

JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK.

THERE was once a widow who lived in a little wayside village: she was a poor lonely woman, with only one comfort to relieve the dreariness of her life; and this one comfort was her son Jack. As Jack was an only child, you can fancy how much affection was bestowed upon him—how the poor widow went without food that Jack might not feel their poverty; how she watched over him day and night; how, in fact, she loved him as only a widowed mother can.

Now, Jack was not at all a bad-hearted fellow. He was generous, helpful, and brave. He would go any distance on an errand to please a neighbour; he would give away all he had to any one who begged of him; and if he saw a big boy ill-treating a little one, the bully was pretty certain to receive a sound thrashing at the hands, or rather at the fists, of Jack. But he had one fault, which many brave, open-hearted lads have: he was heedless and

reckless. Not knowing the value of money, he spent it as freely as if his mother had hundreds of pounds, but she loved him so fondly that she did not like to reprove him, and allowed him as he grew up to become more and more extravagant, while every day they grew poorer and poorer.

At last, on going to her money-box one night, the widow found that there was not a shilling left. The box was empty except for one little threepenny-piece, which had been clipped all round the rim and had a large hole punched out of the middle. Then at last she began to reproach Jack.

“Oh, you heedless, wasteful boy!” said she; “see what you have brought me to with your extravagance! All I have is gone, except the threepenny-piece which no one will take, and we must have bread to eat. Nothing now remains but to sell my poor cow. When the money we get for her is gone I do not know what we shall do. Oh dear! oh dear!”

Jack saw at last what he had done, and promised to amend, really meaning what he said. He declared that he would be the prop of his mother's old age; and early next morning sallied forth to sell the cow.

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As he trudged along, swinging his stick, and cutting off the head of a thistle now and then for pastime, he began to think how much money he should ask for the cow, and to whom he should sell her; and the more he thought the less he could make up his mind. Like many people in similar difficulties, he resolved to leave the matter to chance. Directly afterwards he met a butcher who asked him what he was going to do with "that thin old cow."

"Neither thin nor old," answered Jack rather angrily, "but if you want to know, I'm going to sell her."

"Well," said the butcher, who knew Jack's easy-going temper, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You see these beans in my hat? Beautiful, aren't they? Red and blue and purple and all sorts of colours. I shouldn't offer another man so much; but you are a clever fellow and like to drive a hard bargain, so I'll give you the lot for the poor old cow."

Jack was much flattered at being called a clever fellow, and moreover liked the look of the beans. So he stupidly closed at once with the offer made by the wily butcher, who drove off the cow, laughing in his sleeve at

Jack's simplicity. The boy then turned homeward, fancying he had done a rather clever thing, and calling to his mother from afar to come out and admire what he had brought her.

When the good woman heard with her own ears and saw with her own eyes how foolishly Jack had acted, she was about as angry as any one could be. She had made up her mind, poor woman, what she would buy with the money the cow would fetch. She had settled where she would buy the flour for the bread, and how much she would save out of the price of the potatoes by taking a quantity at a time, and how she would manage to scrape enough together to buy a comforter for her son to wear in the winter, and perhaps something warm for herself. And then, when she had planned everything so nicely, to have that silly boy standing there with a few beans in his hand and a broad smile on his face!

The old woman quite lost patience, and, having scolded Jack for his stupidity, angrily tossed the beans out of the window, bewailing her lot in having such a careless, rattle-brained scapegrace for a son. Jack, who was really sorry, did his best to console her, but,

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though they kissed and made friends, that fact did not undo his folly, and they both had to go supperless to bed.

The next morning Jack found himself awake two full hours before his usual time, and a little sprite inside him seemed to be calling, "Breakfast! breakfast! breakfast!" pinching him at the same time. He got up quickly and, as he dressed, looked out of the window. What he saw made him start with wonder and rub his eyes to make sure he was awake. Then, with an exclamation of surprise, he ran downstairs as fast as he could, and into the garden.

From the corner where his mother had flung the beans rose a great thick bean-stalk; not a single stalk really, but a number of stalks twined and twisted in such a way that they formed a sort of ladder. The ladder went up and up so high that the top seemed lost in the clouds. The lower part of the bean-stalk was as thick as a tree trunk, and Jack tried vainly to shake it.

