

SIR THOMAS THUMB



NELSON

David Johnston.

Wishing Davis a very
Merry Christmas
Audrey & Lushma

Mato
1911

SIR THOMAS THUMB ;
OR,
THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF
A FAIRY KNIGHT.

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THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURES
OF A FAIRY KNIGHT

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

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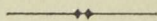
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SIR THOMAS THUMB.

Chapter I.

MERLIN THE ENCHANTER.

LONG, long ago there lived in the West Country a famous wizard or enchanter named Merlin. No man knew the story of his birth and boyhood ; nor could any remember a time when he had not been a bearded, wrinkled man with locks like the driven snow.

Many tales were told of his wonderful powers and of his dealings with the fairies, elves, and pixies. He it was who made the

famous Round Table which came into the possession of the great King Arthur when he wedded the beautiful Princess Guinevere. It had seats for one hundred and fifty knights, whose duty it was to form the bodyguard of the King, and to ride throughout the land redressing human wrongs.

It was Merlin, too, who brought from Ireland the great stones which are now to be seen standing in a circle on Salisbury Plain ; but how he accomplished this wonderful feat no man or woman could ever find out.

When he was not staying at King Arthur's palace he lived in a great cave at Dynevor, near Carmarthen. Not many mortals dared to visit him, for there came from this cave a continual noise of rattling iron chains, the bubbling of brazen caldrons, the groans of

men or spirits, the strokes of hammers, and the ringing of anvils.

What was going on in that mysterious cave no one could ever find out, nor did any one greatly care to make the attempt. But a tale was told of one wonderful thing which came from that elfin workshop. This was a mirror in the shape of a hollow globe, which showed to any one who happened to look into it all that was to happen to him or to her in the future. Many other marvellous things were made by the great enchanter in his cave, but of these we have no space to tell.

Now, although the people of those parts went in great fear of the power of Merlin, he was known to be very wise and gentle, as well as full of kindness, to those who treated him well—as, indeed, this book will shortly show. King Arthur, too, owed a great deal

to this wise man, and would never embark upon any enterprise without first taking his counsel upon it. It was Merlin who watched over him from his earliest infancy, and it is no wonder that the King should reverence and obey him.

The story of the share that Merlin had in the mysterious coming of Arthur to the kingdom is worth telling at this point.

King Uther lay on his deathbed, and his heart was sad within him because he had no son to rule his kingdom when he should pass away. By him stood the wise men, Bleys and Merlin, who for many a long year had helped him to rule the realm. And when the King had passed away they left the castle, and went out to breathe the cool air of night.

But they found a tempest raging, which seemed to shake the earth and sky and sea.

And as they fought their way against the wind they saw far out at sea a vessel shaped like a winged dragon, and bright from stem to stern with shining forms. For a moment they saw it, and no more.

Then the two stepped down to the entrance of a cave by the margin of the sea, and watched the angry waters fall, wave after wave, each mightier than the last.

They counted the waves as they rose in an arch and fell in long lines of foam creeping up to their feet. The ninth wave, which seemed to gather half the sea, slowly rose and plunged towards them with a mighty roar, and, as it were, a sound of many voices. And in this wave was borne a naked child, which fell at the feet of Merlin.

Stooping, the sage lifted the babe in his arms and cried,—

“The King ! Here is an heir for Uther !”

As he spoke, the great breaker, sweeping up the beach, seemed to wrap him and the child with a mantle of flame. And there fell a great calm on sea and sky.

Then Merlin brought the babe back to the castle, and gave him into the charge of a good knight, Sir Ector, whom he trusted. And the child grew, and waited for the time when he should be called to rule the realm of Britain, with Merlin the Wise at his right hand.

Chapter II.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S COTTAGE.

NOW Merlin was able to take upon himself the form of any person he chose ; and he often travelled about from place to place, sometimes on foot and at other times on horseback. One day he was travelling along a rugged road dressed like a beggar. He had tramped many a weary mile, and now that evening was coming on he began to feel very tired and hungry. Lifting his eyes and shading them with his left hand from the level rays of the sun, he saw not far away a small mud cottage, at the door of which sat a man and his wife.

He went slowly forward towards them, and the man, whom Merlin knew from his dress and appearance to be a ploughman, held out his hand in kindly greeting.

“Come, friend,” he said, “sit down and rest here on this bench. My wife will go and prepare supper. We are very poor indeed, but you are welcome to a share of whatever food we have.”

The deep-set eyes of the old beggar-man gleamed with real pleasure.

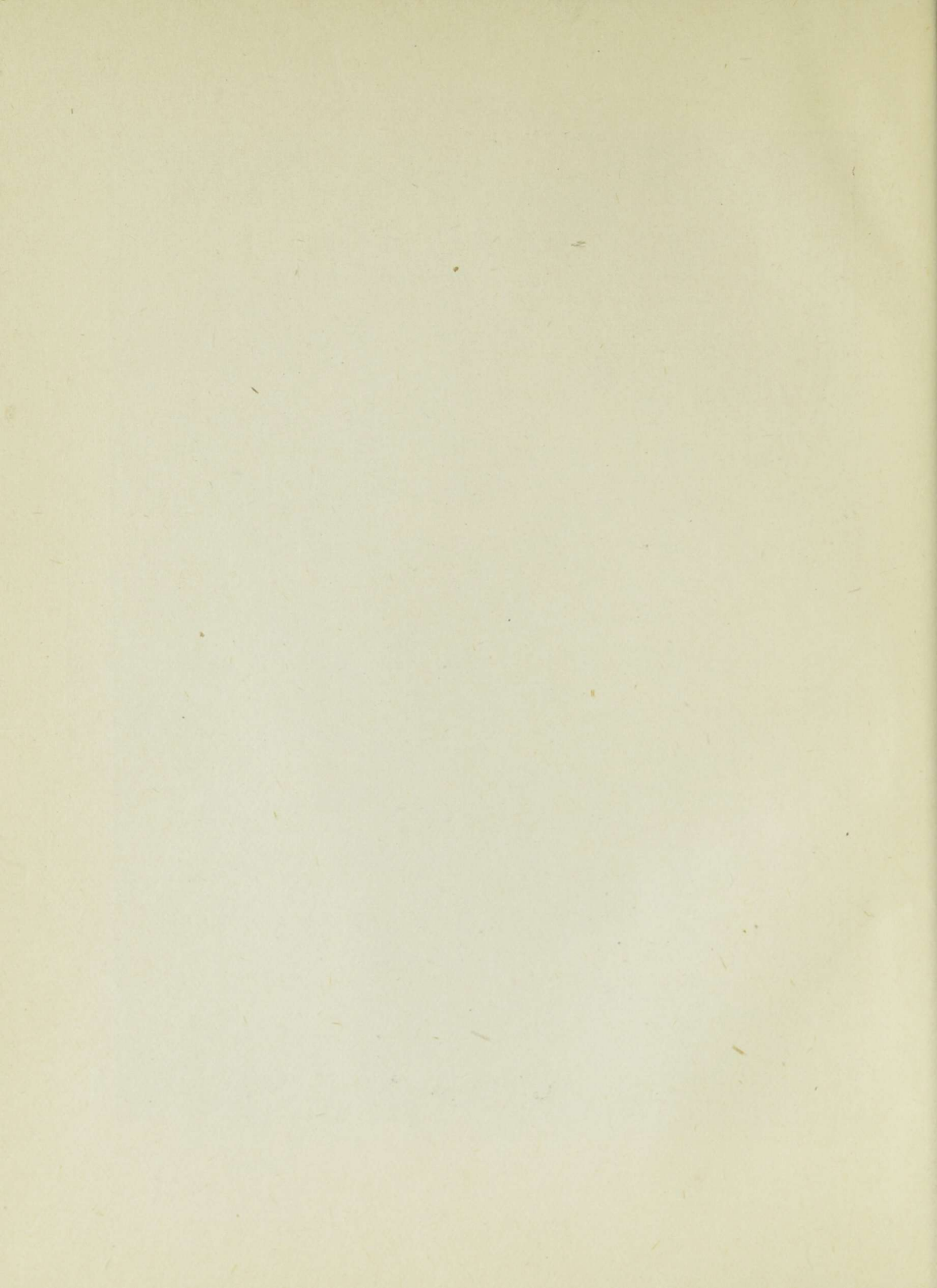
“Thanks to you and your good wife,” said he, as he seated himself beside the master of the cottage, and turned so that in looking at him the ploughman was obliged to face the rays of the setting sun.

For a few moments the two men spoke of the weather and the crops, and Merlin gently patted the head of an old dog which



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Queen Mab in her carriage.



stood near the ploughman's knee. Then the good wife appeared, carrying a large bowl of milk and a platter on which rested some brown bread and a little cheese.

"It is all we have," she said rather sadly, feeling that she would gladly have starved herself for a week to provide a better meal for her unexpected guest.

"It is given with grace," said the stranger ; "and the King himself could not desire more than that."

"Thanks, friend," said the ploughman simply ; and the three began to partake of their supper.

The ploughman's wife was finished first, and rising from her seat she went into the house. Soon she returned, carrying another platter on which was placed a large bunch of grapes.

“They were a present from our master,” she said, in reply to her husband’s look of surprise and inquiry, “and for the moment I forgot that they were in the house.”

The man’s eyes shone with pleasure as he divided the fruit among the three, giving the largest share to the stranger. His wife now sat down again, and the three began to talk.

There was something about the stranger which won the hearts of the honest couple; and almost without knowing it, they had soon told him all their affairs.

They had, it seemed, a kind master and mistress, who owned the farm not far away. Their cottage was warm and cosy in winter, while in summer the garden was one of the gayest and most useful to be seen for miles around. Their wants were simple, and

they were quite contented with such rough fare as they were able to obtain. But there was one thing which was a cause of grief to both of them : they had no child to love and cherish.

“If only we had a little son,” said the woman, with a sad but earnest look upon her face, “even if he were no bigger than my husband’s thumb, I should be the happiest woman in King Arthur’s kingdom.”

A slow smile wreathed the lips of the old stranger as he listened to these words of his hostess. Then he rose to bid the honest couple good-night.

“Thanks once again, kind friends,” said he, as he leant upon his staff and looked kindly at them. “Thanks for your hospitality. It may be that some day the fairies will bring you a son.”

Then he went on his way, after gently refusing to spend the night at the cottage. And as he went along the road he began to laugh quietly at the idea of a boy no bigger than a man's thumb.

“It would be such sport as Queen Mab would love,” he said to himself mysteriously, as he walked quickly onward to seek a resting-place for the night.

Chapter III.

MERLIN'S VISITOR.

THE palace of the fairies hung halfway between earth and sky ; and though it was as light as gossamer no wind or storm could harm it. A shimmering moonbeam formed a path leading from the gateway to the earth below. The walls of the palace were made of spiders' legs closely mortised together ; and the windows, of the eyes of cats ; while the roof was covered with the wings of bats silvered over with moonshine.

Here lived the Fairy King, whose name was Oberon, and his wife, Queen Mab. The Fairy Court consisted of an innumerable

crowd of fairies, elves, and other little beings, who were ready at any moment to perform the commands of their royal master or mistress.

Queen Mab's own maidens formed a merry band—

Hop and Mop and Drop so clear,
Pip and Trip and Skip that were
To Mab, their sovereign, ever dear,
 Her special Maids of Honour ;
Fib and Tib, and Pink and Pin,
Tick and Quick, and Jill and Jin,
Tit and Nit, and Wap and Win,
 The train that wait upon her.

One evening, just as the sun was setting, Queen Mab took a great desire to go for a drive. So she called a fairy page, and bade him go at once and order her chariot. Soon it was standing at her door, ready to carry her wherever she wished to go. The horses

were four nimble gnats, and the harness was of gossamer. The wheels were constructed of crickets' bones covered with thistledown, lest the coach should rattle. Upon the coach-box sat Fly Cranion, the Queen's trusted coachman, who could drive his mistress safely even to the edge of the moon. The chariot itself was made from the finely-coloured shell of a snail; the seat within was the soft wool of a bee; the cover was made from the wing of a gorgeous butterfly. Never had been seen a chariot so delicate, so light, and yet so cosy.

The Queen stepped lightly into the coach, whispering into the ear of Fly Cranion as she did so. Crack went his whip, round went the wheels, and the chariot rolled off at a great pace. Through many a gate it passed and over many a stile, and at last stopped at

the door of the cave where lived Merlin the Enchanter.

