

about it. You 'll keep, I 'll wager, and slow dying will give you time to choose about your eyes," and with this the hateful old creature walked calmly off and, slamming the house door, left the poor boy tied hand and foot and buried to his neck.

The hours that followed were hours of torture to poor Rob. He could not move; the damp, heavy earth pressed down upon him like lead, growing heavier and tighter every moment, and the sun shone in his eyes while the ants began to crawl over his face, and he felt as if he would die. And the horror of it! for the boy knew how wicked the wretched miser was, and that he could hope for no mercy. Ah, how he wished that he had not been so curious, and so eager to meddle with another's business. Rob repented of his curiosity as deeply as a great many other people have repented of theirs, when it was too late. He winked back the tears, for was he not a boy, and he would not cry like a girl; but it was dreadful to die thus! The minutes seemed like hours, the hours like days, and still no help. The time passed, however, and the sun set, and once, only, old Cheezer looked out at him and jeered. Night was coming and Rob had not tasted a morsel since morning, not even a drop

of water had passed his lips. The boy was used to hunger, but thirst was terrible, and he began to ache all over, so that every second was torture: and oh, the chill of it! it was like a bed of ice; and how dark it grew! a cloudy night and black as pitch.

The child never knew how those hours passed; he tried to pray, but I am afraid no one had taught him how to say his prayers, and he was so frightened that he could scarcely have remembered, if he had been taught. So he stayed there all night long, and saw the dark sky brighten and brighten with the dawn, and grow light at last, and then pink and gold when the sun rose. At this time, old Cheezer came to the door and asked him if he wanted his eyes put out.

"No," said Rob, faintly, for he could not endure much more; "but only give me a cup of water."

"Thieves must thirst!" mocked the old man, and slammed the door, and Rob knew that he was going off for the day and there was no hope.

Poor child, the end of his misery was not far off, for he could not bear it. The scene — though it was a bright morning — began to darken and waver, in the strangest fashion, and then he knew nothing



more, for he had fainted away, something he had never done in all his life before.

It must have been a long while afterwards that Rob came slowly to himself, and then he did not know what had happened, for he felt neither cold nor hunger, but was lying on a soft warm spot, with a warm breeze blowing gently in his face, and he heard voices, strange, squeaky little voices, all about him. Not knowing where he was, and remembering suddenly the horror of that burial alive, Rob began to think that he had died and come to life in another world; very cautiously he opened his eyes a little bit and peeped through the lashes and saw — well, he saw a marvellous sight. He seemed to be in the depths of a wooded dell, shadowed by great trees, and lying in a bracken of ferns, while around him were strange little men, all clad in green with pointed caps, each cap ornamented with a cock's feather; and one, evidently the most important of all, was seated on a huge toadstool. Rob knew that this one was a king, because he wore a crown and frowned prodigiously if any one even dared to contradict him. Rob did not know at first that these were the famous derrick, the dwarfs of Devon, but to his astonishment he heard one of them telling the

king all about himself in a very squeaky voice. The derrick described Rob's life from day to day so perfectly that the boy pinched himself to be sure that he was not dreaming, and the dwarf told how he and another derrick had put a cock's feather on old Jacob's money-hole every night to torment him; then came the description of Jacob beating Rob and burying him alive, and the boy listened to this eagerly, to find out how he had escaped.

"We dug him out, your Majesty," said the derrick. "It was very hard work, too, for he's an uncommonly heavy boy."

"I don't see how he can be," interrupted the king sharply. "He's a bag of bones and nothing more. You always make a fuss over your work, Dolittle."

"He weighs as much as ten cats!" retorted Dolittle, sullenly, "and his bones are n't pleasant to handle."

"I shall ask the prime minister how much ten cats weigh," remarked the king. "Go on, Dolittle, what next?"

"After we took the boy out, Retribution and I caught old Jacob and stuffed him into the same hole, sire."



"Very good," said the king, "and you brought the boy here. But, by the way, which end of old Cheezer did you put in first?"

Another derrick piped up gayly:

"Head, your Majesty," he said, "and we punched the dirt down tight about it."

The king reflected. "I don't know," he said thoughtfully, "whether that will kill him or not. These mortals are queer; but so much earth in his mouth might be attended with serious results. Fizzle-Fizzle," he said to an attendant, who wore a green coat like the others, and lovely rose-colored tights encasing his fat little legs, "call the prime minister."

Rob could hardly keep still all this while, but he did not move, for fear the whole troop of elves would scamper off; and presently the prime minister, a very dignified derrick, with a long white beard and spectacles, came in and took his place at the king's right hand. His Majesty immediately laid the whole matter before him and asked if he thought that earth in the mouth, nose, and ears of a mortal, pounded in tight, would be likely to kill him. The prime minister assumed a very wise and thoughtful air and was silent for some time, the whole court

gazing breathlessly at him. At last, he frowned severely, adjusted his spectacles, and spoke.

"Please, your Majesty," he said, "it is my deliberate opinion that if this earth was pounded down hard it would kill a mortal."

