for them.

In utter despair, Jack glanced round the room. To his great joy, in a far-off corner he espied two stout cords. To seize them, make a running noose at the end of each, and, twist them firmly together, was the work of a moment; and just as the giants were entering the gate of the castle, he cleverly dropped a loop over the head of each. The middle of the rope he had already passed over a beam of the ceiling, and he now pulled and hauled with all his might, pulled with such a will, indeed, that the giants were soon black in the face. When his enemies were half strangled and had not much strength left, Jack clambered out of the window, and, sliding down the rope, drew his sword and killed them both.

Having saved himself from a cruel death, Jack's first thought was for the other prisoners.

Indeed, they seemed to know by some means that the tyrants were dead, and fearing Jack would hurry from the dreadful place and leave them to their fate, they all called out to him. With difficulty Jack managed to drag from its hiding-place the giant's great bunch of keys and soon had all the captives free. On going through the rooms and dungeons, he came upon three unfortunate ladies tied up by the hair of their heads and almost starved to death. Their husbands, they said, had been killed and eaten by the giants and they had been awaiting a like fate.

"Ladies," said Jack, "this cruel monster and his brother will never trouble you more, for I have put an end to them. I give you this castle and all the spoil it contains so that you may have some amends for the sufferings you have endured."

He thereupon gave them the keys, and, bidding them a polite good-bye, resumed his journey into Wales.

He walked on sturdily till night came, by which time he had lost his way in a lonely valley between two high mountains. At last he reached a large and handsome house, which looked very inviting to a weary traveller who

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had walked many miles after killing two giants. He knocked boldly at the door to ask admittance for the night, and was rather startled when the door was opened by a large two-headed giant. This monster was indeed more to be dreaded than the others; for he was not fierce in his behaviour like Cormoran or Blunderbore, who by threats and boastings put an enemy on his guard, but cunning, and generally effected by tricks and stratagem what others did by open violence. At the same time, even in appearance, he might be thought an alarming fellow. He was as tall as Cormoran and a foot or two broader round the waist. In his two heads he had, of course, two mouths, and perhaps that is why he was so fat.

He spoke very civilly to Jack, and when he heard he was a traveller who had lost his way invited him into the house, gave him a good supper, and sent him to bed. Jack, however, did not like the appearance of the giant, one of whose heads used to look at the other out of the corners of the eyes, which then winked in a very artful manner. Jack thought, too, he had seen the giant shaking his fist at him slyly once or twice during

supper so, instead of going to sleep, he listened. Presently he heard the giant marching about in the next room, singing a duet all by himself—the treble with one mouth, the bass with the other. This was the song he sang:

“Though here you lodge with me this night,  
You shall not see the morning light;  
My club shall dash your brains out quite!”

“Oho!” said Jack softly, when he heard this pleasant ditty. “Are these the tricks you play upon travellers? I shall prove a match for you yet.” Groping about the room, he found a thick log of wood in the fire-place; this he put into the bed and covered it well up, after which he concealed himself in a dark corner.

In the middle of the night the giant came creeping into the room, nodding his two heads at each other with a knowing wink. He sidled up to the bed, and—“Whack!—whack!—whack!”—down came his cruel club upon the log of wood, just where Jack’s head would have been but for his clever trick.

The giant, thinking he had broken all the bones in his guest’s body, retired well pleased with himself, and lay down on his own bed to sleep.

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Fancy how surprised he was when, early in the morning, he heard Jack stirring in his room, singing gaily, and apparently in the best possible spirits.

When Jack came calmly into the room and thanked him for his nice night's lodging, the giant rubbed his four staring eyes and pulled his hair to make sure he was awake.

"Ho-ow-w-w did you sle-e-e-p?" stammered the giant at last. "Did anything dist-u-r-r-b you in the night?"

"Oh, I slept very well," replied Jack. "I believe a rat came and gave me three or four slaps with his tail, but he soon went away again."

The giant was so surprised that he sat on a bench, and scratched his heads for three minutes, trying to make things out. Then he rose slowly, and went to prepare breakfast.

Jack now thought he would play the giant another trick. Taking a great leathern bag, he fastened it under his tunic, his idea being to make the giant believe he could eat as much as himself. From the readiness with which he had believed the story about the rat, Jack was not inclined to think much of the giant's brains, even though there were two heads to keep them in.