An eerie light came from the opening of the cave ; and peeping within, the Queen could see the wizard seated at a huge table with his head upon his hand and his back towards her. Mab leapt down from the coach and ran into the cave ; then, without any seeming effort, she rose through the air and alighted near the elbow of the sage.

“Ha !” he cried, “my dainty Queen ! What brings you here ?”

“You thought of me,” said Mab, in a voice like a silver bell, “and so I came.”

“I did indeed think of you, your Majesty,” said the sage, “for I need your help.”

“And that you shall have, my dear master,” said the Queen, “whatever you may need.”

“Listen to me, then,” said Merlin ; and

Queen Mab, seating herself on the great table of rock at which the wizard was working, clasped her dainty hands over her knee.

Then the enchanter told her the story of his adventure in the disguise of a beggar, and of the fervent wish of the ploughman's wife for a boy, even if he were no bigger than her husband's thumb.

The Queen laughed merrily ; and the sound of her laughter was sweeter than the purling of a brook over the pebbles on an afternoon in June. She rocked to and fro in her merriment, and the eyes of the sage gleamed with pleasure as he looked at her delicate fairy form with its robe of shimmering gauze.

“ Well,” he said, when Queen Mab's mischievous merriment was spent, “ what can you do to help me ? ”

Chapter IV.

QUEEN MAB'S PROPOSAL.

“**F**IRST I must tell you a secret,” said the Queen.

“What is that?” asked Merlin.

“Well, you must know,” said Mab, with a merry light in her sparkling eyes, “his Majesty the King is *jealous*.”

“And of whom?” asked Merlin.

“Of one of his own knights,” was the answer.

“Which of them dares to give him cause?” asked the sage.

“Pigwigginn,” said the Queen; “and only yesterday he sent me a *letter*.” The Queen’s

merry laughter here once more overcame her. "He asked me," she went on, after a while, "to meet him at midnight in the tall cowslip which every fairy knows full well, and which stands on the top of Hient Hill. I read the letter, and I laughed, and laughed, and laughed again."

"But what of Oberon?" asked Merlin.

"Oh, his Majesty *was* jealous," said the Queen. "His brow grew black as thunder, and he swore by the sun and the moon and the stars to have the life of Pigwiggin."

"Well?" queried Merlin, as the Queen paused to laugh again.

"Well, I began to think that the letter was rather pretty, and to beg the King's pardon for Pigwiggin. This made him more angry than ever; and Pigwiggin not being near at the moment, he swore to take

the life of the page who brought the letter to me. But I hid the dear little fellow in my bower, and he is there now—unless, indeed, any of my maids has revealed the secret to the King.”

“And what has all this to do with the ploughman and his wife?” asked Merlin.

“Everything,” said Queen Mab quickly. “The King’s page must be kept out of his Majesty’s reach until the royal anger has time to cool. Why should he not take human shape and be the ploughman’s little son, at least for a season?”

“But if he takes human shape,” said Merlin, “he must be subject to all the ills of human kind. In your fairy kingdom he knows nothing of weariness and pain, of hunger and thirst, of sorrow and sickness. And if he becomes a mortal, even for a



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Queen Mab and Merlin.

short season, he must learn to bear all these things, and that with patience."

"No matter," said the Queen lightly ;
" 'twill do him good. For," she added slyly,
" it was treacherous of him to bring the letter
of Pigwiggin—dear Pigwiggin—to me. Be-
sides, we can set him free now and again, and
let him visit our kingdom when he is tired
of his human form. And you and I must
be his guardians and protectors, so that no
real harm can come to him."

"It seems an excellent plan," said Merlin,
"and I will do my share ; but the first steps
must be taken by your Majesty."

"Leave it to me," said the Queen, as she
leapt lightly upon the floor and tripped away
to her carriage. "Soon the good plough-
man's wife shall have a boy no bigger than
her husband's thumb."

In a few moments she was gone ; and before King Oberon had had time to miss her she was back again in the royal palace of the fairies. Soon she was relating to a circle of her handmaidens the story of Merlin and the ploughman ; and their merry laughter sounded sweetly through the halls of Fairyland.

Chapter V.

TOM THUMB'S ARRIVAL.

“THE page shall be the ploughman’s son,” said the Queen, when order was restored, “and his name—girls, what shall his name be among the mortals?”

“Why, TOM THUMB, of course,” said a gentle fay, whose name was Nymphidia.

“Of course,” said the Queen. “How clever you are!” And the little fairy maiden blushed with pleasure.

Now, how it was done I cannot tell with any exactness. But next morning the ploughman’s wife found upon her kitchen table a tiny cradle made from a walnut shell, in

which lay peacefully sleeping one of the tiniest of tiny babies that ever was seen. The good woman threw up her hands in great surprise, and called loudly to her husband, who was just then getting ready to set out for the day's work. He came at once to her side and peered down at the little fellow with a puzzled look upon his face. Then, all at once, he laid his hand upon his wife's shoulder.

"Don't you remember," he said, "how you told the old beggar-man who was our guest that you would be a happy woman if you had a child, even if he were no bigger than my thumb?"

"Yes, I do," was the reply; and the woman's face took on a look of awe. "I said at the time that our visitor was no common man, and now you see I was right.

He was a wizard, of that I am sure, and he has taken me at my word."

"Then," said her husband, with a smile, "you must also keep *your word*, and become the happiest woman in the world."

"Well, it is not a little strange," said the good wife. "But I will at least take great care of the tiny fellow. What shall we call him?"

"Yes," said the man, with a laugh, "that is just the name for him."

"What do you mean?" asked his wife. "I did not mention any name."

"Didn't you say 'TOM THUMB'?" asked her husband.

"No, indeed! *You* must be bewitched," was the answer.

"I certainly heard some one say those
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two words," said the ploughman, in a mystified manner. "Of course it was you. How could it be any one else?"

"It certainly was not," said the good woman, looking now more awed than ever.

"Nonsense," said the man; "you have spoken your thought without knowing it—and a very good name it is, too. Take care of the little fellow, and may he bring you happiness!"

Then he took up his cap and trudged off to his master's farm.

Left to herself, the good woman began to examine the little child, and was filled with wonder at the beauty of his face and limbs, tiny though they were. She spent a great deal of that day in tending the wonderful baby, and found that for its size it could cry

quite loudly. This made her feel more at home, for now she knew that it was a real baby and not a fairy changeling.

When night came the small cradle was placed for safety on a table near the bed in which she slept. And as soon as the good couple were wrapt in the deepest slumber Queen Mab and her maidens paid a visit to the ploughman's cottage.

All at once a pale yellow light shone in the room—brightest where lay the cradle of Tom Thumb ; and while Queen Mab sat near the head of the tiny bed her maidens joined hands and danced lightly round the sleeping child. Now as they circled round with the lightest of footsteps they sang very clearly, but so softly that the heavy ploughman and his wife were not in the least disturbed :—

“Round about, round about, in a fine ring a,
Thus we dance, thus we dance, and thus we
sing a ;

Trip and go, to and fro, over this plain a,
All about, in and out, for our brave queen a.

“We have danced round about in a fine ring a,
We have danced lustily, and thus we sing a ;
All about, in and out, over this plain a,
To and fro, trip and go, to our brave queen a.”

“That is well done,” said Queen Mab, nodding her head with a smile. “Now, Trip, off with you to the coach and ask Fly Cranion for the bundle. “Tib and Pink, go with her, lest she find the weight too great for her.”

All at once the circle of fays was broken, and three of the light-footed maidens leapt upon the floor and jumped, one after another, through the keyhole. The rest of the fairies sat down near their Queen, humming

a gentle song which would have soothed the most fretful child to sleep.

By-and-by a tiny rustling was heard in the chimney ; and soon the three fairy messengers were seen gliding down carrying a bale between them. After alighting for a moment on the handle of the kettle to rest themselves, they came floating through the air, and laid the bale at the feet of the Queen.

“ Now open it,” said Mab ; and soon the deft fairy fingers had undone the silken threads which bound it. Then the Queen took from its folds the clothes which her own mantle-maker had made for Tom Thumb.

There was a pretty oak leaf to serve as a hat ; a tiny shirt woven from the fabric of a spider's web ; a coat made from the softest thistledown ; and a pair of shoes made from

the skin of a baby mouse, tanned with the downy hair within.

Queen Mab laid the clothes near the foot of the cradle. Then suddenly the ploughman snored. In a moment the fairy light went out, and the Queen, followed by her maidens, passed quickly through the keyhole into the darkness of the night.

Chapter VI.

TOM THUMB'S BOYHOOD.

THE years passed away—the human years of which Queen Mab and her fairy crew knew nothing—and Tom Thumb remained true to his name. Though he grew older he did not grow taller, but remained always of the size of his father's thumb. Of course he became wiser, as most children do, and he also grew very cunning. He was full of tricks of all kinds, and many a time his good mother called him a “tricksy elf,” which, when we think of it, was a very good name for him indeed. The boys of the neighbouring cottages loved to play with

him. Such a tiny, spriteful playfellow they had never seen before. But at times they were not a little angry at some of his tricks and capers.

He would sometimes join the boys at a game of cherry-stones; and when he had lost all his own he often played a trick which was not at all fair dealing. He would jump into the bag of one of his playfellows, and steal some of the stones from it. One day a certain big boy found him doing this.

“Aha!” he cried, “I have caught you at last. Now you shall have what you deserve.”

Then he put Tom back among the cherry-stones, and drawing the string tight, he gave the bag a hearty shake. Poor Tom was quite dazed and badly bruised. He cried

out with pain ; and the boy, who had been a little rougher than was really necessary, placed one eye near the opening of the bag.

“ Will you promise never—no, never—to do it again ? ” he asked.

“ I will ! I will ! ” cried poor Tom Thumb. “ Let me out ! let me out ! O my poor bones ! ”

“ Come along then,” said the boy, not unkindly ; and lifting the little fellow out he placed him upon the ground.

After that Tom was very careful not to offend in the same way again, but he could not forget the boy's roughness. And some time afterwards he was able, by means of a friend, to punish the lad for his cruelty, as we shall see.

Not long afterwards the wife of the ploughman was making a very large pudding

for the family dinner. Tom wished to see how it was made, and climbed upon the table. He sat down on a little cushion which his mother had made for him and watched her very carefully. By-and-by the ploughman's wife turned aside to attend to something on the hearth. Then Tom, who was very inquisitive, climbed up to the rim of the bowl, and sat there cleverly balanced upon the slippery edge. His mother turned round quickly to finish her work, and Tom got such a start that he fell over, not upon the table, but, sad to say, into the pudding !

The flour and batter filled his mouth so that he was unable to cry out, and his mother, thinking that he had jumped off the table, quickly wrapped up the pudding and put it into the pot to boil. The water was hot and bubbling, and soon Tom began

to feel the heat. He kicked and struggled so hard that the pudding basin jumped about in the pot as if it were alive.

“The fairies have bewitched it surely,” said the woman, when she saw this strange sight; “and if that is the case, my fine pudding will not be good for either man or beast. In fact, I do not care to touch it, to say nothing of eating it.”

Then she picked up the tongs, lifted the pudding from the pot, and placed it at the cottage door, without a word. Soon she was busily making a second pudding, glad at heart to be rid of the first.

By-and-by a poor beggar-man came along the road.

“The kind creature,” he cried, “she usually gives me crusts, but to-day, bless her good heart, she has made me a pud-

ding.” So he put the pudding basin into his wallet, which he slung upon his back, and then walked onward with a quicker step.

By this time Tom had managed to get the flour out of his mouth and to raise his head to the top of the pudding. He was in a very sad case, as you may suppose, and he began to set up a most dismal howling.

The man stopped and looked behind him, thinking that a poor stray puppy, or perhaps a cat, was following him ; but nothing could he see. He turned round again, and once more heard the piteous cry behind him.

“ Surely the fairies have bewitched me,” he said, with a look of terror.

Round he went again ; but still the cry was heard behind him. All at once he thought of the pudding, and applying his

ear to the opening of his wallet he heard the cry again. So he opened the bag, and with his crooked stick he brought out the pudding, dropped it down by the road-side, and ran away at a pace which astonished even himself.

