

son, and after a while, they really did adopt him. So it was that from such a small thing, — a little kindness to a fish, — poor Joe, the neglected, sad, friendless foundling, won a home, and a fortune, and a great name, for Sir Humphrey gave him his own, and Joe was careful never to disgrace it.

But what happened after Joe left the Abbey of Buckfast, where the poor old abbot had swallowed a pixy alive? Ah, thereby hangs a tale; but it is such a long one that it must be told all by itself — the story of the Madness of the Abbot of Buckfast.

*THE MADNESS OF THE ABBOT
OF BUCKFAST*



THE fact has been related that the Abbot of Buckfast went fishing, and that — after a day of unsuccessful angling — while quenching his thirst from his little brown jug, he accidentally swallowed a live pixy. Quite unconscious of his horrible deed, the abbot, at first, felt no ill effects, and proceeded as usual to the abbey with the solitary trout that he had caught. It was a little before the hour for supper, when the good man arrived, somewhat tired and out of breath, but otherwise giving no signs of any change; but it was not long before his behavior created a great deal of

amazement. In the first place, he had been seen to run from the kitchen door to the main entrance, and it was very unusual for the abbot to do anything so undignified as running; and as he weighed something like two hundred and fifty pounds and was very short, he was not exactly made for an athlete. But this first little race was only the beginning of his queer doings. He went into the church, to assist at the vespers, and, lo and behold, when the services were over, the good fathers were amazed to see their superior gather up the skirts of his monkish frock, and, taking a hand-spring over the chancel rail, caper down the aisle in the most extraordinary fashion, his fat sides shaking and his cheeks quivering with the exercise. The monks did not know what to make of it, but they dared not remonstrate with the lord abbot, and they all flocked meekly out of church and stood gazing blankly at him, as he capered over the close-trimmed lawn, as gay as a lambkin, but presenting such a strange picture that the others began to smile a little, and one or two had to smother their laughter. Up and down bounced the fat little man, hither and yon, and he even stood on one toe and pirouetted in a marvellous manner, with the other foot describ-

ing a circle in the air. This was too much to bear; it was not only ridiculous but it was very unbecoming, and quite a crowd had gathered to look on, while every window in the abbey was full, and the cooks and the scullions came out to stare. It was too bad, and the subprior, a good old man who came next to the abbot in authority, felt that it was his duty to remonstrate.

"My lord Abbot," he whispered, approaching the dancer, "I prithee, remember who you are — and where you are! It is really unseemly — and your reverence knows how people will talk."

"Tra la!" sang the abbot, standing up on one toe and flinging the other foot high in the air, "tra la, Father Eustace, let's go to the moon!"

"Bless my soul!" cried the subprior, falling back aghast, "the abbot is certainly mad!"

And as he spoke, the fat abbot whirled around on his toe and kissed his hand to the bystanders with the most fascinating wink.

"Now you shall see me go to the moon!" he cried, and tucking up his gown, so that his very fat legs were quite plainly seen, the abbot capered over the grass and — to the horror and amazement of the monks — began to creep up the side of a tall oak.

He clasped the tree firmly with his knees and started to ascend in a time-honored, but not very graceful fashion; but alas! the abbot was very, very fat, and it was long since he had clambered up a tree in that boyish style, and — well, he came down plump on his fat back, and sprawled on the grass, uttering a succession of sharp little squeals, that were not only undignified, but also very unnatural, for they sounded like the shrieks of an extremely young pig. But for all that, the good fathers were relieved to be able to pick him up and hustle him off into the cloister-house, out of sight, for they were in a terrible quandary. A dancing abbot in such a sober place! such a thing had never been heard of! And what in the world had he been doing to get into such a happy state? A committee of grave old gentlemen went and examined the little brown jug, for something seemed to tell them that this might be at the bottom of the whole mischief, but nothing ever looked more innocent than that same little empty brown jug, and the delicious odor that clung to it was far from displeasing to the reverend fathers, and so the jug was formally acquitted of all guilt in the premises. Beyond a doubt, the lord abbot was bewitched, and the best thing that could

be done was to try to cast out the demon. Meanwhile, the abbot himself had entirely recovered from the effects of his fall, and seemed a little sobered by the experience; so when they all met in the great hall, where the supper was spread, he appeared quite himself, and the brethren began to breathe more freely, though the subprior still kept a watchful eye upon him.

There were several tables spread; one on the dais, or platform, at the end of the refectory, was for the lord abbot, the subprior, and any guest of honor; another long table for the monks, and a third for the lay brothers — that means members of the community who were not in orders. In the centre of each table was a huge salt-cellar, and those who sat above it were of higher rank than those who sat below. Have you never heard the phrase, "Below the salt"? It used to be quite a common one, and it meant the humble places at a banquet.

Well, the lord abbot ate his supper soberly enough; I suspect that he was quite black and blue, for you know he was not used to falling about in the fashion that he had done on the lawn, and he must have been bruised. The monks were all so

relieved at his return to quiet ways, that they ate heartily and talked pleasantly, and began to forget all about it, for we always do try to forget things that are unpleasant to remember. Matters were going on quite as usual, the meal was almost over, the tapers had been lighted, and the great refectory looked as cheerful and neat as heart could wish, and the brethren were smiling over a rather old story of the subprior's, when suddenly all their pleasure was spoiled. The abbot rose, with the wildest kind of a giggle, and took a hand-spring clear over the table, and began to cut a pigeon-wing in the centre of the hall. The monks laid down their knives — they had no forks in those days — and stared in consternation, while Father Eustace bustled down from the dais and tried to quiet the reverend dancer.

