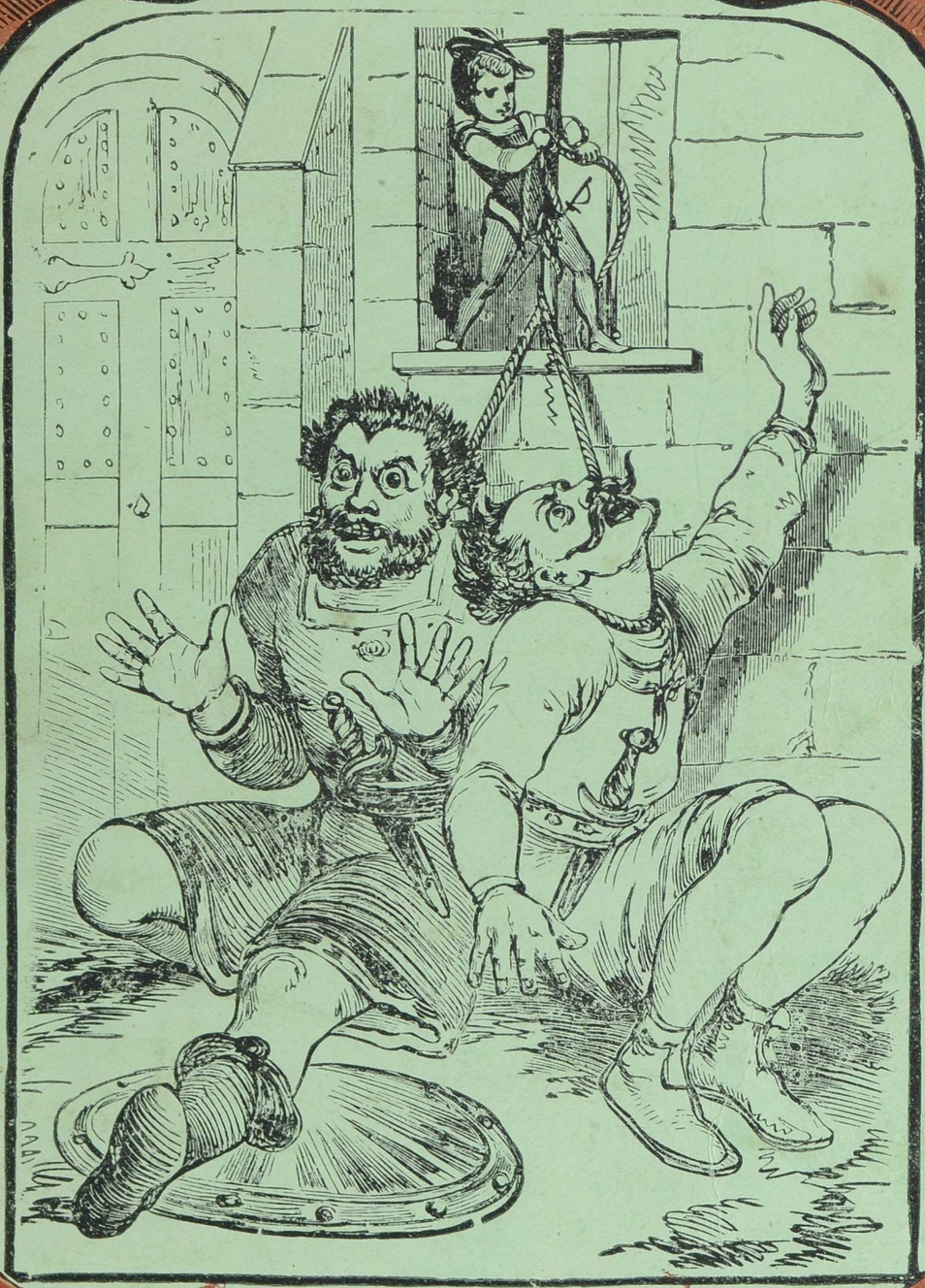
JACK THE GIANT KILLER



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"And putting his long arm down the chimney carried off the delicious morsel."