The pudding cloth was torn open with the fall, and Tom crept out in a very sad state indeed. With great difficulty he made his way home, and crept indoors, tired and weary. But his mother washed him carefully in a teacup and put him comfortably to bed.

Chapter VII.

SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES.

NOT long afterwards Tom was taken by his mother into the field to bring home the cow. The good woman perched the little fellow upon the top of the gate, and held him there while she called "Ruby ! Ruby !"—for that was the red cow's name.

Soon the animal came slowly across the wind-swept field, and patiently stood in the shelter of the outhouse, while the ploughman's wife set to work to milk her. The wind was so strong that, fearing Tom Thumb might be blown bodily away, she had tied him to a thistle flower with a piece of fine

thread. While she was busy milking, the red cow turned its head and caught sight of Tom Thumb's oak-leaf hat. Now Ruby had a taste for oak leaves, and without a moment's warning she took poor Tom and the thistle-head at a mouthful.

Soon the little fellow was dancing about within the mouth of the cow, doing his best to avoid being crushed, and crying out at the top of his voice, "Mother ! mother !"

"Where are you, my boy ?" cried the good woman, in great distress.

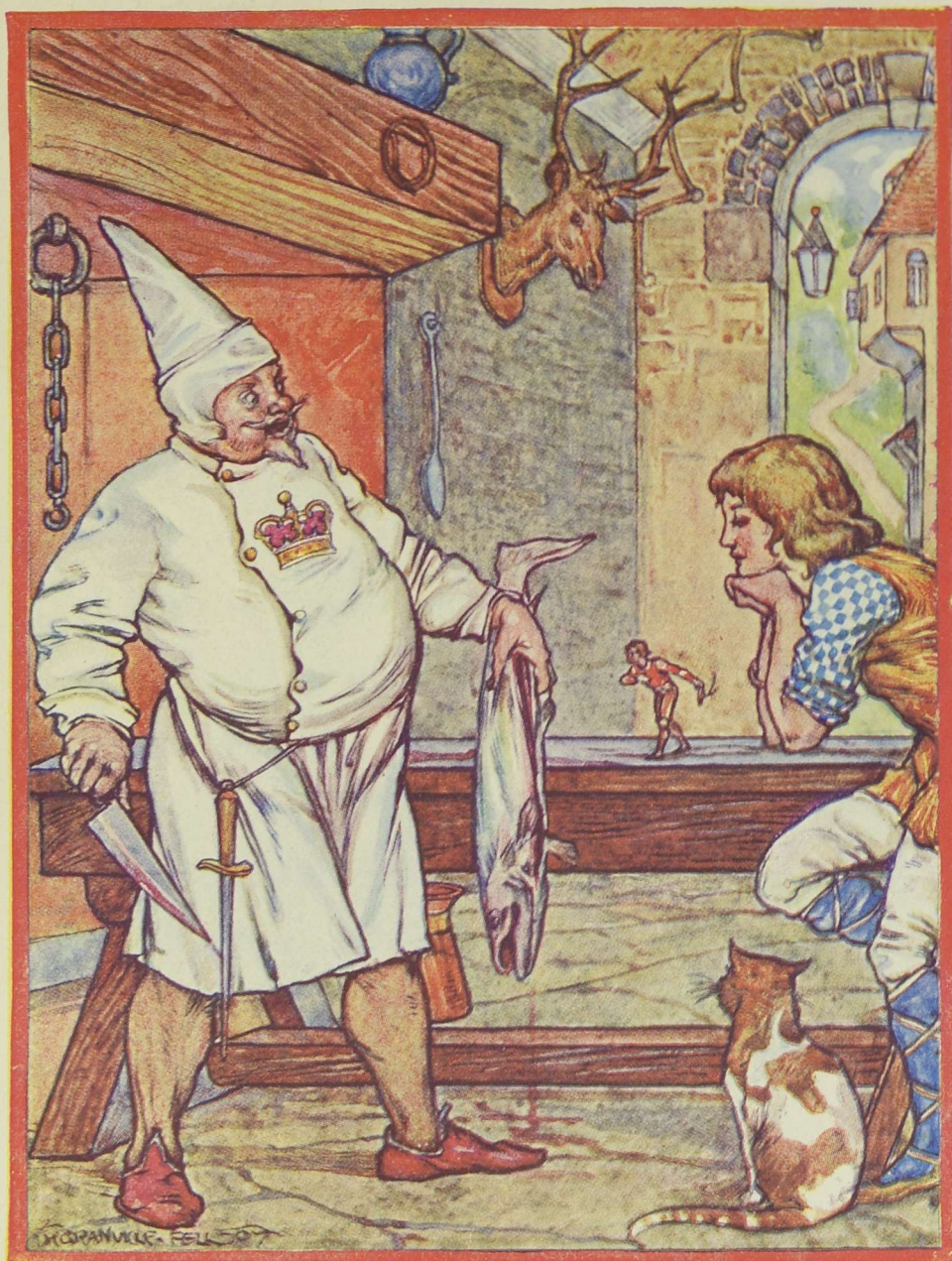
"Here, mother, here !" came the answer from the red cow's mouth.

The poor woman now began to cry and to wring her hands in deep distress. This was owing to her great kindness of heart, but it was not of much use to poor Tom Thumb. However, the cow saved the situation. She

was not used to thistles which jumped about within her mouth, so she opened it, and Tom fell out. His mother fortunately caught him in her apron, or his fall would doubtless have killed him ; and wrapping him up, she ran off home with him as fast as she could.

Before long the little fellow was comfortably tucked up in bed ; and that night Queen Mab sent a troop of fairies to sing him such a sweet lullaby that the pain he had suffered did not disturb him.

Not long afterwards Tom's father made him a whip of barley straw, with which, he said, with a broad smile, his little son was to drive the cattle. Next day Tom took this treasure with him when he went out of doors ; but as he was crossing a ploughed field he slipped his foot and rolled head over heels into a furrow.



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Out stepped Tom Thumb.

At that moment a raven which was flying overhead saw him and swooped down upon him. The bird picked him up in its strong bill, and flew off with him to the top of a giant's castle which stood by the seashore. There the raven was building a nest, and it placed Tom in a corner near a heap of sticks and straw.

The little fellow lay quite still, hoping to make his escape in some way, though he did not know in the least how he was going to do so. By-and-by he heard a heavy step upon the stair which led to the flat roof of the castle ; and before long a huge giant appeared, and began to walk up and down to take the air.

Tom lay quite still, hoping that he would not be noticed.

“ He will eat me if he sees me,” said the

trembling little fellow to himself, "for all these human beings seem to spend their lives in eating things."

Just at that moment the giant, whose name was Grumbo, caught sight of him.

"Aha!" he cried, "what have we here?"

Then he picked up Tom in his huge, rough fingers; and after looking at him intently he began to laugh loudly, opening his mouth wide, and showing two rows of gleaming white teeth, which put poor Tom in a dreadful flutter.

But, strange though it may seem, the giant did not do as Tom had feared. Perhaps he had just dined, or perhaps he thought that Tom was not worth eating. However that may be, he spared the little man this terrible fate, though he did not treat him very gently

after all. Raising his arm he flung him with all his might far out to sea.

Any ordinary person would have been dead long before he reached the water, so great was the fall ; but Tom was now getting used to strange adventures, and he kept his head. He struck out boldly for the shore, and the water bore up his chin quite bravely. But, alas ! he had not made more than a dozen strokes when a great fish came floating by, and opening its mouth, swallowed him at one gulp.

Surely, one would imagine, this was the end of Tom Thumb. But it was not ; for though he was not quite comfortable, he could at least breathe ; and he made up his mind to make the best of it, and wait with patience what fortune would bring him. The fish sailed along, and then stopped

suddenly. Tom wondered what was going to happen, when all at once he heard the sound of singing, which seemed familiar to him.

The voices were sweeter than the sunset breezes of a summer evening, and the song was borne clearly across the water,—

“Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands :
Curtsied when you have, and kist
The wild waves whist,
Foot it featly here and there ;
And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear.

Hark, hark !

Bow-wow !

The watch-dogs bark :

Bow-wow !”

“’Tis Queen Mab and her maidens,” said Tom to himself. “Oh that I could come to them or they to me. But here am I neither on the earth nor in the sea.”

Chapter VIII.

IN KING ARTHUR'S PALACE.

SUDDENLY Tom Thumb felt a great jerk. The King's fisherman had caught the fish which for the moment was Tom's home, and he quickly rowed to land with his prize. Then he carried it up to the royal palace, which stood on a huge rock by the margin of the sea.

He knew his way to the door of the scullery, and there he was warmly welcomed by the cook, who was almost at his wits' end, for he had received a message from Sir Kay, the King's steward, to the effect that there had been of late too much sameness

about the dinners served at the royal table.

“Right welcome you are, my fine fellow,” said he. “This is such a fish as I vow his Majesty has never tasted before. Bring it in. You shall have a handsome price—at least you may ask the King’s treasurer for a handsome price. I can give you leave to do that, at all events.”

“Thanks !” said the fisherman ; and off he went to drive a bargain with the King’s treasurer.

The cook, without loss of time, proceeded to cut up the fish for the royal table. And after a few deft strokes with the knife, to his great astonishment out stepped Tom Thumb as blithe as ever.

The man stood with the knife in his hand and his eyes wide open with wonder.

“Whatever is the matter, master?” asked one of the kitchen-boys, whose name was Gareth.

The cook was too much dazed to reply. Gareth's eyes then fell upon Tom Thumb, and he came forward to the table.

“Who are you, little man?” he asked gently; and Tom, seeing that the kitchen-boy looked kindly at him, said bravely,—

“My name is Tom Thumb;
From the fairies I've come.”

The kitchen-boy laughed merrily. He knew more about fairies and elves than any of his mates of the hearth; for, if the truth must be told, he was really a prince in disguise, who was serving in the King's kitchen for a year to fulfil a vow. There was a gleam in his merry eye that somehow

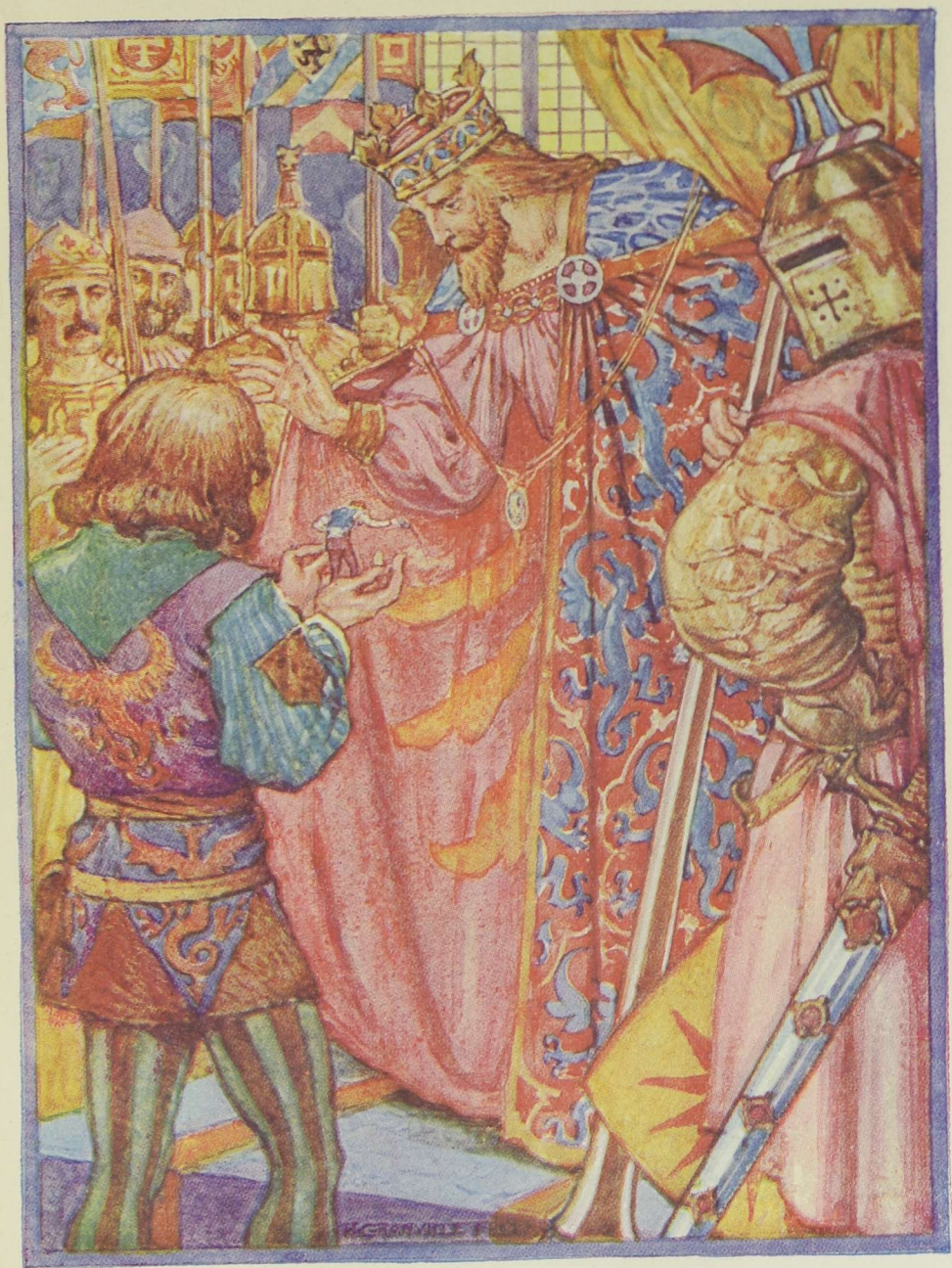
reminded Tom of Queen Mab ; and summoning up his courage, the little fellow stepped across the table towards Gareth.