Now, Jack was an adventurous kind of boy, and could not pass a ladder without a desire to climb it. When he saw this great bean-stalk, he at once determined to get to

the top, and see "where it led to." But first, like a dutiful boy, he ran back to the house to tell his mother of his intention. She tried all she could to dissuade him, feeling sure some harm would come to him. But Jack was a headstrong boy, and, having made up his mind, not even his mother's tears could alter it. Up the bean-stalk he accordingly went, his mother standing underneath, calling and threatening and entreating in vain.

Hour after hour he climbed, and the higher he got the more hungry he grew. At last, panting for breath and almost exhausted, he reached the top, and found himself in a strange country.

It was not a beautiful country by any means: not a tree, nor a shrub, nor a house, nor a living creature, was anywhere to be seen. Jack found himself, in fact, in as dry a desert place as you can imagine; not at all the kind of country any one would choose who went to seek his fortune.

Jack seated himself on a block of stone, and thought of his mother, reflecting with sorrow how he had again brought trouble on her devoted head by his want of thought. He was also in sore trouble on his own account;

he could find nothing to eat, he was woefully exhausted, and began to feel much afraid that he would die of hunger.

Still, however, he walked on, hoping to see a house where he might beg for food; but there was no sign, far or near, of anything of the kind. Suddenly, however, he became aware of a kind of cloud rolling towards him; it parted, and disclosed, to his great surprise, a beautiful lady. She was dressed in a shining robe of white, and held in her right hand a slender white wand with a peacock of pure gold at the top.

Jack stood gazing at the lady with the greatest amazement, but she approached and asked :

“How did you come here?”

Her face was kind and she smiled very pleasantly, so Jack, after bowing low, told her about the cow and the beans and the great thick bean-stalk.

She smiled still more and, to his surprise, asked :

“Do you remember your father?”

“No,” he answered sadly. “My mother always weeps when I mention him and will tell me nothing.”

“Listen,” said the lady. “I will tell you a story of which your mother has never dared to speak. But before I begin you must give me your solemn promise that you will do exactly as I command; for I am a fairy, and unless you act as I tell you, I shall not be able to assist you, and there is little doubt that, left unaided, you will not only fail in the attempt I wish you to undertake, but perish.”

Jack at once promised, and the fairy continued:

“Your father was a rich man, and, what is more, had a kind heart. No one who came to him for help was ever turned away; and he would often seek out people in distress without waiting for them to come to him. Not many miles from your father’s house lived a cruel giant who was the dread of the whole country. When he heard your father’s goodness praised he hated him in his heart, and vowed to destroy him. To do this he came with his wife to the place where your father lived and pretended to have lost all his property by a great earthquake. Your parents received him kindly, for they were good to all. One day, when the wind was blowing loudly over the sea, the giant came to your father

with a glass in his hand. 'Look through this,' he said; 'here is something that will grieve your kind heart.' Your father looked, and saw several ships in danger of going down or being driven on shore. The giant begged him to send his servants to assist these poor people, well knowing he would not refuse. All the servants, except your nurse and the porter, were at once sent, but hardly were they out of sight when the cruel giant fell upon your father and killed him.

"The cruel monster intended to kill you also; but your mother fell at his feet and begged so piteously that he agreed to spare you both on condition that your mother promised never to reveal the story. Then he set about plundering your father's house and afterwards set fire to it. While he was thus employed, your mother took you, a poor weak little baby, in her arms, and fled as fast as she could. For miles and miles she travelled, in an agony of fear, dreading every moment that the cruel giant would alter his mind and come after her. At last, exerting all her strength, she reached the village in which you have lived so long. Now you know why she has never opened her lips to