JACK was a sturdy little fellow, who lived in Cornwall, when "good king Arthur ruled the land." He went to bed with the lamb and rose with the lark, and ate no sweet-stuff, so that he grew strong and stout. In those days there were a great many fierce and terrible giants dwelling about the country, who preyed on the possessions of their weaker neighbours, and spread fear and horror wherever they were seen. One of these, by name called Cormoran, lived in St. Michael's Mount, not far from Jack's father's cottage. Jack had never seen the savage until he was about eight years old, but the whole country rang with tales of his greediness and cruelty, and to these he would often sit and listen for the hour together. One night Jack's father brought home a nice young kid for supper, and it was forthwith put into the pot to boil over a good fire. Now it so chanced that Cormoran passing by that way as he went home, smelt the goodly odour of the kid as it seethed in the pot, and putting his long arm down the chimney, carried off the delicious morsel for his own supper. You may be quite sure Jack never forgave the giant this trick.

"And picking out the finest and fattest cows, string them up like so many rabbits round his waist."

Cormoran had a very large appetite. Indeed, being more than eighteen feet high, he wanted a great deal of food to keep up his strength. He used to go about amongst the farmers' fields, and picking out the finest and fattest cows from the herd, string them up like so many rabbits round his waist, and carry them off to St. Michael's Mount. Jack, already angry with the giant for carrying off his supper, conceived the following bold plan for ridding the country of him altogether. He set off one night with a spade, a horn, and a pickaxe, and digging a pit twenty-two feet deep and fifteen wide, near St. Michael's Mount, he strewed the top over with branches and blew a loud blast on his hunting horn. Out rushed Cormoran in a rage, declaring he would broil for breakfast whoever had been so rash as to disturb his slumbers. But at that moment he fell heavily into the trap prepared for him, and Jack struck him mortally on the head with his pickaxe. The magistrates of Cornwall, for this noble exploit, presented Jack with a handsome sword and belt, on which was engraven—

"This is the valiant Cornish man,
Who slew the giant Cormoran."

"The Giant battered away at the log till he thought he had broken all Jack's bones."

Taking his journey into Wales soon after this, Jack being overtaken by nightfall, knocked at the door of a large mansion to beg a night's lodging, when behold! a huge giant with two heads stood before him. However, he pretended to receive Jack hospitably and lodged him in a comfortable room. Here Jack, suspecting the treachery of his host, hid himself under the bed, after laying a log of wood in his place. The giant creeping in battered away at the log till he thought he had broken all Jack's bones, and in the morning was struck with amazement to see his guest walk in well and sound. Did you rest well? said he. Yes, said Jack, a rat gave me a flap or two with his tail, but it did not much disturb me. The astonished giant prepared two bowls of hasty pudding for breakfast, and Jack whilst pretending to devour his, slipped it all inside a leathern bag he had fastened in his coat. Look here, said he to the giant, and ripping up the bag with his knife out fell the pudding on the floor. Determined not to be outdone by little Jack, the giant also plunged his knife into his breast, and instantly fell dead on the ground.

"And twisting the ropes round the window frame with all his strength presently strangled them."

Not long after this, Jack, everywhere known as Jack the Giant Killer, was found one day asleep under a tree, by Blunderbore, a huge giant who had been a friend of Cormoran's. This Blunderbore, perceiving from the inscription on Jack's belt who he was, instantly pounced upon him and carried him off to his castle, where throwing him on the floor of a room all strewn with dead men's bones, he assured him that he would that day dine upon his heart, men's hearts eaten with pepper and vinegar being his favourite food. He then departed, leaving Jack half dead with fright, the more so as he heard a warning voice singing in the distance that Blunderbore would soon return with another giant more cruel than himself. In fact, on looking from the window Jack saw the terrific pair approaching. Now or never, thought he; and hastily tying a couple of noozes in some ropes which lay at his feet, he contrived dexterously to throw them over the heads of the giants as they reached the door beneath him, and twisting the ropes round the window frame with all his strength presently strangled them. He then set free all the victims that were in the castle.

