



MAKING OUT THE SCHEDULE.

pocket the mackerel of the Tyrrell family. He opened it, laid it flat upon the table before him, and divided it by imaginary lines into six parts.

"Here," said he to himself, "are breakfasts for six days—I would it were a week. I like to have things square and even. Had that man bought the ten-cent fish that I saw offered him, there would have been seven portions. Well, perhaps I can make it do, even now—let me see! A little off here—and the same off this—so—"

At this moment something very strange occurred. The mackerel, which had been lying, split open, upon its back, now closed itself, gave two or three long-drawn gasps, and then heaving a sigh of relief, it flapped its tail, rolled its eyes a little, and deliberately wriggling itself over to a pile of ledgers, sat up on its tail, and looked at Skarridge. This astounded individual pushed back his chair and gazed with all his eyes at the strange fish. But he was more astounded yet, when the fish spoke to him. "Would you mind," said the mackerel, making a very dry face, "getting me a glass of water? I feel all of a parch inside."

Skarridge mumbled out some sort of an assent, and hurried to a table near by, where stood a pitcher and a glass, and filling the latter he brought it to the mackerel. "Will you hold it to my mouth?" said the fish. Stephen complying, the mackerel drank a good half of the water.

"There," it said, "that makes me feel better. I don't mind brine if I can take exercise. But to lie perfectly still in salt water makes me feel wretched. You don't know how hungry I am. Have you any worms convenient?"

"Worms!" cried Stephen, "why, what a question! No, I have no worms."

"Well," said the fish, somewhat petulantly, "you must have some sort of a yard or garden; go and dig me some."

"Dig them!" cried Stephen. "Do you know it's winter, and the ground's frozen—and the worms too, for that matter?"

"I don't care anything for all that," said the mackerel. "Go you and dig some up. Frozen or thawed, it is all one to me now; I could eat them any way."

The manner of the fish was so imperative that Stephen Skarridge did not think of disobeying, but taking a crowbar and a spade from a pile of agricultural implements that lay in one corner of the room (and which had at various times been seized for debts), he lighted a lantern and went down into the little back garden. There he shoveled away the snow, and when he reached the ground he was obliged to use the crowbar vigorously before he could make any impression on the frozen earth. After a half-hour's hard labor, he managed, by most carefully searching through the earth thrown out of the hole he had made, to find five frozen worms. These he considered a sufficient meal for a fish which would scarcely make seven meals for himself, and so he threw down his implements and went into the house, with his lantern, his five frozen worms, and twice as many frozen fingers.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs he was certain that he heard the murmur of voices from above. He was terrified. The voices came from the room where all his treasures lay! Could it be thieves?

Extinguishing his lantern and taking off his shoes, he softly crept up the stairs. He had not quite closed the door of the room when he left it, and he could now look through an opening which commanded a view of the whole apartment. And such a sight now met his wide-stretched eyes!

In his chair—his own arm-chair—by the table, there sat a dwarf, whose head, as large as a prize cabbage, was placed upon a body so small as not to be noticeable, and from which depended a pair of little legs appearing like the roots of the before-mentioned vegetable. On the table, busily engaged in dusting a day-book with a pen-wiper, was a fairy, no more than a foot high, and as pretty and graceful as a queen of the ballet viewed from the dress circle. The mackerel still leaned against the pile of ledgers; and—oh horror!—upon a great iron box, in one corner, there sat a giant, whose head, had he stood up, would have reached the lofty ceiling!

A chill, colder than the frosty earth and air outside could cause, ran through the frame of Stephen Skarridge, as he crouched by the crack of the door and looked upon these dreadful visitors. And their conversation, of which he could hear distinctly every word, caused the freezing perspiration to trickle in icy globules down his back.

"He's gone to get me some worms," said the mackerel, "and we might as well settle it all before he comes back. For my part I'm very sure of what I have been saying."

"Oh, yes," said the dwarf; "there can be no doubt about it at all. I believe it, every word."

"Of course it is so," said the fairy, standing upon the day-book, which was now well dusted; "everybody knows it is."

"It couldn't be otherwise," said the giant, in a voice like thunder among the pines; "we're all agreed upon that."

"They're mighty positive about it, whatever it is," thought the trembling Stephen, who continued to look with all his eyes and to listen with all his ears.

"Well," said the dwarf, leaning back in the chair and twisting his little legs around each other until they looked like a rope's end. "Let us arrange matters. For my part, I would like to see all crooked things made straight, just as quickly as possible."