“ Take me to the King,” he said boldly.

“ That I will,” answered the boy, “ as soon as I have made myself fit to go into his presence.”

Now, on any other occasion the cook would have rated the boy soundly ; but by this time he was very busy with the fish, working hard to make up for lost time, and trying to persuade himself that he had not really seen what he had seen ; for he was a practical man, and cared little for stories of elves and fairies.

Before long Gareth came with Tom Thumb into the royal hall. It was one of those days upon which King Arthur sat as a judge among his knights, and the boy



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The King came down from the dais.

was obliged to stand aside until his royal master had leisure to hear his story.

Then he stepped forward, boldly indeed, but with the awe upon him which befitted his youth ; and raising Tom Thumb upon his hands, he told the wonderful story of his arrival. The King smiled kindly, and came down with his lords from the dais to look more closely at the little fellow.

“He shall be our servant,” said King Arthur, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes—“our royal dwarf and jester ; and let every one treat him with the respect due to his high office.” Then he passed slowly out of the hall, and Gareth handed over his little friend to the care of the King’s chamberlain.

This officer took Tom Thumb to the royal tailor, who made fresh clothes for the King’s

dwarf. Of these he stood in great need, as we can readily believe ; for he had been in very strange places, and the clothes left for him by Queen Mab were now somewhat the worse for wear.

Chapter IX.

TOM MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

FOR a time Tom Thumb was very happy at the King's court. A herald was sent to his home to announce that he had been made the royal dwarf, and would henceforth live in the castle by the sea. The ploughman's wife was much fluttered when the gay messenger came riding up to her cottage door, but she was relieved to find that her boy was alive and well.

Tom soon became a great favourite at court. Queen Guinevere, who seemed to the eyes of the dwarf almost as beautiful as Queen Mab, often amused herself with

watching his tricks and gambols ; and great was the joy of Tom Thumb when he could win a smile from those lovely eyes.

When the King rode out on horseback he often took Tom with him ; and if a shower came on, the little fellow would creep into the folds of the King's tunic, and stay there quite comfortably until the sun shone once more.

One day the King, in an idle hour, began to put questions to Tom about his parents. He wished to know whether they were as small as their son, and what they did to make a living.

Tom told his royal master all about the good ploughman and his wife. They had been very kind to him, he said, and he wished he could do something to help them. But he was so very small that he could not

hope to be of any use to them, for they were of the size of ordinary people.

The King was much interested and amused at the tale, and rising from his seat, he carried Tom with him to the royal treasury. There he showed him many golden cups and salvers, jewels and ornaments of great price, as well as a heap of money many times taller than Tom himself.

“You shall have for yourself,” said the King merrily, “as much money as you can carry home to your parents.”

Tom ran off at once to get the little purse that had been made for him, and lifting a threepenny-piece in his arms, he managed to get it safely within the purse.

“Now you may take it to your people,” said King Arthur ; and Tom set off in high glee for the ploughman’s cottage.

But the way was long and weary, and the load upon his back was almost more than he could carry. When night came on he had not covered half of the distance.

He crept away from the highroad, and finding a bank of soft turf, he lay down to try to get a little sleep. The darkness fell, and Tom was beginning to feel afraid, when he heard a voice not far away singing a song which he felt sure he had heard before,—

“From Oberon in Fairyland,
The king of ghosts and shadows there,
Mad Robin, I, at his command,
Am sent to view the night-sports here.
What revel rout
Is kept about
In every corner where I go,
I will o’ersee,
And merry be,
And make good sport with ho! ho! ho!”

“Ho ! ho ! ho !” cried Tom Thumb, in chorus. “Here am I, good Puck.”

“Where ? where ?” asked a merry, laughing voice, not far away.

“Here, on a bank of turf,” cried Tom. And in a moment there stood before him a strange little elfish figure bearing a lantern.

“Tom Thumb, of a surety,” said the newcomer. “Why, where have you been ? Whither are you going ?”

“Those are questions that will take some answering,” said Tom. “Won’t you sit down ?” he asked, pointing to a large mushroom not far away.

“With pleasure,” said Robin, or Puck, or Hobgoblin—for he was known by each of these names—as he seated himself, cross-legged, upon the fairy seat. “Now tell me

all about it. How do you like mortals? Aren't you tired of their company? Haven't they tried to eat you yet? Eating and snoring are all they are good for, I know."

Chapter X.

NEWS FROM FAIRYLAND.

“**T**RUE enough !” said Tom Thumb ;
“there has indeed been more than
one attempt to eat me. Even my mother,
kind as she is, used to say to me when she
felt particularly fond of me—‘My little
dear, I could *eat* you !’” Then he told
his friend the story of his adventures ; and
Puck’s laughter was loud and long.

But the lively little fellow did not seem
much impressed when Tom Thumb told him
what was now his lofty station at the court
of the great King Arthur.

“Pooh !” he said ; “it is nothing. I would

rather serve King Oberon, though indeed his Majesty is ill to flout."

"How do things go in the Fairy King's dominions?" asked Tom; and then he added gravely, "It is thirteen years ago since I left him."

"I do not know what you mean," said Puck. "Why, it was only 'an hour ago,' as mortals speak, that Queen Mab set out to meet Pigwiggin."

"What?" cried Tom Thumb, the memories of past times coming upon him with a rush. "Why, it is thirteen years and more since I took her Pigwiggin's letter and was sent here for my pains."

"Thirteen years!" cried Puck, with withering scorn. "What have I, and such as I, to do with years? I tell you that not very long after the Queen got the letter she

set out to meet Pigwiggin in the cowslip bower on Hient Hill ; and I am now on my royal master's errand, concerned solely in that business."

"Tell me all about it," said Tom Thumb, feeling rather mystified between his fairy spirit and his human body. "The last I knew of the business was this : Queen Mab was very angry with me for bringing her the letter from Pigwiggin."

"Queen Mab angry ! Ho ! ho ! ho !" cried Puck, rocking himself to and fro till his seat swayed like a ship in distress. "Why, then, she soon got over her anger ; and she set out to meet Pigwiggin in such a hurry that she left her maids behind her."

"What did they do ?" asked Tom Thumb, with great interest, for the news from Fairyland was to him like news from home.

“Why, they went after her, to be sure,” said Puck, laughing, “on the back of a grasshopper, with a large cobweb thrown over them to shield them from the wind.”

“And what of Oberon?” said Tom.

“I was near him when he heard the news,” said Puck, “and saw him rend his clothes and tear his hair. He ran to and fro like one of your mad mortals, and meeting with an acorn cup he grasped its stalk and whirled it round his head in a great fury. Then he met with a wasp, which for a moment he took for his enemy Pigwiggin. ‘Where is my Queen, thou rogue?’ he cried, as he gripped it by the waist. ‘Restore her, or thou diest.’”

Here the mischievous Puck was forced to pause in order to laugh; and his “Ho!

ho ! ho !” rang out loud and shrill upon the night air.

“Go on,” said Tom Thumb, after a while. He himself had been King Oberon’s page, and did not feel so much inclined to laugh at his first royal master.

“Well, the wasp proved that he was not Pigwiggin by producing his sting,” Puck went on ; “so the King released him. But in a few moments he met with a glow-worm, which gave him such a start that he thrashed her soundly with his acorn club for carrying fire in her tail. Then he ran in his madness into a hive, and belaboured the bees right and left. When he came out he was a fine sight for fairy eyes, for his face was smeared with wax and his beard all daubed with honey.”

Puck paused once more to hold his sides. And again the stalk of the mushroom swayed

to and fro, like the mast of a ship in a heavy storm, as he laughed and laughed again.

“The next to meet him was an ant,” he went on, after a pause ; “and taking his seat upon its back he urged it forward with his club. But so great was his haste that the ant stumbled and fell into a hole. Out came the King more dirty than ever, and meeting with a molehill which he took for a mountain, he climbed to the top. Down the other side he ran, and fell into a pool. But making his acorn cup into a boat, he ferried himself safely to the other side. By this time I began to think that he needed help.”

“I should have guessed so,” said Tom Thumb, rather dryly.

Puck paid no heed to his companion's displeasure, but went on with his tale.

“I placed myself in his path,” he said,

“meaning to offer him my devoted service, when he set upon me in a fury. But I soon made myself known, and asked for his commands. ‘Dear Puck,’ he said, ‘my Queen is gone ! If you have any love for me, go after her and bring her to me, alive or dead. And bring me, too, the head of that vile thief Pigwiggin.’ Then I promised to go through thick and thin to serve him—

“Through brake, through brier,
Through dirt, through mire,
Through water, through fire.

“I am now upon that service, and I will find the Queen and Pigwiggin if I have to search the earth, the sea, and Fairyland as well.”

Chapter XI.

THE TRICKS OF PUCK.

“**I** SUPPOSE,” said Puck, after a pause,
“that you have no idea where the
Queen is to be found?”

“None at all,” said Tom Thumb, adding
to himself, “And if I had, I do not think I
should tell you.”

“No matter,” said Puck, with a knowing
laugh, as if he had guessed what was in
Tom Thumb’s mind; “but really I must
be going.”

“Whither away so fast?” said Tom;
“cannot you sing a song for good fellow-

ship? You can easily overtake the Queen
—if only you can find out in which direction
she has gone.”

“With pleasure,” said Puck, and he began
to sing at once,—

“More swift than lightning can I fly
About this airy welkin soon,
And in a minute’s space can spy
Each thing that’s done below the moon.
There’s not a hag
Or ghost shall brag,
Or cry ‘Ware goblins!’ where I go,
But Robin, I
Their feats will spy,
And send them home with ho! ho! ho!

“Whene’er such wanderers I meet,
As from their night-sports they trudge home,
With mocking, tiny voice I greet
And call them on, with me to roam
Through woods, through lakes,
Through bogs, through brakes;

Or else, unseen, with them I go,
All in the nick,
To play some trick,
And frolic it with ho ! ho ! ho ! ”

Puck leapt down from his seat and took up his lantern.

“ You don’t happen to need my services, Tom Thumb ? ” he asked, with a mischievous smile. “ There is no one among these hare-brained mortals who has done you harm, and upon whom I can play a merry trick ? Is there any one whom you would like me to lead a wild-goose chase in the bog over the common there ? I can change myself to a man, an ox, a hound, or a horse—in fact, anything you will. Why, just before I met you I had the finest of sport. For the moment I was a horse, and a fine horse too—at least, so it seemed to a young fellow

who met me on the common. He was a ploughboy, I should guess from his dress, and he thought, of course, that I belonged to the farmer, his master. Well, he set out after me, and I led him such a chase as he does not wish for again—through fields and hedges, pools and ditches. At last I lost sight of him. Then I met you.”

“What was he like?” asked Tom.

“A lumbering fellow, as I have said,” was the reply, “with a shock of red hair and such a vacant stare!”