The king coughed. "I suppose old Cheezer's dead then," he remarked, glancing sternly at Dolittle and Retribution, who stood in open-mouthed amazement; "but probably the loss to the world is not great. What does my prime minister think?"

That worthy sighed deeply. "I'm always in favor of mercy, sire," he said profoundly; "but if he's dead, he's probably dead."

"Exactly," said the king, lifting his crown to wipe the dew from his brow; "that disposes of him. And now about this boy?"

At this Rob pricked up his ears.

The prime minister looked at him intently.

"We are informed," said the king, "that this is the very boy who was stolen from his cradle in Mistress Deane's house, in Exeter. He has the scar on the left ear, and you know that the pixies and the derricks were always accused of doing it."

The prime minister wagged his head so hard that his spectacles dropped off, and half a dozen courtiers,



in green coats and pink tights, had to crawl under the ferns and grasses to hunt for them.

"It turns out," continued the king, waving his hands airily, "that the sordid peddler, Jacob Cheezer, stole him and brought him up to beg for him in London. Now, it is my intention to return him to Mistress Deane, to show that the derricks and the pixies are much belied."

At this, Rob could remain silent no longer; he sat up and stared wildly at his Majesty, his sudden and clumsy movement upsetting two rows of courtiers, in pink tights, who started a terrible squealing like so many little pigs, on their backs in the ferns.

"If it please your Majesty," cried Rob, trying to speak politely, "I'm very much obliged to you for saving me from old Cheezer, but I don't want to be given to any one else; just let me loose in the woods and I'll do anything I can to serve you — anything — to be away from the people who beat me and ill use me."

The king put his fingers in his ears.

"Dear me!" he cried angrily, "let some one pick up my pages; he's upset them by scores, and their cries deafen me."

Poor Rob, covered with confusion at his awkwardness, tried to set the little creatures up; but at his touch they all fell over on their backs again, and screamed until they were purple in the face, and it was not until he kept quite still that the older derricks managed to get them all on their feet again, and the confusion subsided; then the king took his fingers out of his ears and replied to Rob:

"Mistress Deane is your mother," he said sharply, "and a very good woman, or the derricks would not befriend her to find her boy. Children of your age should be seen and not heard. The prime minister will take you home himself. Domuch, harness the wishhounds and whisk this mortal off to Exeter at once."

Poor Rob, he wanted to protest, but he did not like to give offence after they had saved his life; besides, the word "mother" sounded new, and strange, and attractive to him. He had seen other little boys with mothers who loved them, and, after all, he had a mother too! For Rob never thought of doubting what the King of the Derricks said, and in the end he permitted them to pack him off, with the prime minister, on a sledge of bark, cushioned with moss, and drawn by six beautiful light-footed hounds who



seemed rather to skim over the earth than to touch it. Away they flew, through a beautiful stately forest, over wide moors and sloping hills, past villages, where Rob saw people, but no one seemed to see him; and at last the sledge stopped at a neat little cottage, on the outskirts of a town, and here, in a garden full of country flowers—such as Rob had longed to have all his weary life in the city slums—the sledge stopped, and the prime minister led his charge gravely up to a rustic bench where a woman sat, with a sweet, sad face and gray hair. Though she seemed to be much startled and amazed at the sight of the derrick and the boy, she said nothing, but fell to studying Rob's face with such troubled, seeking eyes, that the child's heart went out to her, and he waited eagerly for the explanation.

"Madam," said the dwarf, "I am the prime minister of the King of the Derricks. Many years ago, —ten, I think,—your baby boy was stolen from his cradle, and you were told that the pixies or the derricks took him;" the prime minister puffed himself up prodigiously. "Madam, we do that only in extreme cases, and for a reason. Your child was stolen by an old peddler named Jacob Cheezer."

"Ah!" cried the poor dame sobbing, "I always

thought so! Oh, little man, derrick, fairy—whatever you are—give me but news of my boy and I will bless you!"

The prime minister sneezed and wiped his eyes on a handkerchief of apple blossom.

"Madam, your boy was brought up a street beggar in London, by the wicked old miser, Cheezer, who was about to kill him, when we interfered and—and here he is!" and he pointed triumphantly at Rob.

The poor dame uttered a cry of joy and held out her arms. And Rob? He fell into them weeping, and the prime minister sneezed again.

Oh, what joy there was, and what a reunion! The derrick disappeared, and all the neighbors came in to rejoice, and the boy had such a supper as he could not remember having had in all his life before, and was put to bed in a clean, soft bed, instead of lying on straw.

But in London the neighbors of old Cheezer, finding that something was wrong, broke into the house on the Strand, and there, in the garden, they found the old miser buried head first in the hole with his ill-gotten gains, his feet sticking up in the air. The money that he had hoarded so greedily,



and to such a miserable end, was taken out by some good people and given to the poor. No one ever suspected how the wicked wretch came to his end, though they did see a cock's feather close beside the spot where he was planted — head first — the strangest tree that ever was put into the earth, in any garden in this world.

*THE ABBOT'S TROUT*