Presently the giant came in with two great bowls of hasty pudding, and began feeding each of his mouths by turns. Jack took the other bowl and pretended to eat the pudding it contained; but, instead of swallowing it, he kept stowing it in the great leathern bag. The giant stared harder than ever, wondering that such a little chap as Jack could eat so much.

“Now,” said Jack, when breakfast was over, “I will show you a trick. I can cut off my head, my arms, or my legs, and put them on again, just as I choose, and do a number of strange and wonderful things besides. Look here, I will show you an instance.” So saying, he took hold of a knife, ripped up the leathern bag, and all the hasty pudding came tumbling on the floor, to the great surprise of the giant.

“Ods! splutter hur nails!” cried the giant in his Welsh way, “hur can do that hurself.” Determined not to be outdone by such a little chap as Jack, he seized his knife! plunged it into the place where *his* hasty pudding was, and dropped down dead.

After this clever achievement Jack had a better title than ever to the name of “Giant-Killer.” He continued his journey, and a few days afterwards we find him travelling in very

grand company indeed. The only son of good King Arthur had a great liking for adventures, which he no doubt inherited from his father, for King Arthur in his time fought many combats and overcame many foes, never sheathing his sword without honour. Now, the Prince had at this time travelled into Wales on an errand somewhat similar to Jack's. He wanted to deliver a beautiful lady from the hands of a wicked magician who was keeping her in captivity. When Jack found that the Prince had no servants, he begged leave to attend him, and the Prince, seeing by the inscription on the belt who the sturdy traveller was, very gladly consented.

The Prince was very brave and handsome; but, like many other Princes, had a habit of giving away and squandering his money without waiting till he got any more. One day the Prince had played this game with such goodwill that when night came he had not a silver penny left wherewith to pay his lodging.

"What shall we do?" he asked Jack with a rueful face. "And how shall we provide ourselves with food for the rest of the journey?"

"Leave that to me, your Highness," said



Jack, at which the Prince felt greatly comforted.

A mile or two farther on they came to a large castle, which they were told was inhabited by a very wonderful giant indeed, for he had three heads, and could fight five hundred men (at least, he said he could).

The Prince felt rather doubtful about asking such a monster to give them lodging and supper even for one night. "What shall we do there?" asked the Prince; "he can eat us up at a single mouthful; indeed, we shall hardly be a mouthful for him, and may but just fill his hollow tooth."

"My lord," said Jack, "do you wait here till I return and leave me to manage him." Jack accordingly went on alone, and knocked loudly at the castle gate.

"Who's there?" roared the giant.

"Only your poor Cousin Jack," came the answer.

The giant, like most great men, had a good many poor relations, and Jack guessed this very well.

"Dear uncle," he went on, "I have brought you news."

"What news, Cousin Jack?" asked the giant.

"Bad news, uncle," answered Jack.

"Pooh!" cried the giant; "what can be bad news for a person like me, who has three heads and can fight five hundred men and make them fly before me."

"Oh, my poor uncle!" cried cunning Jack, "the King's son is coming, with two thousand men, to kill you and destroy your castle!"

All the giant's three faces turned pale at once; and he said in a trembling voice, "This is bad news, indeed, Cousin Jack; I'll hide in the cellar, and you shall lock me in, and keep the key till the King's son has gone."

Jack laughed in his sleeve as he turned the key of the cellar upon the simple giant. Then he brought the Prince to the castle, and they feasted and enjoyed themselves, eating the best of the giant's food and drinking his very oldest wine, whilst the poor master of the house sat in the cellar shivering and shaking with fear. Next morning Jack helped the Prince to a good share of the giant's gold and silver, and sent him three miles forward on his journey. He then went back to let his "uncle" out of the hole. The giant looked about him in a puzzled way, and seemed to think the two thousand men had not done so

much damage to his castle after all, and that they had very small appetites. He then asked Jack what reward he would like for saving the castle, and Jack answered, "Good uncle, all I want is the old coat and cap and the rusty sword and the worn slippers which are at your bed's head."

"You shall have them," said the grateful giant: "they will be very useful to you. The coat will make you invisible; the cap of knowledge will reveal to you hidden things; the sword of sharpness will cut through the best coat of mail ever made; and the slippers will give you swiftness; take them, and welcome, my brave Cousin Jack."