“Had he a scar across the bridge of his nose?”

“He had indeed,” said Puck. “Do you happen to know him?”

“I do,” said Tom; “and I know him to be a great bully. Why, when I was a tiny boy—”

“A tiny boy!” cried Puck, with a burst of merry laughter.

“Well, then, when I was younger,” said Tom Thumb, with all the dignity of a doubly-royal page, “he shook me about unmercifully in his cherry-stone bag. It is true I was playing him a trick, but he did not seem to understand me.”

Puck laughed again.

“Probably not,” he said. “You see, he is used to human wits, of which, as you know, I have no great opinion. And these mortals have strange ideas on many things. But here I go.”

In a moment he was gone, and Tom Thumb lay down to compose himself to sleep. As he was dozing over he heard faintly from the distance the song of the messenger of King Oberon,—

“From Oberon, in Fairyland,
The king of ghosts and shadows there,
Mad Robin, I, at his command,
Am sent to view the night-sports here.
What revel rout
Is kept about
In every corner where I go,
I will o’ersee
And merry be,
And make good sport with ho ! ho ! ho !”

Chapter XII.

THE FAIRY GROUND.

SOON Tom Thumb lay soundly sleeping. Then there crept from behind the bush which sheltered him the lovely little fairy maiden who belonged to Queen Mab's train, and whose name was Nymphidia.

"So that is the plot!" said she to herself, very softly, for she had heard all that had been said. "Puck is against us, and the sworn enemy of the Queen! Alas! alas! But I will spoil his treacherous plans."

Then she drew near to the sleeping figure. Tom Thumb lay close to the hedge bank, with his head upon the purse which held

the present from the treasury of the King.

“Poor fellow !” murmured the elf. “I doubt not that he often wishes himself back again in our fairy court, fine as he is. But see, he stirs ! Certainly he has no bed of comfort. I have time to sing him a soothing song before I go.”

Then she sat down not far from the sleeper, and in a voice like a silver chime she gently sang a song well known in Fairyland,—

“Where the bee sucks, there suck I :

In a cowslip’s bell I lie ;

There I couch when owls do cry.

On the bat’s back I do fly

After summer merrily.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now

Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

The music ceased. Tom Thumb did not

stir. In a moment the gentle fay was gone upon her errand—to warn the Queen of coming danger.

With the early dawn Tom Thumb was astir. He breakfasted on a berry and a half, with three drops of crystal water from a spring. Then he shouldered his treasure once more, and set out upon the way towards the ploughman's cottage. He kept to the field paths, for fear of the children in the villages ; but even there he had more than one fight for his life.

In one place, as he lay down to drink from a brook, a great water-rat ran out at him, and it seemed for a moment as if the end of his life had really come. But drawing the tiny sword which the King had given him, the brave little fellow soon put the monster to flight.

“It is strange,” he said to himself, as he sheathed his sword again. “Now, I have a faint remembrance of playing, long ago, a merry game with a water-rat which had no desire to eat me. But now there seems to be a great deal of spite here and there. I wonder why it is so.”

The little fellow sighed rather wearily. The sun was now going down behind some tall trees by the margin of the river, and Tom began to think that he would have to spend one more night in the fields.

“No matter,” he said to himself, quite cheerily ; “I can sleep as comfortably under a hedge as in a bed.” So he began to look about on the common which he was crossing for a suitable place in which he could settle for the night.

He soon found a bed of dry grass just beneath a gorse bush ; and lying down as the sun sank out of sight, he was fast asleep in a few moments, with his head upon his purse of treasure as before. But he did not sleep till the next morning. He awoke with a start towards midnight, and rubbed his eyes, thinking that the sun had risen. There was certainly a bright light shining round about him.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes again. Then he saw that a bright light was indeed shining all around him ; but it was not the light of the sun, or the moon, or the stars : it was the fairy gleam.

Tom crept into the shadow of the bush, where he was quite hidden from observation. There he sat down and looked about him.

The fairy light extended only to the limits of a circle of grass, which Tom knew to be what is known as a fairy orb. He knew also that if he sat quite still he would soon see the fairies appear. So he drew in his feet, clasped his hands round his knees, and looked with all his eyes. By-and-by he heard the sound of singing on the other side of the bush in which he sat; and in a moment a fairy came in sight, floating down to the ground on a ray of light which looked like a moonbeam.

The newcomer was dressed in robes which seemed to be made of gauze as delicate as gossamer, and she bore in her hand a tiny wand, which sparkled at the top like a glittering star. Alighting gently in the centre of the ring she tripped round it, touching the grass at every step with her

fairy wand. And as she moved she sang softly and sweetly,—

“Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere ;
And I serve the Fairy Queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.”

Nine times the pretty little fay tripped round the ring, and then she stopped beside a cowslip bed near its edge. Again her sweet song rose upon the balmy air of the summer night,—

“The cowslips tall her pensioners be :
In their gold coats spots you see ;
Those be rubies, fairy favours ;
In those freckles live their savours :

I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear."

In a moment the little fay had gone out of sight. But something seemed to tell—or to remind—Tom Thumb that if he sat quite still he would soon see the fairy revels.

Chapter XIII.

QUEEN MAB AND PIGWIGGIN.

NOT many minutes had passed when Tom Thumb heard the sound of merry music. Nearer and nearer it came, borne towards him by a gentle breeze, and at last the fairy musicians came in sight.

First marched a number of little men in green jackets and red caps with white feathers. They were playing upon reeds, and they stepped nimbly in time to the music. Then came a band of light-footed fairies, who sang sweetly as they swept onward in their flowing robes of gossamer.

After them tripped Queen Mab herself, and by her side walked the fairy knight Pigwiggin. He held the hand of the Queen by her dainty finger-tips, and his face was full of pride in himself and high disdain of every one else.

“Aha !” thought Tom Thumb, in his place of shelter, “if Oberon could only see him now !”

Then came a crowd of dainty fairies, who tripped over the ground so lightly that they did not even bend the blades of grass. They were followed by a perfect swarm of humming bees and buzzing flies.

In a moment the music stopped, and at a signal the fairies arranged themselves in a ring about Queen Mab, Pigwiggin, and the maids of honour. The musicians took their places on the outside of the ring,

and waited for a second signal from their royal mistress.

Suddenly Queen Mab sat down upon the grass, and her merry maids disposed themselves about her. Then Pigwiggin, bowing low, craved permission to recline at her feet. The Queen's smile was full of mischief as she graciously bowed her head in assent; and Pigwiggin threw himself upon the grass with his face towards the hiding-place of Tom Thumb.

“A pretty picture truly!” said the little fellow to himself. “My friend Pigwiggin plays a daring game. He desires nothing less than the kingdom of Fairyland. If Puck should appear he would need all his bravery.”

The fairy maidens now formed a ring round the Queen, and the musicians tuned

their reeds. Then all at once the Queen sprang to her feet.

“Nay,” she said, raising her hand, “we must honour Pigwiggin alone. Come, girls, follow me. This brave knight shall be the very centre of our revels.”

Then, before Pigwiggin could protest that this was too great an honour, Queen Mab and her maids had joined the ring ; and now all were waiting, with toes tapping impatiently, for the dance to commence.

“The song, girls,” cried the Queen ; “I will lead.”

Then the music commenced, the ring of light-footed dancers began to move, and the sweet voice of Queen Mab rose upon the summer air,—

“Come, follow, follow me,
You fairy elves that be,

Which circle on the green ;
Come, follow Mab, your Queen.
Hand in hand let's dance around,
For this place is fairy ground."

"Now, Nan," cried the Queen, when she had finished, without stopping even to take breath ; and the maid of honour who bore this name continued the song, while the dance went on as merrily as before,—

"When mortals are at rest,
And snoring in their nest,
Unheard and unespied
Through keyholes we do glide ;
Over tables, stools, and shelves,
We trip it with our fairy elves."

"Pip follows," the Queen called out, while the dance went on as before ; and Pip began,—

"Upon a mushroom's head
Our table-cloths we spread ;

A grain of rye or wheat
Is fine bread which we eat ;
Pearly drops of dew we drink,
In acorn cups filled to the brink."

"Now, Trip," cried the Queen ; and her command was at once obeyed by one of the most sprightly of her maids of honour,—

"The grasshopper, gnat, and fly
Serve for the minstrelsy.
Food ta'en, we dance awhile,
And so the time beguile ;
And if the moon doth hide her head,
The glow-worm lights us home to bed."

"Skip follows," cried the Queen, pausing not the least in her merry dance ; and another dainty maiden at once took up the song,—

"On tops of dewy grass
So nimbly do we pass,

The young and tender stalk
Ne'er bends when we do walk ;
Yet in the morning may be seen
Where we the night before have been."

While the merry dance went on, Pig-wiggin sat in the centre of the ring ; but he did not seem to be enjoying the special honour that was being paid to him. Indeed, Tom Thumb began to think that the valiant little fairy knight would gladly have slunk away unobserved. For, sad to say, the dancers never once looked at him. In fact, the Queen and all her merry maids seemed to have completely forgotten his existence.

Chapter XIV.

THE CHARMED CIRCLE.

ON went the dance, loudly the minstrels played, and sadly sat Pigwiggin within the fairy circle, when suddenly the revels were brought to an end, and in the most tragic manner.

Tom Thumb happened for a moment to raise his eyes, when he saw suspended in the air right over the centre of the fairy ring the Queen's maid of honour Nymphidia. The gentle fay came lightly downward, and alighted upon the grass before her royal mistress.

The Queen stopped suddenly. "Nymph !

Nymph !” she cried in glee, holding out both hands in welcome ; and the dainty fairy took her hands, and stooping, lightly kissed them. Then she stood upright before the Queen, with her arms folded across her bosom.

By this time Queen Mab’s own maids had grouped themselves round their mistress, and were waiting with eagerness to hear what Nymphidia had to say. But urgent though her message was, the fairy messenger waited the pleasure of the Queen.

“What news, Nymph ?” said Queen Mab.

“My sovereign,” replied Nymphidia, “you must fly from this place, and that without a moment’s loss. Danger is at hand, and I have come with speed to warn you. The King has sent Puck to seek you in all the fields and haunts of fairies, and he has been

bidden to bring you bound or free to his royal master."

At once there was great commotion among the fairy band. The maidens scattered this way and that. Some tore their ruffs, and some their gowns. They flew about like chaff in the wind, and all in different directions. But the Queen's own maids of honour kept close to their mistress, as if they were determined to shield her from all possible harm.

Queen Mab and her maidens ran from the fairy ring, and came within the shadow of the bush in which Tom Thumb was seated. Now it happened that the little fellow had found in his hiding-place half of a walnut shell, in which he thought to spend the night after the fairy revels were over. Quick as thought he rolled it down, and it

fell just within the path of the Queen and her maiden band.

“See, my Queen,” cried one of them, “here we can safely hide.”

“’Tis well,” said the Queen. “Come all into this shell,” she cried, leading the way herself. “Sit close together. It is small indeed, but there is room enough.”

One after the other they stepped within, and lying down, slept as soundly as if they were all safely housed in the royal palace of Fairyland.

In a few moments all was still. As for Pigwiggin, he was nowhere to be seen. The fairy minstrels and the rest of the elves had gone no one knew whither, and the fairy gleam had faded away.

But Nymphidia had not gone with Mab and her maids within the refuge. She stood

without not far away, and by the light of the moon, which now had risen, Tom Thumb could see that she was considering deeply. So he settled down to watch her proceedings.

“If Puck should find Queen Mab,” she said softly, “he will have little respect for her royal person. I must by some charm protect her from him. But hist! is there any one within call?”

Lightly the fairy maiden tripped to and fro, peering within the long grass and up into the brake in which Tom Thumb was seated. The watcher thought that surely now he would be discovered, but by some chance the sharp eyes of Nymphidia overlooked him; then she stepped once more into the open, and stood near the walnut shell in which the Queen and her maids were sleeping soundly.

Next she took from a wallet which hung on her back the seeds of certain plants, which she strewed round about the sleeping-chamber of the fairy queen. Then she stepped up to a low brier bush and lightly leapt over it three times.