"So would I," said the fairy, sitting down on the day-book, and crossing her dainty, satin-covered ankles, from which she stooped to brush a trifle of dust; "I want to see everything nice, and pretty, and just right."

"As for me," said the mackerel, "I'm somewhat divided—in my opinion, I mean—but whatever you all agree upon will suit me, I'm sure."

"Then," said the giant, rising to his feet, and just escaping a violent contact of his head with the ceiling, "let us get to work, and while we are about it we'll make a clean sweep of it."

To this the others all gave assent, and the giant, after moving the mackerel to one corner of the table, and requesting the fairy to stand beside the fish, spread all the ledgers and day-books, and cash, and bill, and memorandum books upon the table, and opened them all at the first page.

Then the dwarf climbed up on the table and took a pen, and the fairy did the same, and they both set to work as hard as they could, to take an account of Stephen Skarridge's possessions. As soon as either of them had added up two pages the giant turned over the leaves, and he had to be very busy about it, so active was the dwarf, who had a splendid head for accounts, and who had balanced the same head so long upon his little legs that he had no manner of difficulty in balancing a few ledgers. The fairy, too, ran up and down the columns as if she were dancing a measure in which the only movements were "Forward one!" and "Backward one!" and she got over her business nearly as fast as the dwarf. As for the mackerel, he could not add up, but the fairy told him what figures she had to carry to the next column, and he remembered them for her, and thus helped her a great deal. In less than half an hour the giant turned over the last page of the last book, and the dwarf put down on a large sheet of foolscap the sum-total of Stephen Skarridge's wealth.

The fairy read out the sum, and the woe-ful listener at the door was forced to admit to himself that they had got it exactly right.

"Now, then," said the giant, "here is the rent list. Let us make out the schedule." In twenty minutes the giant, the dwarf and the fairy—the last reading out the names

of Stephen's various tenants, the giant stating what amounts he deemed the due of each one, and the dwarf putting down the sums of these their names—had made out the schedule, and the giant read it over in a voice that admitted of no inattention.

"Hurrah!" said the dwarf. "That's done, and I'm glad," and he stepped lightly from the table to the arm of the chair, and then down to the seat, and jumped to the floor, balancing his head in the most wonderful way, as he performed these agile feats.

"Yes," said the mackerel, "it's all right, though to be sure I'm somewhat divided."

"Oh! we won't refer to that now," said the giant; "let bygones be bygones."

As for the fairy, she didn't say a word, but she just bounced on the top of the day-book that she had dusted, and which now lay closed near the edge of the table, and she danced such a charming little *fandouille* that everybody gazed at her with delight. The giant stooped and opened his mouth as if he expected her to whirl herself into it when she was done; and the mackerel was actually moved to tears, and tried to wipe his eyes with his fin, but it was not long enough, and so the tears rolled down and hardened into a white crust on the green baize which covered the table. The dwarf was on the floor, and he just stood still on his little toes, as if he had been a great top dead asleep. Even Stephen, though he was terribly agitated, thought the dance was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. At length, with a whirl which made her look like a snow-ball on a pivot, she stopped stock-still, standing on one toe, as if she had fallen from the sky and had struck upright on the day-book.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the dwarf, and you could hear his little hands clapping beneath his head.

"Hurrah!" cried the giant, and he brought his great palms together with a clap that rattled the window-panes like the report of a cannon.

"Very nice! very nice, indeed!" said the mackerel. "Though I'm rather di—"

"Oh, no, you're not!" cried the fairy, making a sudden joyful jump at him, and putting her little hand on his somewhat distorted and certainly very ugly mouth. "You're nothing of the kind, and now let's have him in here and make him sign. Do you think he will do it?" said she, turning to the giant. That mighty individual doubled up his great right fist like a trip-hammer, and he opened his great left hand, as hard and solid as an anvil, and he brought the two together with a sounding whang!

"Yes," said he, "I think he will."

"In that case," said the dwarf, "we might as well call him."

"I sent him after some worms," said the mackerel, "but he has not been all this time getting them. I should not wonder at all if he had been listening at the door all the while."

"We'll soon settle that," said the dwarf, walking rapidly across the room, his head rolling from side to side, but still preserving that admirable balance for which it was so justly noted. When he reached the door he pulled it wide open, and there stood poor Stephen Skarridge, trembling from head to foot, with the five frozen worms firmly grasped in his hands.



MR. SKARRIDGE WALKS IN.