"My lord Abbot, my lord Abbot!" he cried, "this is most unseemly — I prithee, remember! If you are —"

"Fudge, Father Eustace!" cackled the abbot, winking his eye at the subprior, "what is the matter with you? Come, let us dance and be merry!

"Tra la, and tra lore,
You stupid old bore!"

he sang, pointing his finger at his friend, and performing another fandango.

Poor Father Eustace was decidedly hurt at this unkind remark, and he could not help hearing a sly titter from behind him; but the good man was too worried over the abbot to heed it. He wrung his hands in despair.

"He is certainly mad!" he cried, "my Lord of Buckfast is certainly raving mad! Woe is me!"

The poor soul's grief was so genuine that it would have touched a stone, and it really did sober the rest of the monks, who had hardly suppressed their mirth at the sight of their superior capering about on the light fantastic toe; but it had no effect on the hardened old abbot. No, indeed; what do you think he did? Well, he took the skirt of his long frock between a forefinger and thumb on either side, he held it out as far as he possibly could, and he whirled around and around on his toes. Every little girl knows just how to do it; around and around, as fast as you can spin, and then drop suddenly, with your skirts puffed up and widely extended about you. It is called making a cheese. That is exactly what the Abbot of Buckfast did, in the centre of his own refectory, and in the presence

of all his community. Dear, dear, how shocking it was! The subprior staggered back and sank on a settle, almost in a dead faint, and the graver and older men stood up, horrified at the spectacle; but I am afraid a few of the younger ones laughed behind their hands, for it certainly was the most amusing sight, — the fat old abbot spinning around, and then suddenly dropping flat on the floor.

Whether this last wild feat was too much for the abbot, or whether there was really a terrible change in his feelings, will never be known, but certain it is, that his high spirits suddenly drooped, his eyes lost their twinkle, even his nose grew pale, and he clasped his hands to his stomach with a fearful squeal. The monks hurried to his assistance, for no one could mistake his evident anguish.

"What ails your reverence?" they anxiously inquired. "Is your lordship ill?"

But the abbot made no reply; he only rocked to and fro, squealing very much like a pig, and now and then doubling up with a spasm of pain.

"He is ill!" cried the subprior, recovering from his weakness, "that accounts for it all! Is your reverence in pain?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" squealed the abbot, shaking his fat

fists at Father Eustace. "You've put something live in my food, you hoary old villain! I've swallowed a porcupine, I certainly have!" and he rocked himself in his misery and shrieked at the top of his lungs, his face growing redder and redder every moment, and his eyes bulging out of his head.

Old Father Squills, the physician of the abbey, now came to his aid, and declared that the abbot must be carried up to his bed, and be blistered and bled and dieted according to his directions; and, in spite of the patient's squeals, he was carried off by four stout brothers and put to bed. But alas, this was only the beginning: his case was far from yielding to the treatment of Father Squills, or any other father in the abbey, and he became so violent and so savage that the brethren began to tremble and believed that their superior had been bewitched. Whenever they approached him, he screamed and made grimaces at them and pelted them with his pillows, his sandals, his bottles of drugs, everything, indeed, that he could lay his hands on. At last, the affair waxed so alarming that it was decided to summon all the great doctors within reach, and messages were accordingly sent hither and thither, and every physician in the kingdom was called to see

the wonderful case of the Abbot of Buckfast. But it took a long time to travel from place to place, and not all these grave personages could respond to the invitation, but five great doctors did come, three from London and two from places nearer Buckfast; and one fine morning they all arrived — these learned and important doctors — and with them a poor young physician, an assistant of the most famous of all, Dr. Killemsure. The older ones all came riding on horses or mules, richly clad in velvet or silk, with gold chains around their necks, and long cloaks of rich stuffs, and they were received with all due ceremony and respect, and ushered into the room where the reverend patient was sitting up in bed, making faces and pelting his attendants. As soon as the great physicians entered, that dreadful old abbot let fly a bolster — with such skill and exactness of aim that he hit Dr. Killemsure fairly on the nose — and then he squealed with delight. Quite naturally, the physicians decided at once that he was raving mad, and ordered him to be bound while they made their examination. Accordingly, the abbot was tied in bed, where he screamed and kicked while the sages gravely consulted, and poked and prodded him in

every tender part of his body. They looked at his tongue and the whites of his eyes; they felt his pulse and pounded his chest; but still it was evident that they could not agree. One thought it was this, and another swore it was that, and the dispute was hot and long. Only the young physician, Michael Twopenny, said nothing, but closely watched the patient, and it was thus that he, and he alone, saw the strange thing that happened. For, while the doctors argued and disputed, the abbot was quite unnoticed, and all of a sudden, the fat old gentleman sneezed — sneezed tremendously — raising the echoes, and out of his mouth hopped a little creature all dressed in green. Quick as a flash, young Dr. Twopenny pounced on this tiny thing, and thrusting it deep into a green bag he carried, drew up the strings and tied them securely.

And now a wonderful change took place. The abbot came to himself; in fact, he was completely restored in an instant, and wanted to know the meaning of it all, and the great doctors were as much at a loss to explain his recovery as they had been to understand his disease. There was a good deal of grumbling and growling among them at being called from such a distance for nothing;