"The Knight and Lady did not know how to thank Jack sufficiently."

After refreshing himself while at court, where he was honourably received by the king, Jack once more set out in quest of adventures. And he had not proceeded far when he heard in the midst of a lonely wood horrible cries and screams. As he drew nearer he saw a monstrous giant dragging a knight and a lady along by the hair of their heads. Indignant at such cruelty, Jack crept quietly up to the monster and gave him such a tremendous blow with his sword just below the knees, that he almost cut his legs off, and he fell to the ground. Jack then mounting nimbly on his body, before he could recover himself, cut off his huge head, and thus rescued his unfortunate victims from their wretched condition. The knight and lady did not know how to thank Jack sufficiently, and they all proceeded to the giant's castle, where they found a multitude of captives ensnared by this wicked creature. Every one of these was doomed to death but for this deed of Jack's. He liberated them every one, and they were all invited to pay a visit to the knight and his lady, whose castle was at hand, where every refreshment and amusement was provided for them.

"Jack went boldly to the castle door, and knocked till the three-headed monster appeared."

In the course of his travels Jack met Prince Arthur's son, and they joined company. After long and weary journeyings they had spent all their money and were dying with hunger. We are near a cousin of mine, said Jack; and giant though he be, I will go and beg a night's lodging. So Jack went boldly to the castle door, and knocked till the three-headed monster appeared at the top. Jack was horribly frightened, but he took care not to let the giant see it, and telling him he was his cousin, Jack informed him that the Prince and a large army were coming to destroy him. What shall I do? cried the giant, frightened in his turn. Let me lock you in the cellar till they are gone, said Jack. The giant consented gladly, and Jack and the Prince coming in when he was safe below, feasted and made merry, and rested well that night. In the morning they went on their journey, and when Jack let the giant out he was presented by him with a heavy purse of gold in reward for the good service he had pretended to do him. But I think you will agree with me that Jack did not deserve this gold, for he only got it through telling a lie.

"The Giant, by his tremendous weight, broke the bridge asunder, and fell into the moat."

Whilst, however, they were in the midst of their rejoicings at the escape they had had, word was brought to the assembled guests that Thundel, a huge giant, was coming to revenge his comrade's death. All were struck with terror, but Jack, full of courage, exclaimed, Be not afraid, only suffer me to deal with him. Then, assisted by two of the knight's servants, he almost cut through the draw-bridge which led over the moat, thirty feet deep, surrounding the castle. Scarcely was this accomplished, when loud screams of the peasantry were heard as they fled before the approaching giant. And very soon he came in sight, huge and terrible. Jack being light of foot crossed the bridge in safety to meet the monster, and with mocking words challenged him to a race. The enraged giant pursued Jack, who now fled before him, with shouts of fury. Jack ran across the draw-bridge towards the company assembled by the castle gate, and the giant following close behind him, by his tremendous weight broke the bridge asunder, and fell into the moat. The fall broke also his mighty neck, nor can I tell you that there was one present who wept for his death.

"And with a pealing blast he summoned the Giant, following whom was a pretty white cat."

Laden with riches from the giants he had plundered, Jack returned to cheer the hearts of his dear old father and mother. But the whole village was in consternation, for Dorinda, a playfellow of Jack's, had been carried off by a giant who had the powers of a magician, and changed his victims into the shapes of birds and beasts. Determined to rescue Dorinda, Jack set forth instantly to the castle of this enchanter, and there at the gate hung a golden horn thus inscribed:—

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

No one had ever yet ventured to sound the horn, but Jack had no fears, and with a pealing blast he summoned the giant, following whom was a pretty white cat. Jack felt sure it was Dorinda, and as the walls of the castle began to shake, the giant saw his power was over. He made therefore no resistance, and Jack despatched him, when all his victims resumed their proper shapes. Jack carried Dorinda back to her father and mother, and soon after married her, giving up, thenceforward, for her sake, his dangerous profession of a giant killer.