Standing now within the charmed circle over which she had sprinkled the seed, she began to sing in a low crooning voice a song which made Tom Thumb's tiny teeth rattle so loudly in his head that he felt sure he would be discovered,—

“ By the croaking of a frog,
By the howling of a dog,
By the crying of the hog,
 Against the storm arising ;
By the evening curfew bell,
By the doleful dying knell,
Oh, let this, my direful spell,
 Hob, hinder my surprising.

*By the hissing of the snake,
The rustling of the fire-drake,
I charge thee thou this place forsake,
Nor of Queen Mab be prattling.*

“By the whirlwind’s hollow sound,
By the thunder’s dreadful stound,
Cries of goblins underground,
I charge thee now to fear us.
By the screech-owl’s dismal note,
By the black night-raven’s throat,
I charge thee, Hob, to tear thy coat
With thorns if thou come near us.”

Chapter XV.

HOBGOBLIN BEWITCHED.

HER magic charm being ended, Nymphidia stepped aside and hid herself behind some tall grasses which grew near the bush in which Tom Thumb was hidden.

Presently she saw Puck come stealing along with stealthy step, his lantern in his hand. Tom Thumb held his breath and watched with all his eyes. He could almost hear his own heart beating. An owl hooted overhead, and three bats swept noiselessly through the air. The moon hid her face behind a cloud at that moment and the

only light on the ground was that of the lantern borne by Hobgoblin.

Onward crept Puck, his eyes rolling from side to side. He looked behind every blade of grass and under every leaf; and soon, without any thought of danger, he came within the charmed circle marked out by Nymphidia.

At once the charm began to work, and he was caught as in a trap. Up went his hand to his head, as though he felt a sudden pain. Down fell his lantern to the ground, and its light went out. It was with difficulty that Tom Thumb could now see what was going on, for there was only the dim light of the stars to guide him.

But by craning his neck forward he was able to see how Puck next reeled against a reed in his mad career. Up went his heels,

and he measured his length upon the green sward. Then he sprang to his feet in a fury, and began to scramble through the bushes.

He tripped over a stump, and came down upon his face, tearing himself dreadfully among the briars.

“A plague on Queen Mab and all her maids!” said he. “I think it was the foul fiend who guided me to this place.”

With these words he stumbled over a piece of wood, and fell headlong into a muddy ditch, in which he stood up to the chin. For a moment he was in grave danger of being stifled, but he managed to scramble out, and then ran helter-skelter across the common, yelling at the top of his voice.

The noise of his cries woke Queen Mab and her maids, who sat up, quaking with fear; for they thought that surely now

Oberon was near, and ready to wreak his vengeance upon them.

But Nymphidia ran forward, laughing merrily, and soon allayed their fears. In a few moments she told how cleverly she had outwitted the King's messenger; and the Queen and her maidens rocked to and fro with merry laughter.

Tom Thumb was filled with a great desire to join in the merriment, but dared not do so for fear of making himself known, when, of course, all the fairy band would vanish into thin air. He noted, too, that the fairy gleam had now returned.

"I am weary with the night's work," said Queen Mab at last. "Girls, sing me to sleep."

Then she lay down on the green sward with her head upon a bank of moss, gathered her robe about her, and closed her eyes. And

sitting down in a ring about their mistress,
the maidens sang their lullaby,—

“You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen ;
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,
Come not near our Fairy Queen.

Philomel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby ;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby ; lulla, lulla, lullaby ;
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh ;
So, good-night, with lullaby.

“Weaving spiders, come not here ;
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence !
Beetles black, approach not near ;
Worm nor snail, do no offence.

Philomel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby ;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby ; lulla, lulla, lullaby ;
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,

Come our lovely lady nigh ;
So, good-night, with lullaby."

By the time the song was ended Tom Thumb also was sound asleep, with his head upon his knees. When he awoke, the sun was high in the heavens, and there was no sign of the fairies where they had been the night before.

Chapter XVI.

TOM THUMB AT HOME.

AT the end of the second day Tom Thumb reached home, weary, footsore, and sick with travel. His shoulders ached with the heavy burden of his treasure, and he reeled and almost fell to the ground when he reached the doorstep of the ploughman's cottage.

His mother ran to meet him, and picking him up, purse and all, she took him into the warm kitchen. Then she sat down by the fire with the little fellow in her lap.

The woman was lost in wonder at the fine clothes of the royal dwarf. She made

a great pretence of being afraid of Tom Thumb's real sword, and was filled with surprise and pleasure at the King's present to herself and her good-man. So glad was she to see her tiny son that she declared once more that she could eat him. Then said Tom rather hurriedly,—

“I have had little to eat myself, mother, for two whole days.”

“My poor child!” cried the good woman.

She rose at once to her feet, placed Tom in a walnut shell by the cosy fire, and went off at once for a meal. She brought a hazel kernel on a tiny plate; and after Tom had eaten about half of it, he lay down and went to sleep.

When he awoke it was evening, and the ploughman was sitting with his wife by the fireside looking earnestly at his little son.

Tom sprang to his feet and made a courtly bow, whereupon the honest ploughman began to laugh very heartily. Tom did not understand why he was laughing so loudly, and made his best bow again.

Then the ploughman gently picked him up, and placed him upon the table near his elbow.

“Tell me all about the King and his court,” said he.

And Tom began his story of Arthur and Guinevere and the brave knights of the Round Table, who went about, as he said, “redressing human wrongs.”

“’Tis mighty fine !” said the ploughman, in great awe ; “and I suppose if mother and myself were in trouble the King would send a knight to help us out again ?”

Tom did not know what to say to this,

so he changed the subject. He did not wish to tell the kind ploughman and his wife that the courtly knights might think it beneath them to help those who were not of high degree.

“Mercy upon me!” suddenly cried the ploughman’s wife; “why, I have spent so much time with my little son to-day that my work is not even yet begun. The floor is unswept, the flax is unspun, the corn is not threshed, nor the malt ground. Whatever shall I do?”

“’Tis bedtime now, dame,” said the ploughman, as he rose to prepare for rest, “and an ill hour to begin the day’s work. You must leave it till the morning comes. Set a cream bowl for Lob-lie-by-the-fire, and perhaps your work will be all done for you before morning.”

In a few moments the ploughman and his wife were fast asleep in bed. Tom lay in his walnut cradle near the fender, and not far from him was set a bowl of rich cream, for what purpose we shall shortly see.

Tom Thumb slept badly that night. He was really too tired to sleep, and he still felt somewhat sick with his exertions upon his travels. He dozed off about midnight, but after a while he woke with a start.

He found the room filled with an eerie light, which he knew immediately to be the fairy gleam. At once he sat up and listened intently. Not a sound was to be heard except the occasional squeak of a mouse.

Tom waited for a few seconds, for he knew quite well that he was about to see some fairy work once more. In a few moments he heard a noise in the chimney,

and looking in that direction he saw a shape which seemed familiar hanging in the air above the dying embers.

“Puck !” said Tom to himself.

But although the sly smile on the face of the newcomer was that of Puck himself, his body was somewhat changed. He seemed more like a goblin than an elf, for his skin was covered over with thick hair like that of an ape.

The visitor took no notice of Tom Thumb, but, standing on the hearth, laid his hand upon the broom which stood near the poker and tongs. Then he began to sing softly, but somewhat gruffly,—

“Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf howls the moon ;
Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,
All with weary task fordone.

Now the wasted brands do glow,
 Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe
 In remembrance of a shroud.
Now it is the time of night
 That the graves all gaping wide
Every one lets forth his sprite,
 In the church-way paths to glide :
And we fairies, that do run
 By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
 Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic : not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallowed house :
I am sent with broom before,
To sweep the dust behind the door."



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Puck rested upon a three-legged stool.

Chapter XVII.

LOB-LIE-BY-THE-FIRE.

“**H**O! ho! ho!” cried the stranger, whose voice was certainly the voice of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, or Hobgoblin. Then with the broom in hand he leapt into the middle of the room, and began sweeping the floor with great vigour.

He worked hard, and did not cease until the floor was swept quite clean. Then for a while he rested cross-legged upon a three-legged stool, with his sharp eyes upon the ploughman and his wife. As soon as he had recovered his breath he began again to sing,—

“ Why, now and then, good-wives to please,
At midnight I card up their wool ;
And while they sleep and take their ease,
With wheel to threads their flax I pull.
I grind at will
Their malt up still ;
I dress their hemp, I skin their tow.
If any wake,
And would me take,
I wend me, laughing, Ho ! ho ! ho ! ”

“ Now I must to work once more,” said the merry goblin, as he slipped down to the ground and took his place at the spinning-wheel, near which lay a pile of fleecy flax. In a few moments he had spun it all to fine thread, which he wrapped carefully upon a kind of stick which lay upon the floor.

Next he ran off into a large shed which opened out from the kitchen ; and in a few

moments Tom knew by the sound of falling blows that the goblin was hard at work threshing the ploughman's corn. He knew that there was a great deal to be threshed, for he had heard the ploughman say so ; but it seemed only a few moments before the busy worker was back again, sweating profusely.

“Now for the malt,” he cried, as he ran nimbly into a corner, and set to work to grind the hand-mill.

In a very short time that work was done, and he came once more to the fireside.

He looked down at Tom, and grinned pleasantly.

“I knew you were awake, Tom Thumb,” he said ; “but I dared not speak before the work was done, because, you see, you are a mortal—or, at all events, half a one—

and to speak to you would have spoilt everything."

"I see," said Tom, now quite at his ease, for he saw that the hairy goblin was truly Puck himself in one of his many strange disguises. "Why did you come?" he asked.

"Oh, it is one of my many duties," was the answer. "You see, the ploughman's wife, though a mortal, is an uncommonly kind-hearted one. She was very kind to you to-day, was she not?"

"She was indeed," said Tom warmly, "and her husband too."

"That explains my visit," said Puck. "You see, I had to repay her for her kindness to one from the fairy realm—meaning yourself. So I have done her work, and to-morrow she can start fair. I

think," he went on, "that I have duly earned the contents of this cream bowl."

"You have indeed," said Tom Thumb; and Puck, kneeling down by the side of the bowl, drank every drop of the cream in a very short time.

"Your pardon, Tom Thumb," he said, as he rose to his feet. "I am so little used to having a companion on these expeditions that I forgot my manners. I might, at least, have asked you to share with me."

"It is no matter," said Tom Thumb brightly. "Really I could not have tasted a drop of the cream. I like pure water best. Please do not mention it."

"I won't," said Puck, squatting down on the hearthrug. "Perhaps you would like me to sing you a stave or two?"

"I would indeed," said Tom: "but first

tell me all about Oberon, and Queen Mab, and Pigwigin. How goes the quarrel?"

"Quarrel!" said Puck, with a peculiar smile, "I know nothing about it. After such a bowl of cream one is not disposed to talk of quarrels—to say nothing of taking part in them. I shall soon be asleep. Perhaps you do not care for my song?"

"Oh yes," cried Tom Thumb eagerly; and Puck began,—

"From hag-bred Merlin's time have I
Thus nightly revelled to and fro;
And for my pranks men call me by
The name of Robin Goodfellow.
Fiends, ghosts, and sprites,
Who haunt the nights,
The hags and goblins, we do know;
And beldames old
My feats have told;
So farewell to you, ho! ho! ho!"

By the time the song was finished Tom Thumb was fast asleep. The goblin stretched his hairy form before the fire and slept too. But when Tom awoke with the dawn, Lob-lie-by-the-fire, or Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, or Hobgoblin was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter XVIII.

TOM THUMB RETURNS TO COURT.

“WHY, Lob has been here, sure enough,” said the ploughman’s wife, as she came forward the next morning to light the fire. “No cream in the bowl—I am sure Tom Thumb has not taken it—the floor swept, all my flax spun, and the malt ground! Well, I never!”

“Wife,” cried her husband, as he entered the kitchen, drying his head on a coarse towel, “the corn is threshed! I thought you told me that you had no time to do it yesterday.”

“Indeed I had not,” said the good-wife. “Lob-lie-by-the-fire has been here in the night, and all the work I could not do yesterday has been done for me.”

“Nonsense !” said the ploughman, who was a practical man. “Dame, give me my breakfast.” And he would not listen to another word about fairies or anything of the kind. After breakfast he set off for his work on the farm.

“I must go to court to-day, mother,” said Tom Thumb. “The King and Queen will be weary without me.”