Jack thanked the giant, as well he might, for such very useful gifts. Then he hurried after the Prince, and they soon reached the dwelling of the beautiful lady who was in the power of the wicked magician. She was very pleased to see the Prince, and gave a great feast in his honour. At the close the lady rose and, waving her fine cambric handkerchief, said:

"My lord, you must submit to the custom of this place. To-morrow morning I command you to tell me on whom I have bestowed

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Putting on his shoes of swiftness, Jack began to run, the great double-headed giant taking great strides after him.

this handkerchief, or you must lose your head."

She then left the room, and the young Prince went to bed very mournful and very puzzled at so strange a demand.

Jack, however, made light of the matter, for, having put on his cap of knowledge, he was aware that the lady was compelled, by the power of enchantment, to meet the wicked magician every night in the middle of the great forest. When the Prince had retired, Jack put on his invisible coat and the slippers of swiftness and was at the meeting-place before the lady arrived. When she came he saw her give the handkerchief to the magician, and with one blow from the sword of sharpness he cut off the rascal's head. At once the enchantment ended and the lady was restored to her true self and her former virtue and goodness.

The Prince married her the very next day, which perhaps you will think rather a quick proceeding; but they did all such things quickly in olden times. The happy pair then proceeded to King Arthur's Court, and so pleased was that monarch with what Jack had done that he made him one of the Knights of the Round Table.

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But Jack could not long remain idle; and, hearing that there were still many giants at large in Wales, he begged the King to provide him with a horse and money that he might go forth against them.

On the third day of his journey, passing through a thick forest, he heard the most doleful groans and shrieks. Making his way through the trees, he saw a great giant dragging along a handsome knight and a beautiful lady by the hair of their heads. Jack at once put on his invisible coat, and, taking his sword of sharpness, struck at the giant. The great monster was so huge, however, that Jack could not reach his body, but had to hack at his thighs. At last, putting forth all his strength, he managed to cut off both the giant's legs below the garters, and the great trunk came crashing down, making the trees tremble and the earth itself shake with the force of the fall. Setting his foot on the monster's neck, Jack plunged his sword into the body and the giant rolled over dead.

The knight and his lady thanked their deliverer, you may be sure; but Jack would have done the same for anybody in distress, as a good knight is bound to do. Jack



declined an invitation to go to their castle and live with them, for he wanted to see the giant's den, where, he was told, lived an even fiercer giant, brother to the one he had just slain.

"When I have killed him," said Jack, "I will return and pay my respects to you."

Mounting his horse, Jack rode on for about a mile and a half, when he saw above him the mouth of a great cavern. Here sat the giant, on a huge block of timber, with a knotted club by his side.

"Here is the other," cried Jack; and, having put on the invisible coat, he hit the giant a blow with his sword. Being in rather too great a hurry, however, Jack did no more than cut off the great fellow's nose. The giant gave a roar like claps of thunder and rolled his great eyes from side to side, but of course could not see who had struck him. So he took up his club and began to lay about him right and left, like one mad with pain and fury. This gave Jack the chance he wanted, and, slipping behind his enemy, he jumped on the great block of timber and so was able to reach the giant's head, which he soon cut off. This he sent to King Arthur with that of the

giant's brother; the two heads just made a good waggon-load.

Now, at length, Jack felt entitled to go and see the knight and his lady; and there were rare doings at the castle. The knight and his guests drank to the health of the Giant-Killer; and the former presented Jack with a handsome ring with a picture on it of the giant dragging along the once unhappy couple by the hair.

The mirth was at its height when a messenger arrived to say that Thundel, a fierce two-headed giant and a near relative of the two dead giants, was coming, burning with rage, to avenge his kinsmen's death. All was hurry and fright; but Jack bade every one be quiet—he would soon settle Master Thundel. First, he sent some men to cut the draw-bridge over the moat, just leaving a slight piece on each side. The giant soon came running up, swinging his club, and though the knight and those with him had every confidence in Jack's courage and skill, they could not help feeling very anxious about the issue of the combat when they saw what a very great giant Thundel was; and how all the country people fled in terror before him, as he came

tramping heavily along. It is true he could not see Jack—for our hero had taken the precaution to put on his coat of darkness—yet his sense of smell was so acute that as Jack approached across the bridge he knew some one was at hand and cried out:

“Fe!—fi!—foh!—fum!  
I smell the blood of an Englishman!  
Be he alive, or be he dead,  
I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”

“Say you so, my friend?” asked Jack.  
“You are a monstrous miller indeed.”