you on the subject of your father. It has been a hard trial to her to see you growing up in poverty, while she knew another had grown rich on the inheritance that should have been yours. But her promise, though given to a wicked giant, was a promise after all, and she has kept it. It is for you to regain the fortune your parents lost; for all this wicked giant has belongs of right to your mother and you. I have taken you under my protection, for I was your father's guardian. But fairies are bound by laws as well as mortals, and through a sad mistake I lost my power for a number of years and was unable to help your father when he most needed succour. My power only returned on the day you went to sell your cow. It was through me that the butcher found the beans, and it was I that induced you to buy them and that caused the bean-stalk to grow. I filled you also with the desire to climb, but now you have reached this country where the wicked giant dwells I can only help you if you are willing to help yourself. You are heedless, but, I trust, brave and earnest. Go boldly forward, fearing neither danger nor hardship. Your enemy's house—or rather your own—

lies straight before you; and remember that my protection can be given to you only so long as you work boldly and faithfully."

The fairy then vanished.

Jack sat for a time in utter amazement at the wonderful things he had heard.

"Poor mother!" he thought, "how she must have suffered! Well, I will do my best to right her, and to punish this wicked giant."

Resolving thus, he pursued his journey, wandering farther and farther. At last, as the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, he came in sight of a fine, spacious mansion. He went straight up to the door, and asked the woman who stood there for a night's lodging and a crust of bread.

The woman looked ugly, haggard and careworn, but did not seem ill-natured. She was greatly surprised to see him, and several times motioned him to go away, as if she would gladly have been rid of him and his request together. But Jack, determined to go through with his adventure, stood his ground manfully. At length, when she saw that he paid no heed to her silent warning, she glanced sorrowfully at him and said:

“Alas! my poor boy, I dare not take you in. My husband is a mighty and cruel giant. He goes hunting every day, and brings home men to supper—not to sup with him, but to be eaten—for he feeds almost entirely on human flesh, and is out of temper when he cannot get it. He has gone out to-day to try and catch a fat citizen, and if he has been unsuccessful, he will make you do instead.”

Jack was greatly terrified by this account of the owner of the house; the more so when he heard that the giant was expected home directly. But he was very hungry and very tired—and, besides, the fairy had told him he must be brave and bold. So he begged the good woman to take him in, just for this one night, and to hide him somewhere; and she, being a good-natured sort of person for an ogre's wife, consented.

She led him through a fine hall, furnished with chairs as big as bedsteads and cups that held a gallon; and upon one table Jack saw a large spear-head, which the woman told him was her husband's toothpick. Through other rooms they went, well furnished, but all cold and gloomy; until, at the end of a long gallery, Jack saw something that looked like

a grating or the front of a cage; behind this two or three men moved to and fro, wringing their hands and weeping. They were, in fact, the giant's prisoners, whom this monster kept just as a farmer might keep turkeys and geese to kill at Christmas. Jack's blood ran cold, but he kept up his courage, and followed his hostess to the kitchen. Here was a roaring fire, and everything looked warm and comfortable. The giant's wife placed a plentiful supper on the table; and when you remember that Jack had not only eaten nothing all that day, but had gone to bed hungry the night before, you can fancy what a meal he made.

Just as he had finished supper they heard a sound like fifteen trumpets, and the woman started up in a fright, exclaiming, "My husband is coming!"

"Does your husband always have trumpets played when he comes home?" asked Jack.

"What trumpets?" asked the giant's wife. "Foolish boy, he requires no trumpets to be blown before him; the sound you hear is my husband blowing his nose."

Then there came footsteps, like fifty dray-horses walking together. Nearer and nearer they came, "tramp! tramp! tramp!" and then

there was a loud knock at the door which made the house shake.

"Ah," cried the woman, "he is in a rage, I can tell. If he sees you he will kill you and me too. What shall I do?"

"Hide me in the oven," said Jack, who now somehow felt quite bold as he remembered that he would soon be face to face with his father's murderer and the cause of all his mother's troubles.

Then the woman ran and opened the door in a hurry, and the giant came stalking into the kitchen.

"I smell fresh meat!" were his first words.

It was soon evident that the giant was in a terribly bad humour, for no success had come to him that day in hunting. He had met no one but a black man, whose flesh was not tender, and who had escaped, and an old man who had lived so long in the workhouse on dry bread and gruel that he was nothing but skin and bone, and the giant in disgust had kicked him and let him go. So he was in a very bad humour indeed, and his looks were black.