“It is not possible,” said the dame, “for the wind is high and the rain falls heavily. It was fine weather when you came, and you were tired out even then. Why, you could not take a step in this storm. Make yourself cosy by the fire.”

But after a while the rain ceased and the wind abated.

“I must really go now, mother,” said Tom. “The King expects me, and it is my duty to face the fatigue.”

The good woman sat wondering for a moment.

“I wish,” she said, “that I knew of some one going in your direction who could give you a lift. Stay ! Tom Clod is going to the sty. Let him take you part of your way in his wheelbarrow. He has given me a lift myself before to-day, and a very good fellow he is.”

Tom Thumb drew himself up to his full height, which to him, at least, seemed very great.

“I cannot go to his Majesty in a wheelbarrow,” he said. “I will go on foot.”

“Stay !” cried his mother.

Then she reached down a small stick and some paper from a shelf, and quickly made a parasol. She tied Tom to the handle, kissed him, and took him to the door. There she flung the parasol into the air. The wind filled it, and, strange to say, Tom was carried safely, and in a very short time indeed, to the palace yard. Perhaps his fairy friends had something to do with this wonderful trip, but no one will ever be able to find out.

King Arthur and the beautiful Queen Guinevere were very glad to see the little fellow once more. Even in royal palaces the time hangs heavily upon occasion, and Tom Thumb was forced to go through all his tricks over and over again, so that at last he was quite exhausted.

Then Gareth, the kind-hearted kitchen-boy, came and carried him away to the cook's pantry. There he tended him and put him to sleep. When he awoke, Tom was quite gay.

"Tell me a story, Tom Thumb," said Gareth, sitting down with his elbows on the table near the little fellow.

So Tom began to tell the tale of the quarrel of King Oberon and Queen Mab, and Gareth was charmed to hear it. But Tom could not finish it.

"How goes the ending?" asked Gareth.

"Indeed I do not know," said the other, "for as yet it has not happened."

Gareth laughed merrily.

"A strange tale of fairies and pixies, and a dainty one too; but who ever heard of a story that had no ending? Shall

I tell you a tale or two in return, Tom Thumb?"

"If you would be so good," said Tom; and he lay down on the table, resting on his elbows and looking up into the handsome face of the kitchen-boy.

For more than two hours Gareth entertained the little fellow with some of the best-known tales of King Arthur's court. He told him of the great deeds of Lancelot, the bravest of the brave—how he had fought with giants and knights who oppressed fair ladies, how he had helped the great King to free the land from robbers and make peace within its borders.

The eyes of Tom Thumb shone brightly as he heard of the prowess of Sir Lancelot, and of his brave deeds with spear and sword in the lists and in the battlefield. But when

Gareth went on to praise the beauty of Queen Guinevere and her maidens, Tom found it difficult not to yawn ; for, as he said to himself, the beauty of mortals was as nothing compared with the loveliness of Queen Mab and her fays.

Chapter XIX.

THE NEW KNIGHT.

AMONG the many important people at the court of King Arthur, perhaps the most important, in his own eyes, was Tom Thumb. Was he not the King's right-hand man, and did he not spend his days in the company of the very highest in the land? Many people of high degree came to the King, and held conference with him on matters of great moment, but only Tom Thumb could make his Majesty laugh.

He enjoyed the King's favour to a great extent. He was well fed and well clothed; and if he did not always have money in his

pocket, it was only because of the great size of ordinary money and the size of his pocket.

One day the king called for him after dinner, and Tom did his best to make him merry. He had great success on that day; and when all his tricks had been played, the King turned to one of his knights, and with stern look—though there was a merry twinkle in his eye—he asked for a sword.

Poor Tom thought that his last hour had come, and in trembling confusion knelt as gracefully as he could on one knee before the mighty monarch.

“Mercy, great King!” he cried, in abject fear. “Tell me, at least, in what I have offended.”

The King laughed heartily.

“You are now in the right posture,” he said. Then taking the great sword in his



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A large cat caught sight of him.

hand he touched the trembling little fellow lightly on the shoulder and said, "I dub thee knight. Rise, Sir Thomas Thumb."

Poor Tom Thumb was so much overcome that he fell in a kind of swoon upon the table. Then the kindly King called to Gareth, now no longer a kitchen-boy, but a knight, and bade him carry off the little fellow to his own room.

After a while, under Sir Gareth's kind treatment, Sir Thomas was able to sit up in bed and take instructions as to how he was to behave himself in his new dignity. He listened with great care to all that Sir Gareth told him, and promised to conduct himself as bravely as the best.

The next day the king ordered a new suit of clothes to be made for Sir Thomas. His shirt was made of a butterfly's wings, his

boots of chicken skin. Then a lovely white mouse was trapped, tamed, and fitted with a saddle for the new knight to take his rides abroad.

One day Tom was riding by a farmhouse on his new charger when a large cat caught sight of him. With one spring the animal was upon him, and seized both the little knight and his war-horse.

She then ran up a tree with them ; but Tom had by this time called to mind the lessons that Sir Gareth had taught him.

“ Hold, monster ! ” he cried ; but the cat did not appear to hear him. “ Stay, caitiff ! unhand me ! ” screamed the little knight ; but the cat only breathed heavily.

After a moment, however, Sir Thomas managed to wrest himself free and to draw his sword. Then he set upon the monster

with great bravery, and with such good effect that the cat, to save itself, pushed both knight and charger off the bough.

Down they fell, head over heels. The tree was high, so that the fall was great ; but by good luck Sir Gareth came riding by just at the moment, and cleverly caught Tom and his charger in the helmet which hung at his saddle-bow.

He took the knight home, and finding him quite dazed and giddy, put him to bed. Sir Thomas did not move, and for a while every one thought he was dead.

The King came to see him, and sent for the doctor, who said that Sir Thomas was insensible, and advised bleeding him with a leech. But the King said that a leech was more likely to eat the little fellow up, and gave orders that Sir Thomas was to be kept

quite still, in the hope that he would come round again after a while.

For two days Sir Thomas lay unconscious in his bed without making the least movement. No one could understand why he lay there in such a strange, trance-like sleep.

Chapter XX.

OBERON AND PIGWIGGIN.

MEANWHILE important events were taking place in Fairyland. King Oberon had made up his royal mind once and for all to bring to an end the quarrel between himself and Pigwiggin by means of a fight to the finish.

So he set out with a few of his fairy attendants to meet with the traitor. Before long they found him wandering about in an aimless manner, probably hoping to meet the Queen. The sight of King Oberon roused his rage and put fresh spirit into him.

“King, I defy thee!” he cried, in a

passion ; “and I dare thee to mortal combat in defence of my dear lady’s honour ! She is the best of Queens, and my own dear mistress, and——”

“That is well,” said King Oberon, with deadly hatred in his tone. “We shall not fight to prove this or that, thou false knight and traitor, but to end thy miserable life.”

This was more than enough, and the two separated, to prepare for the combat.

Pigwiggin’s shield was a little cockle-shell, which could not be pierced by any spear in the fairy armoury of Oberon. His spear was a strong, stiff stalk of grass, on the end of which was fixed a horse-fly’s tongue, so sharp that nothing could turn the point of it.

His coat of mail was made from the scales of a fish, and his rapier was a hornet’s sting. A stag-beetle’s head served as a helmet,

which in itself was so fearsome that only to look upon it was to dare a death of horror. His plume was a hair from a horse's tail, and gallantly it waved to and fro in the breeze.

His charger was an earwig, which, truth to tell, was not easily mounted, in such a sprightly manner did it dance about. At last, however, Pigwiggin was firmly seated, and then he felt that never had so brave a knight ridden the paths of Fairyland.

Meanwhile King Oberon had also prepared himself for the combat, and was ready, armed and mounted, to ride out and answer the challenge of the traitor knight Pigwiggin. He had as his second a brave attendant named Tomalin, while Pigwiggin had no one to squire him to the field.

Then word was brought to Queen Mab by a light-footed fay that King Oberon and

Pigwigin were about to bring their quarrel to an end, and that Pigwigin had no one to stand by him in his time of trial. The laughter-loving Queen was as much distressed as it was possible for her to be.

“The brave knight *must* have an attendant,” she said. “Nymph, what *shall* be done?”

“Send for Tom Thumb,” said Nymphidia; “he lies in his bed in King Arthur’s royal castle, ‘unconscious,’ say the mortals. Let me bring him here meanwhile. He can return when his master needs him.”

The Queen clapped her hands.

“My sweet maid,” she said, “go yourself. Take the second best chariot, the one drawn by my white mice. Fly Cranion shall drive you. Set off at once, and bring the fairy page Tom Thumb back with you. It will do him good to come.”

Without the loss of a moment Nymphidia hasted away, and soon returned, bringing Tom Thumb, who was well known to all the fairy realm.

“I am your most humble servant,” he said, bowing low before Queen Mab, “and I wait your royal and august commands.”

“Attend Pigwigin,” said the Queen hastily ; “he needs a second in his fight with the King. But I hope that the deadly struggle may not even begin. Away with you, while I go to visit Hecate, the Queen of Shades, and ask her wise advice on the matter.”

Then with the full number of her maids the light-hearted Queen set out on her self-imposed errand. The way led through fogs and mists and bogs. And when the bright band of fairies had travelled for a day and

a night, they came at last to the darksome abode of Hecate, the gate of which was guarded by three witches armed with broomsticks.

Meanwhile Tom Thumb the fairy knight had sought out Pigwiggin, and received from him a message which he was to take to Tomalin, the squire of his opponent, King Oberon.

Chapter XXI.

THE RESULT OF THE COMBAT.

“TELL King Oberon,” cried Tom Thumb, when he met Tomalin, “that the valiant knight Pigwiggin defies him to the death. What is more, if he had his rights, my principal should now be wearing the royal crown of Fairyland.”

This greeting was of so stupendous a character that Tomalin was stricken dumb. Turning without a word, he posted off at topmost speed to report it word by word to his master. Then he repeated the message as he had heard it, and told how well Pigwiggin was prepared for the coming battle.

But the fairy king was not in the least afraid.

“I am armed and ready,” he said, with dignity. Then he rode out on his charger, a fiery grasshopper, and made all haste to meet his foe.

Before long the opponents came face to face, and halted to try the joints of their armour. The seconds occupied themselves for a few moments in seeing that everything was in order. Then falling backward, Tomalin gave the signal for the battle to commence.

The two ran together with such fury that both fell at once to the ground. But before the seconds could rush forward each was mounted once again. A second time they clashed together, but it was not possible to note any advantage on either side. Both

their shields were shattered, their helmets were reft from their heads, and their lances were splintered. Throwing away their useless weapons, they drew their swords and renewed the fight. So great was the din that the sound of their blows came to the ears of Hecate, just as Queen Mab was telling her the story of the great quarrel and the sad disturbance of the peace of Fairyland.

With a hurried step the dark-eyed Queen of Shades ran to one of the bogs in which her kingdom abounded, and gathering some of the fog which hung above it, enclosed it in a bag. Then she ran to the stream named Lethe, whose waters had the power of inducing forgetfulness of all things in the minds of those who drank of them. Some of this water she quickly put into

a bottle without speaking a word of her intentions.

Then the two Queens were borne through the air in the chariot of Queen Mab, and alighted close to the spot where Oberon and Pigwiggin were pounding away at each other in desperate fury. They were careful, however, that they should not be perceived by either the combatants or their seconds.

Suddenly Queen Hecate untied the bag in which the choking fog was contained. At once the vapour spread around the place, and so blinded the eyes of the bold fighters that neither could see the other. Tom Thumb and Tomalin too were hidden from each other, and knew not which way to turn.

After a while, however, the fog began to clear away, and then the grave voice of Hecate was heard.

“In the name of Pluto, my royal spouse and master,” she said, “I command you to tell me the cause of this quarrel. But before either of you begins his tale each must drink from the bottle which I here proffer to you. This liquid will clear your understanding, and each of you will see the other in a different light when once you have tasted it.”

King Oberon and Pigwiggin in turn then took a draught of the water of Lethe. And lo ! suddenly they lost all memory of the discord which had troubled the realm of Fairyland for so long.

Oberon turned to Queen Mab, who stood near him with a bright smile upon her face.

“My Queen,” he said gently, “what means all this company ? How lovely you look ! See how our faithful subjects crowd and jostle to admire your beauty. And see,

our trusty Pigwiggin kneels to offer us his homage.—Rise, my honoured knight, and attend us to our royal home.”

