

# General Jack.



London  
Ernest

Printed in Bavaria  
1397

New York  
C.P. Dutton & Co.





## GENERAL JACK.

**I**F you wanted to give Jack a present that he really liked it had to be something to do with soldiers. Either a book with pictures of soldiers, or such toys as a trumpet, a drum, or a cannon to shoot peas.

Jack's father was an officer, and the little boy's grandfather had also been in the army, and Jack was going to be a soldier himself one day when he was big enough. At present he had to content himself with his wooden and tin army, which consisted of many fine regiments.

At home Jack was called General Jack, and a very good name it was, considering the number of men he had under his command.

Jack was so very fond of his soldiers that wherever he went he took them with him. In the summer at the seaside General Jack's soldiers defended sand castles on the beach, and it would have been a daring enemy indeed that could have landed in the face of such an army. In the winter Jack's tin regiments pointed their guns all day long from a trench of snow on the window-sill of the little boy's room, so that even the bold little sparrows felt nervous, and had to take their crumbs early in the morning while the army was still sleeping.



One day Jack received an invitation to go and spend his summer holidays with his aunt and cousins, who lived in the country. And at this he was very much delighted. Of course he would take his soldiers with him and teach his cousins how to fight battles, and they would have no end of fun together—so that until the time came for Jack to leave home there was a great blowing of trumpets and beating of drums and inspecting of the army to see that it was in proper training and fit for service.

Well, the day for departure arrived at last, and off went Jack; and his cousins were very much pleased to see him, and very much delighted with the soldiers. The very first evening they made a lovely card castle, which the army stormed, and very soon reduced to ruins with the cannons and the cannon-balls of peas; and when they were tired of battles they read fairy tales together: the wonderful stories of "Jack the Giant Killer," "Jack and the Beanstalk," and the marvellous adventures of "Robinson Crusoe."

Then, too, after tea they would have a grand game, altogether a new kind of game. They would act the different stories they had read during the day. Jack's auntie turned out the lumber-room and dressed up the children in all sorts of lovely costumes.







One night the General was Jack and the Beanstalk, while the next evening his cousin Ella dressed up as Robinson Crusoe, and a very pretty little Crusoe she made, with the gun in her hand and the parrot on her shoulder.

Now all this was very pleasant and very nice. Jack was very happy with his cousins; but unfortunately one afternoon something happened that made the little boy exceedingly cross and unhappy. He had been out with Ella and the pony; they had taken it in turns to ride, and

had gathered a beautiful bunch of flowers for a poor little cripple boy who lived in the village, and who could not go out himself to pluck flowers or play in the fields. Jack and Ella had returned home rather late and very tired and hungry, and what was Jack's dismay as he entered the nursery to see his beloved army scattered about the floor in a most woeful plight. The heads of many of his gallant soldiers had been screwed off their bodies, their guns were bent, and the swords of the officers were broken.

The fact was that two of Jack's little cousins had fetched out the soldiers, and with Master Snip, the terrier, had had a most desperate battle.

Jack burst into a flood of tears, and for the rest of the evening behaved himself more like a naughty rough bear than the general of an army. He refused his tea, and after a time went sulkily to bed with the tears still running down his burning red cheeks.

I don't know how long he had been asleep, but he was suddenly awakened by the blowing of a trumpet and the rattle of a drum. Jack sat up in his bed, and only just in time to see his finest regiment of wooden guards disappearing out of the window.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the General, as he ran to the window. "They are marching without orders. I must go after them;" and so saying he stepped out of the window on to a beautiful white cloud, which no sooner did he touch with his feet than it rose in the air till it hung just above the village.

Jack looked here, there, and everywhere, but could not







see his regiment of guards. Not a speck was to be seen on the white cloud, so he went to the edge and looked over. And what do you think he looked into? Why, right down the chimney of his auntie's house. And what do you think he saw? He saw a very nicely-furnished room and a very comfortable-looking bed. On the floor were a number of toys: tin soldiers and wooden soldiers, trumpets, drums, and

cannon. Amongst the toys there was seated a little boy with a very red face and very red eyes, for he had been crying; and his mouth was drawn down at the corners, and he appeared to be very sulky and disagreeable. Jack knew that the little boy was himself.

"I say," thought the General, "how awfully silly I look. I had no idea a bad temper made one so ridiculous. I think I had better look down another chimney."

So saying, Jack walked round the white cloud till he came over a cottage at the end of the village, and peeping down, beheld a very different room to the one he had last looked at. This was a tiny little room, with no comfortable furniture—only a small wooden bed and two wooden chairs—and there was no carpet on the cold red tiles.

In one corner of the floor was seated the poor crippled boy to whom Ella and Jack had taken the flowers in the afternoon. He was playing with his baby sister. The two seemed very happy together.

"Surely he can't be pretending to be playing at soldiers!" exclaimed Jack, in a disdainful tone of voice. "Why he has only a lot of old screws and nails!"

But the cripple boy *was* playing at soldiers, although his regiments were only a number of nails and tacks that stood up on their heads, while some round fat screws were the officers. He seemed to be enjoying himself very much, and was not a bit cross when his little sister overthrew his army with one sweep of her tiny arm.

Suddenly the cottage door opened, and, to the astonishment of Jack, the cripple boy, and the baby, in marched the regiment of wooden guards. They went straight up to the two poor children, turned to the front, halted, and presented arms.

Oh, it was a lovely sight to see the faces of that little boy and girl! Their pale cheeks flushed crimson with delight, and their eyes sparkled with pleasure. They clapped their hands, and laughed with glee as they gave the words of command, and the wooden regiment obeyed them. But presently the officer of the guards said: "We are absent without leave; we must go home now or

General Jack will be cross." And without more ado the soldiers marched out the same way as they had come in, leaving the cripple boy and his baby sister very miserable. With two big sighs





they turned to the nails and screws, and although they pretended as hard as ever, somehow it was not quite the same thing as it had been before.

“Poor little things,” said Jack. Then as he lay on the white cloud and looked into the tiny bare room, a mist came before his eyes, and when the mist cleared away he found that the white cloud had turned into a white sheet, and that he was in bed, while the red sun was pouring into his room, telling him it was time to get up.

The first thing that Jack did that morning after he was dressed was to look at his wooden soldiers. None of them had come to grief in the fight the day before; they were as smart as when they had been given to him. While he looked at them fondly a great battle was raging in the General's heart. Something seemed to say to him: “Don't be selfish; see what pleasure you can give to two little people by giving them your soldiers! You are sure to get plenty more some day!”



Then something else would reply: “That's all very well, but I love these soldiers best of all. Cannot I give the broken ones away instead?” Then the first something would say “No.”

And how did the battle end? In this way. Before



the day was over the cripple boy and his baby sister were sitting in the corner of their room playing with the wooden guards and clapping their hands with glee, just as Jack had seen them in his dream.

Well, all this happened a long time ago, and Jack is a real soldier to-day, and has been in real battles, and has medals on his breast, but he has never forgotten his journey up to Cloudland, and how he watched his regiment of wooden guards who were "absent without leave."

*Edric Vredenburg.*