"I smell fresh meat," he repeated.

His wife, of course, knew that he smelt



The cloud parted and disclosed a beautiful lady, dressed in a shining robe of white, who held in her right hand a slender white wand with a peacock of pure gold at the top.

Jack, but, being really anxious to save the lad, she replied, "It must be the men in the cage." Then she hastily brought her husband's supper to divert his thoughts.

The giant glanced hungrily at the food; but still he muttered to himself—

"Snouk but, snouk ben,
I smell the flesh of earthly men."

The business of supper soon occupied all his attention. It appeared that he was saving up the men in the cage for a treat, and Jack, peeping through a crevice in the oven, was surprised to see that his meal consisted of three legs of mutton, seven quartern loaves, and a few other trifles of the kind. This did not take long to consume, and he then leant back in his chair and, in a voice of thunder, called to his wife:

"Bring me my hen."

She at once placed on the floor before him a very fine hen.

Jack, still peeping through the crevice, at first thought the giant was going to eat this also.

"*Lay!*" roared the giant, and at once the hen laid an egg of solid gold.

"*Lay!*" cried the giant again, and the hen

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obediently laid another egg, larger than the first.

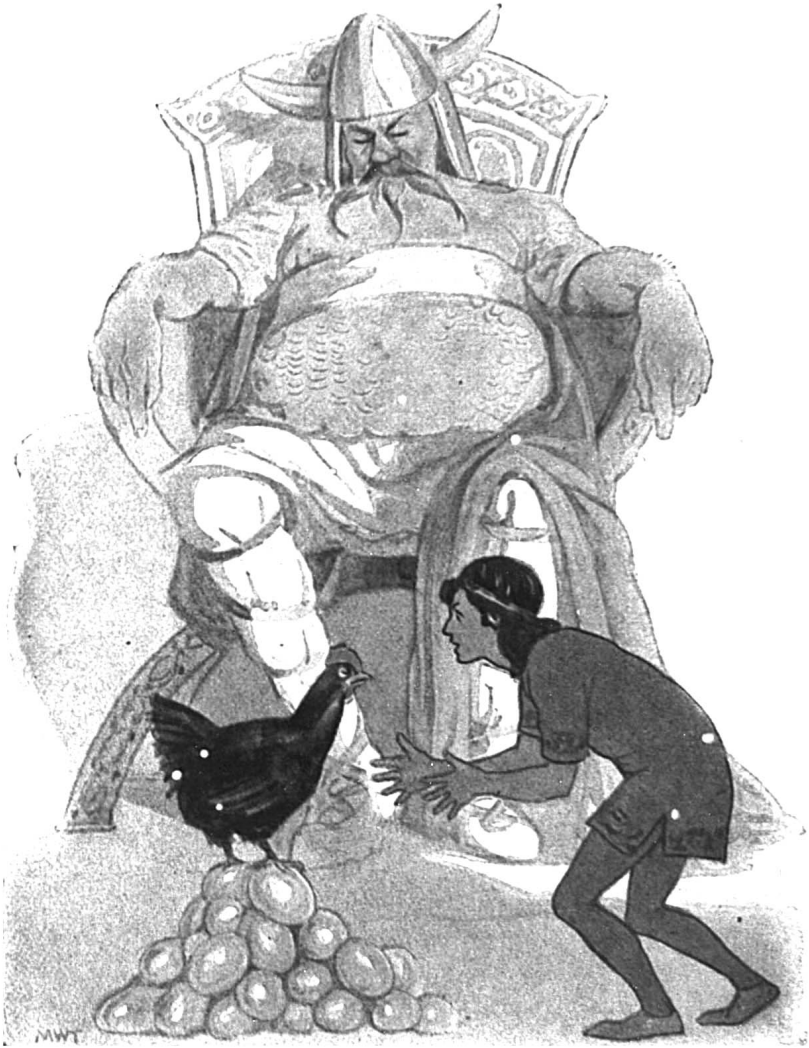
Meantime the wife went to bed, leaving her husband to amuse himself with the hen. In a little while, after quite a pile of gold eggs had been laid, the giant began to nod, and his hands hung limply over the arms of his chair before the fire. Then his head sank lower and lower, and at last he went fairly off to sleep, snoring like the roaring of cannon in battle. In his sleep the giant seemed to have an idea that something unusual was going on, and several times muttered, "Snouk but, snouk ben," but the warmth made him more and more drowsy and his snores grew louder.