“Ah!” cried the giant, “I hear the voice of the villain who killed my kinsmen. I will tear thee with my teeth and grind thy bones to powder.”

“First catch me,” cried Jack; and, flinging off his coat of darkness, he put on his shoes of swiftness, and began to run, the giant taking great strides after him. Jack led him round and round the moat, and then suddenly darted across the drawbridge. The giant followed closely, but no sooner came to the middle, where the bridge had been cut, than it snapped with his weight, and down he went—splash!—into the moat, which was full of water and of great depth. The giant rolled about like a

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great whale, struggling fiercely to release himself; but Jack, who had looked forward to this moment, now came to the edge of the moat, and, peering over, laughed and jeered at his enemy, saying:

“You were going to grind my bones to powder. Will it please you to begin?”

A strong cart rope, with a running noose at the end, was now cleverly thrown over the giant's head by Jack, and the giant was drawn to the castle side of the moat, where, half drowned and half strangled, he lay at the mercy of the Giant-Killer, who completed his task by cutting off the giant's double head, to the great delight of all the people in the castle.

After spending a short time very pleasantly with the knight and his lady, Jack again set out in search of adventures. He came one night to the foot of a high mountain, where stood a small and lonely house. Jack knocked at the door, and an old man, whose hair and beard were as white as snow, let him in and bade him welcome to such food and lodging as he could provide. It appeared that he was a hermit and lived all by himself in the hut. He did many good deeds among the people around, giving them medicine when they were

sick, and advising them as to their concerns, so that all respected and loved him. When the hermit discovered that Jack was the far-famed Giant-Killer, he said, "I am rejoiced to see you, for you can do good service here. At the top of this mountain stands an enchanted castle, the dwelling of the Giant Galligantus. This wicked monster, by the aid of a magician as bad as himself, has now a number of knights and ladies in captivity, and the magician has changed them into the shape of beasts. Among the rest is a duke's daughter, who was seized as she was walking in her father's garden, and borne away to the castle in a chariot drawn by two fiery dragons. They have cruelly made her the shape of a deer. A great many knights have tried to break the enchantment and set her free, but fiery griffins are posted at the castle gate, who destroy all who come near. With your coat of darkness you might manage to pass by the fiery griffins which keep guard at the gate without being seen, and your sword of sharpness would do the rest."

Jack was at once eager to try the adventure, and the hermit added:

"I have heard that when you have once

passed the griffins, you will find assistance in your adventure; for there is an inscription on the castle gates which will tell you how to break the enchantment, if you can only get so far."

Jack promised to do his very best; and early the next morning set off to climb the mountain, dressed in his invisible coat. It was well that he had put this garment on; for long before he got to the castle he could see the old magician, who was of a suspicious nature, looking out. He had an owl on his shoulder, which looked very much like himself; he had a long wand in his hand, and stood poking his red nose out of the window in a most inquisitive manner.

At the castle gate sat the two griffins, but, thanks to his coat, Jack passed between them unharmed. On the gate hung a large golden trumpet, and below it were written these lines:

"Whoever can this trumpet blow,  
Shall cause the giant's overthrow."

Jack at once seized the trumpet and blew a mighty blast that echoed far and near. Immediately the castle seemed to tremble and all the gates flew open. The giant and the magician knew their wicked lives would soon

be over, and stood biting their thumbs and shaking with fear. Jack with his sword of sharpness despatched them both, and all the knights and ladies who had been changed into beasts at once resumed their proper shapes. More wonderful still, the castle vanished like smoke. Jack took the head of the Giant Galligantus and sent it to King Arthur, to be added to his already large collection.

After resting that night at the old man's hermitage, the lords and ladies set off for the Court. Among them was the duke's daughter, and when King Arthur asked the Giant-Killer to name the reward he would wish for his services, Jack humbly asked that the lady might be his wife. They were married amid great rejoicings, the King giving them a large estate, and lived the rest of their days very happily, untroubled by giants.