

45 Thumbling as Journeyman

A certain tailor had a son, who happened to be small, and no bigger than a Thumb, and on this account he was always called Thumbling. He had, however, some courage in him, and said to his father, "Father, I must and will go out into the world." "That's right, my son," said the old man, and took a long darning-needle and made a knob of sealing-wax on it at the candle, "and there is a sword for thee to take with thee on the way." Then the little tailor wanted to have one more meal with them, and hopped into the kitchen to see what his lady mother had cooked for the last time. It was, however, just dished up, and the dish stood on the hearth. Then he said, "Mother, what is there to eat to-day?" "See for thyself," said his mother. So Thumbling jumped on to the hearth, and peeped into the dish, but as he stretched his neck in too far the steam from the food caught hold of him, and carried him up the chimney. He rode about in the air on the steam for a while, until at length he sank down to the ground again. Now the little tailor was outside in the wide world, and he travelled about, and went to a master in his craft, but the food was not good enough for him. "Mistress, if you give us no better food," said Thumbling, "I will go away, and early to-morrow morning I will write with chalk on the door of your house, 'Too many potatoes, too little meat! Farewell, Mr. Potato-King.'" "What wouldst thou have forsooth, grasshopper?" said the mistress, and grew angry, and seized a dishcloth, and was just going to strike him; but my little tailor crept nimbly under a thimble, peeped out from beneath it, and put his tongue out at the mistress. She took up the thimble, and wanted to get hold of him, but little Thumbling hopped into the cloth, and while the mistress was opening it out and looking

for him, he got into a crevice in the table. "Ho, ho, lady mistress," cried he, and thrust his head out, and when she began to strike him he leapt down into the drawer. At last, however, she caught him and drove him out of the house.

The little tailor journeyed on and came to a great forest, and there he fell in with a band of robbers who had a design to steal the King's treasure. When they saw the little tailor, they thought, "A little fellow like that can creep through a key-hole and serve as picklock to us." "Hollo," cried one of them, "thou giant Goliath, wilt thou go to the treasure-chamber with us? Thou canst slip thyself in and throw out the money." Thumbling reflected a while, and at length he said, "yes," and went with them to the treasure-chamber. Then he looked at the doors above and below, to see if there was any crack in them. It was not long before he espied one which was broad enough to let him in. He was therefore about to get in at once, but one of the two sentries who stood before the door, observed him, and said to the other, "What an ugly spider is creeping there; I will kill it." "Let the poor creature alone," said the other; "it has done thee no harm." Then Thumbling got safely through the crevice into the treasure-chamber, opened the window beneath which the robbers were standing, and threw out to them one thaler after another. When the little tailor was in the full swing of his work, he heard the King coming to inspect his treasure-chamber, and crept hastily into a hiding-place. The King noticed that several solid thalers were missing, but could not conceive who could have stolen them, for locks and bolts were in good condition, and all seemed well guarded. Then he went away again, and said to the sentries, "Be on the watch, some one is after the money." When

therefore Thumbling recommenced his labours, they heard the money moving, and a sound of klink, klink, klink. They ran swiftly in to seize the thief, but the little tailor, who heard them coming, was still swifter, and leapt into a corner and covered himself with a thaler, so that nothing could be seen of him, and at the same time he mocked the sentries and cried, "Here am I!" The sentries ran thither, but as they got there, he had already hopped into another corner under a thaler, and was crying, "Ho, ho, here am I!" The watchmen sprang there in haste, but Thumbling had long ago got into a third corner, and was crying, "Ho, ho, here am I!" And thus he made fools of them, and drove them so long round about the treasure-chamber that they were weary and went away. Then by degrees he threw all the thalers out, dispatching the last with all his might, then hopped nimbly upon it, and flew down with it through the window. The robbers paid him great compliments. "Thou art a valiant hero," said they; "wilt thou be our captain?"

Thumbling, however, declined, and said he wanted to see the world first. They now divided the booty, but the little tailor only asked for a kreuzer because he could not carry more.

Then he once more buckled on his sword, bade the robbers goodbye, and took to the road. First, he went to work with some masters, but he had no liking for that, and at last he hired himself as man-servant in an inn. The maids, however, could not endure him, for he saw all they did secretly, without their seeing him, and he told their master and mistress what they had taken off the plates, and carried away out of the cellar, for themselves. Then said they, "Wait, and we will pay thee off!" and

arranged with each other to play him a trick. Soon afterwards when one of the maids was mowing in the garden, and saw Thumbling jumping about and creeping up and down the plants, she mowed him up quickly with the grass, tied all in a great cloth, and secretly threw it to the cows. Now amongst them there was a great black one, who swallowed him down without hurting him. Down below, however, it pleased him ill, for it was quite dark, neither was any candle burning. When the cow was being milked he cried,

"Strip, strap, strull,
Will the pail soon be full?"

But the noise of the milking prevented his being understood. After this the master of the house came into the cow-byre and said, "That cow shall be killed to-morrow." Then Thumbling was so alarmed that he cried out in a clear voice, "Let me out first, for I am shut up inside her." The master heard that quite well, but did not know from whence the voice came. "Where art thou?" asked he. "In the black one," answered Thumbling, but the master did not understand what that meant, and went out.

Next morning the cow was killed. Happily Thumbling did not meet with one blow at the cutting up and chopping; he got among the sausage-meat. And when the butcher came in and began his work, he cried out with all his might, "Don't chop too deep, don't chop too deep, I am amongst it." No one heard this because of the noise of the chopping-knife. Now poor Thumbling was in trouble, but trouble sharpens the wits, and he sprang out so adroitly between the blows that none of them touched him, and he

escaped with a whole skin. But still he could not get away, there was nothing for it but to let himself be thrust into a black-pudding with the bits of bacon. His quarters there were rather confined, and besides that he was hung up in the chimney to be smoked, and there time did hang terribly heavy on his hands.

At length in winter he was taken down again, as the black-pudding had to be set before a guest. When the hostess was cutting it in slices, he took care not to stretch out his head too far lest a bit of it should be cut off; at last he saw his opportunity, cleared a passage for himself, and jumped out.

The little tailor, however, would not stay any longer in a house where he fared so ill, so at once set out on his journey again. But his liberty did not last long. In the open country he met with a fox who snapped him up in a fit of absence. "Hollo, Mr. Fox," cried the little tailor, "it is I who am sticking in your throat, set me at liberty again." "Thou art right," answered the fox. "Thou art next to nothing for me, but if thou wilt promise me the fowls in thy father's yard I will let thee go." "With all my heart," replied Thumbling. "Thou shalt have all the cocks and hens, that I promise thee." Then the fox let him go again, and himself carried him home. When the father once more saw his dear son, he willingly gave the fox all the fowls which he had. "For this I likewise bring thee a handsome bit of money," said Thumbling, and gave his father the kreuzer which he earned on his travels.

"But why did the fox get the poor chickens to eat?" "Oh, you goose, your

father would surely love his child far more than the fowls in the yard!"