Now was the time for Master Jack. Creeping silently from the oven, he stole on tip-toe across the room and snatched up the hen, now proudly strutting on her pile of golden eggs.

Thrusting the frightened bird under his arm, he went softly to the door, casting many a backward glance at the giant, who continued to snore as loudly as ever.

Finding the heavy iron bar across the door could not be lifted without noise, Jack jumped out of the window and ran off. Away he went, and at length found himself at the spot

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where the bean-stalk reared its head through an opening like a well. Down the bean-stalk Jack clambered, still clutching the precious hen; and you can fancy how pleased his anxious mother was to see him again. But she was still more pleased when Jack showed what a rich prize he had secured.

“*Lay!*” he cried, and the hen obeyed her new master as readily as she had obeyed the giant, and laid an egg every time she was told.

For some time Jack and his mother lived happily enough. The golden eggs of the hen supplied all their wants; and had it not been for what the fairy had said, Jack would not have thought any more of the bean-stalk. But the more important part of his task was yet unattempted. He had indeed rescued his mother from poverty, and escaped from it himself; but that was not all he was expected to do. His father had been murdered by the giant, and murdered too, in a very treacherous way. The more he thought of what the beautiful lady had told him, the more it appeared to Jack that he must finish the task the fairy had set him, and that he could not rest content so long as the wicked giant lived to enjoy the riches he had acquired so unfairly.

So one day he told his mother that he must needs mount the bean-stalk a second time. Again the good lady did all she could to dissuade him, but, owing to his promise to the fairy, Jack could not tell her his real reasons for going. At length his mother was forced, with a heavy heart, to consent.

But first, fearing that the giant's wife would know him again, he got his mother to make him a different suit of clothes, and he carefully coloured his skin that he might appear as unlike his former self as possible.

Then once more, with great difficulty, he climbed the bean-stalk, and, having rested awhile on the stones, made his way boldly to the giant's mansion. This time it was not such an easy matter to get in. The old dame declared that once before a poor boy had come for shelter, and had stolen her husband's favourite hen, and that the giant, having forced her to confess that she had let someone in, had revenged himself by beating her cruelly. Jack felt sorry for her in a way, but he was very determined, and at last, after much persuasion, induced her to admit him for the second time. Again he was given a good supper and again, just as he was finishing, the

sound as of trumpets was heard approaching. This time Jack had no need to ask what it meant, but he thought it best to do so.

"Hide in the big cupboard," whispered the giant's wife hurriedly.

Jack was soon safely inside and was glad to find a chink through which he could see what the giant was about.

This time the giant was in a fairly good humour, for he had robbed three travellers of a lot of money, which he had hidden in a cave by the wayside. The travellers themselves he had bound hand and foot, and left in the cave till he should call for them.

He ate his supper with great relish, and, his thoughts running on the money he had stolen, he roared to his wife to bring him his money-bags, that he might count how much he had. He was a covetous giant, and took great delight in hoarding money and counting it over and over again. The wife soon returned, dragging two heavy bags, one filled with golden guineas, the other with bright new shillings.

Snatching them from her hand, the giant gave her a box on the ear, telling her that was for her trouble.

"Now you may go to bed, you old simpleton!" he roared.

This the poor woman was glad enough to do, you may be sure.

Then the giant began to count his money, beginning with the guineas.

"One, two, three, four,"—and so on. Presently he got to the hundreds—"One hundred and one—one hundred and two." By the time he got to "Five hundred and eighty-one—five hundred and eighty-two—" his head began to nod.

In another five minutes he was fast asleep. Then Jack came out of his hiding-place on tiptoe, and clutched both the bags. Just as he was making his way to the window, a little dog, that had lain unobserved under the giant's chair, jumped towards him with a shrill—"Vow! yow! yow!"