Then Pigwiggin, who also had forgotten all the troubles through which he had passed, took his place in the train of the monarchs. And Oberon, taking the hand of his Queen, led her towards the steps of the palace.

Chapter XXII.

CHANGES AT CAMELOT.

BUT there was one among the happy band who did not feel quite at home. This was Tom Thumb. He could take no part in the merriment which followed upon the settlement of the quarrel; and when the fairy fun was at its height Nymphidia came tripping up to him as he sat under the shade of a cowslip.

“What ails you, Tom Thumb?” she asked gently, seating herself beside him.

“Well, you see,” said the little fellow, “at present I belong both to King Arthur and to King Oberon, and yet in a sense I belong

to neither. To tell the truth, I never felt very much at home in Camelot, and now that I have returned here I feel half a stranger."

"'Tis a sad case, truly," said Nymphidia, knitting her lovely brows, "and I must see the Queen about it. Oberon could not advise me, for he has quite forgotten why you were sent among the mortals. Queen Mab will surely have a plan."

In a few moments the fay found out her royal mistress, and put the case before her. Queen Mab sat down on a bank covered with fragrant wild thyme and drew Nymphidia beside her.

"I am afraid he must go back," said she—"at least for a time. 'Tis a stupid world that of Camelot, where they are always fighting about things that don't really matter. But in time all will be well. Perhaps one of

the mortals will kill him. Then he will be free to come to us once more. At all events he must go, and he may as well set out at once. Call up a breeze."

Nymphidia touched the wand of the Queen with her tiny forefinger, and at once a strong wind arose. Then Mab raised her left hand and pointed with the ring finger at Tom Thumb. At once the breeze caught him and carried him up into the air. In a few moments he was out of sight; and almost before he could say "Sir Thomas Thumb" he found himself poised in the air over the courtyard of the palace of King Arthur. But no mortal eye could see him.

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"He is coming round now," said the grave old doctor; "see, he wakes. All is well. I am no longer required." And he

hobbled off, leaning on his stick, with his tin of leeches under his arm.

Sir Thomas sat up in bed.

"Where am I?" he said.

"In your bed, Sir Thomas," said a voice like a meat-saw; and turning his head, the little fellow saw the royal cook sitting at the bedside.

"Sirrah," he cried, "send me a squire. Where is my noble friend Sir Gareth?"

"Gone, gone," said the cook sadly, "and my occupation is gone too. There is no one to cook for except yourself, and that is no work for a man of my qualities."

"Why, what is the matter?" queried Sir Thomas.

"Everything," said the cook. "The foul traitor, Sir Modred, has raised the West against the King, and as we speak they

fight it out far away from Camelot. The Queen has gone to a nunnery, and Sir Lancelot to Joyous Gard in the far North Country. All is over and gone."

Sir Thomas was very weak, and his reply to this stupendous news was to fall back in a swoon. When he came to again, he found a crowd of people round his bed, one of whom wore the rich robes of a king; but it was not the great King Arthur.

"Who are you?" asked the new monarch, who, as Tom learnt later, was called King Thunstone; and Sir Thomas, rising in his bed and making the best possible bow under the circumstances, said,—

"My name is Tom Thumb;
From the fairies I've come.

When King Arthur lived,
This court was my home.

In me he delighted ;
By him I was knighted.

Did you never hear of Sir Thomas Thumb ?”

King Thunstone laughed loudly, and slapped his thigh in a vulgar manner, reminding Tom Thumb of the miller who used to bring the flour to the royal kitchen.

“He is a brave mannikin,” he cried roughly, “and he shall have a royal house to live in.”

Sir Thomas shuddered at the sound of the new King’s voice, but he made up his mind to make the best of things.

Chapter XXIII.

TOM THUMB RETURNS HOME.

THE new king was so much pleased with the little knight that he ordered a small chair to be made, on which Tom could sit on the royal table at meal-time ; also a palace of gold, about nine inches high, with a door an inch wide, for him to live in.

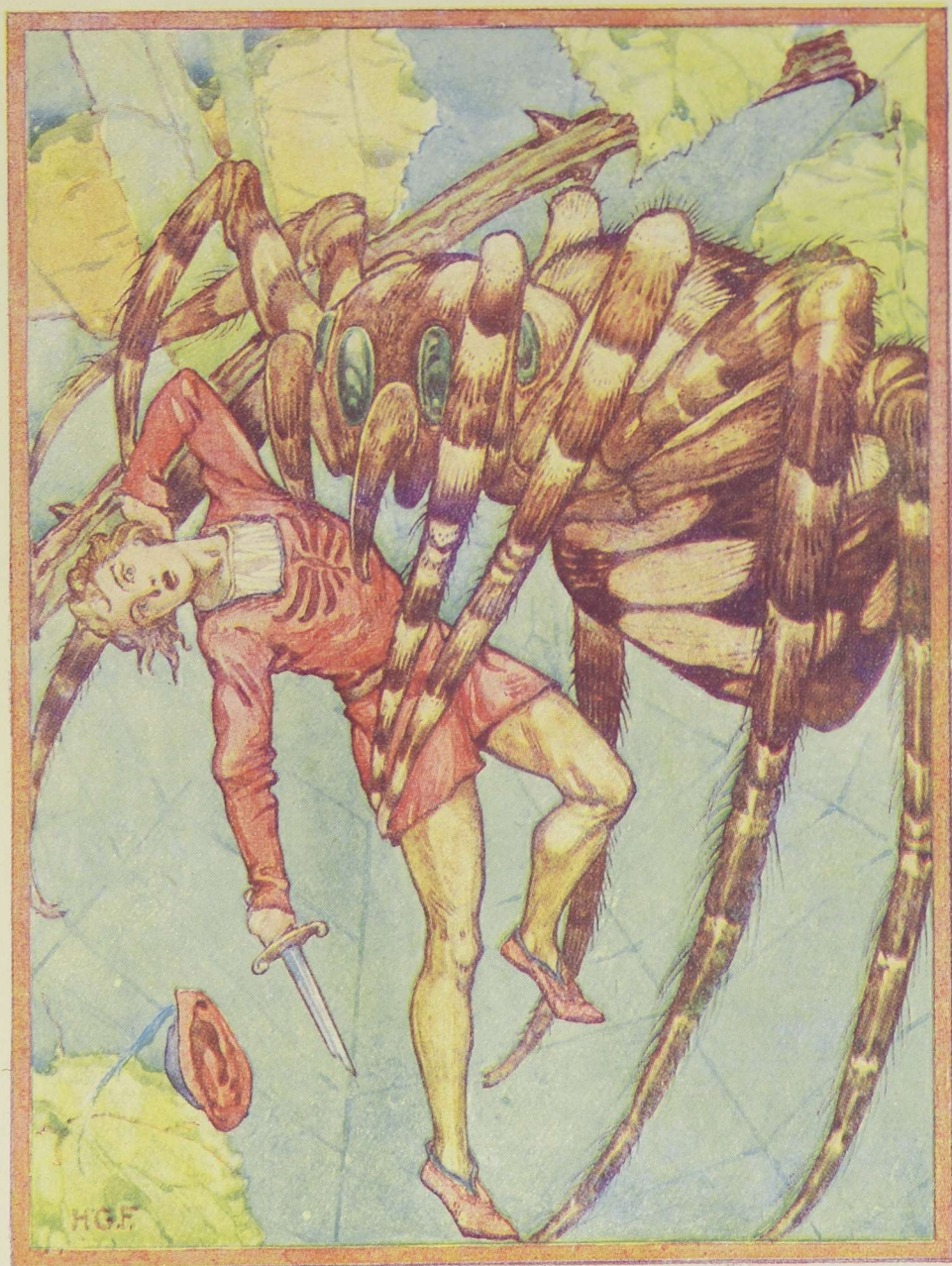
But the new Queen grew very angry when she saw the favour that was shown to Tom Thumb. So she told the King that the little knight had been very rude to her. This was not true, and Tom knew it was only a made-up story.

But when the King sent for him he was

so much afraid that he hid himself in an empty snail-shell. There he lay for some time, till he was nearly dead with hunger.

At last he peeped out. Seeing a fine, large butterfly near him, he placed himself astride of it, and was at once carried up into the air. The butterfly flew from tree to tree, and from field to field, and at last came to the palace garden, where the King and Queen spent a merry time in trying to catch it. At last poor Sir Thomas fell from his seat into a watering-pot, in which he was almost drowned.

When the Queen saw him she flew into a great rage, and said that he should be at once beheaded ; and he was placed in a mouse-trap, to wait until the time came for putting him to death. But the cat, seeing something alive in the trap, rolled it about until the wires broke, and so set Tom free once more.



(1278)

A huge spider made an attack upon him.

The King took him again into his favour ; but the earthly adventures of Sir Thomas Thumb were now almost at an end. One day he was sitting in the palace garden, when a huge spider made an attack upon him. The knight drew his sword and fought like a hero. But the spider was the victor, and soon the brave little champion lay dead upon the ground.

The King, his knights, and even the Queen, were very sorry at his death. A white marble stone was raised over his grave, on which was written the story of his life, so that all should know the wonder of it.

* * * * *

Meanwhile in the royal palace of Fairy-land there were joyous revels, for Tom Thumb had returned to the land of faëry, and all was well.

“Why, Tom Thumb, my trusty page,” said Oberon, “I missed you for a moment. I have a new post for you. Henceforth you shall be Master of the Ceremonies in our royal realm of Fairyland.”

Tom Thumb bowed low before the fairy monarch, who graciously extended his hand for the new royal official to kiss.

That night the fairies went abroad, and Tom Thumb, as the guide of their revels, led them to the low mud cottage where a certain ploughman and his wife were taking their rest. The latter had cried herself to sleep at the news received that day of the death of Tom Thumb.

“Puck,” said Tom Thumb, as the company paused outside the door, “the good dame has had no heart to clean up her house to-day. To your duty !”

Then Lob-lie-by-the-fire stepped forward and entered the house by the chimney, Tom Thumb following him closely. Standing on the hearthrug Lob first sang his song, as he had done when he visited the cottage on a previous occasion. Then he set to work, and soon the place was clean and tidy. Tom Thumb came up the wide chimney and raised his wand. At once the royal couple drew near with their fairy train ; and floating down the chimney they all alighted in a band upon the floor. Soon the voice of the King was heard in a tone of command,—

“Through the house give glimmering light,
By the dead and drowsy fire ;
Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier ;
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it trippingly.”

Then Queen Mab's silvery voice broke in,—

“First rehearse your song by rote,
To each word a warbling note :
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
Will we sing and bless this place.”

And taking hands, the fays danced trippingly to the sound of delicate fairy music. When they paused, Oberon said, in his most royal tones,—

“Now, until the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray,
And each several chamber bless,
Through this cottage, with sweet peace ;
And the owner of it blest
Ever shall in safety rest.
Trip away—make no stay ;
Meet me all by break of day.”

THE END.

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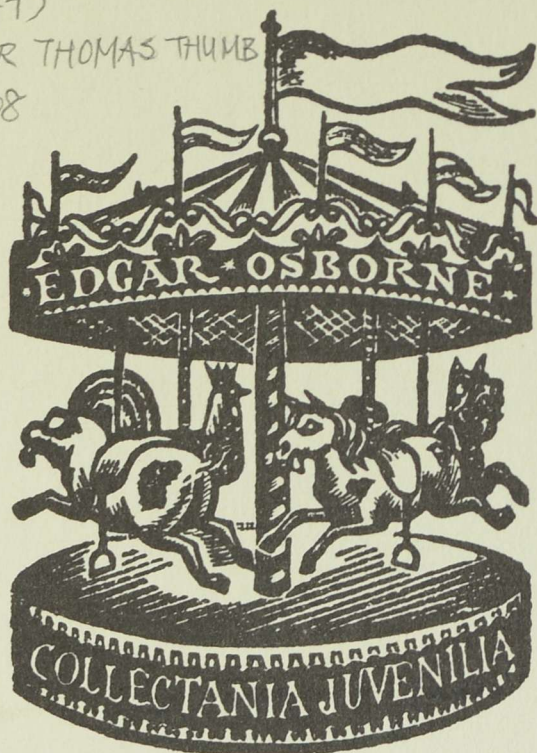
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