Luckily, Jack had not quite finished his supper when the giant's knock came to the door, and he had hidden a bone in his pocket. With this yelping cur to silence, a bone was the very best thing Jack could have had. The giant turned uneasily once or twice on his chair, but did not wake, and the starving dog was soon too busy with the bone to care what happened to his master.

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So for a second time Jack made off with the wicked giant's treasure, and in due course arrived safely at the foot of the bean-stalk.

But all was not well at home. His poor mother had done nothing but fret from the moment he went away; and so anxious had she been that she was ill—in fact, nearly dying. When she saw her boy safe and sound, however, the good woman soon recovered.

With the bags of gold the cottage was rebuilt, and for some time they lived happily together; but presently Jack felt he could stay no longer, and must try once more to penetrate to the giant's abode, for his task was incomplete so long as his father's death was unavenged. This time he did not tell his mother of his intention, for he knew she would try to dissuade him, and he had made up his mind to go at all hazards. So, early one morning, he started on his third expedition. This time it cost him still more trouble to gain admission, for the giant's wife had grown very suspicious; but Jack was so well disguised that she did not recognize him, and he at last contrived to get in.

When the giant returned from hunting he

muttered furiously, "I smell fresh meat!" and began to search the room. Jack this time had hidden in the copper, and the giant, being very hungry, did not take the trouble to lift the lid. His supper consisted of a whole salted log and three large cod-fishes. This salt fare made him very thirsty, so he took three great casks of drink, whereas his usual custom was to wash down his supper with only two. The liquor got into his head, and put him in high good humour. He began to sing and roared to his wife to bring his harp.

This harp was a most wonderful instrument. Directly it was placed on the table it began to play, of itself, the most beautiful music. The giant rose and began to dance. The harp presently played slower and more softly; and the giant, growing sleepy, lay down at full length on the ground and began to snore.

"Now," thought Jack, "is my time;" and, slipping from his hiding-place, he seized the harp. But the harp was enchanted, and, when Jack seized it, cried "Master! master!"

Up started the giant with a roar, and away ran Jack with the harp. The giant thundered after him as fast as he could, crying:

“Oh, you villain! It was you who robbed me of my hen and of my money-bags, and now you take my harp! Wait till I catch you. I will eat you alive!”

“Do,” cried Jack, “*when* you catch me!” For he could see that the giant, in his tipsy condition and blind with rage, would not be able to run very fast.

Jack ran his hardest, and had got a good start of his pursuer by the time they got to the top of the bean-stalk. Down the stalk Jack slid, holding the harp, which played all the time the saddest of sad music, until he called out to it sharply “Stop!” an order that was at once obeyed.

The giant was not long in reaching the top of the bean-stalk, and Jack could see his great boots descending. Arrived at the bottom, our hero called loudly to his mother, who was sitting weeping at the cottage door:

“Mother! Mother! a hatchet! Quick!”

Not a moment was to be lost. Jack seized the hatchet from her hands and chopped at the bean-stalk with all his might. He struck—ONCE!—the giant gave a roar of rage, and redoubled his efforts to get down in time. TWICE!—the bean-stalk cracked and shook,

and the giant stopped an instant as it swayed to and fro. THRICE!—the great stalk snapped and broke off near the ground.

The giant tried vainly to retain his hold; he was like a sailor clinging to a loose rope in a tempest or a vane on a steeple blown round and round by the wind.

As the great monster tugged and struggled, the branches to which he clung gave way, the thick stem was crushed and broken; and he tottered, lost his hold, and came crashing down with a fall that shook the earth. There he lay with a shattered skull—dead!

Jack's mother, when she could summon courage, bent over the great body, and was astonished to recognize the cruel monster who had murdered her husband years before.

The next moment the good fairy appeared and explained all that had happened.

"Jack is a good boy," she said, "and very brave, a worthy son of his father. I think he is cured now of his recklessness, and you have wealth enough to last you for the rest of your days. Do all the good you can."

She waved her wand, the torn and broken bean-stalk disappeared, and the fairy herself was never seen again.



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