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***Jannic aux deux sous* /Tuppenny Jack**

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Introduction

'Jannic aux deux sous' was collected by Luzel from Marie Geffroy, an “old beggarwoman” (*vieille mendiante*), at Plouaret, 1870, who told the tale in Breton. It was first published in French in September 1888 in *Revue des traditions populaires* (Vol. III, 474-83) and this translation is from the French text published in *Contes Retrouvés*, Vol.II (1998, 27-39). It appears to be the only story he collected from Marie Geffroy, although the previous year he had collected a tale from Guillaume Geffroy, a servant also from Plouaret, presumably a relative.

In his discussion of the story, W. A. Clouston, writing in *Folklore* in 1890, identifies the story as a variant of Grimms' 'The Frog Prince' (Tale Type ATU440, The Frog King), whilst acknowledging that it also contains other elements from stories common in “other popular European and Asian fictions” (493). In particular, it is related to ATU402A The Princess Transformed into a Toad¹.

¹ For details of further French variants, please refer to Delarue, Paul and Marie-Louise Tenèze (1976) *Le conte populaire français: catalogue raisonné des versions de France et des pays de langue française d'outre-mer, Tome Deuxième, Contes merveilleux*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose: 25-35.

Literally speaking, the title means Jannic (or Jack) of the Two Sous, emphasizing his poverty (when he receives two sous he considers himself rich) – hence, ‘Tuppenny Jack’. This does, however, fail to capture the complex punning that is going on. ‘Aux deux sous’ is a pun on ‘au dessous’, meaning down below or at the bottom, suggesting Iannic is down on his luck and at the bottom of the social pile. It is also a pun on ‘au-dessus’ which means the opposite – ie ‘upstairs’, or socially at the top of the pile, as Jack is at the end of the tale. So another translation could be ‘Lucky Jack’, or ‘Unlucky Jack’ or ‘Jack on his Uppers’. Another (far funnier) pun is with ‘aux dessous’, meaning Jack of the Underpants, the inference here is that he is so poor that his underpants are showing through the holes in his trousers. So another translation might be ‘Ragged-arse Jack’. My colleague, Dr. Fred Dalmasso (to whom I am very grateful for his checking of my translation and his advice on navigating French idioms), suggested that there is also a suggestion of a pun with the French phrase, ‘Il n’a pas un sous de bon sens’, which translates as ‘he hasn’t an ha’porth of good sense’, or perhaps the northern English dialect term ‘he was a daft apeth’ (halfpenny-worth), thus referring to Jack’s limited intellect (“The poor boy had not been at the front of the queue when the brains were handed out”).

There is also within the text a reference to a group of young boys playing *galoche*, a traditional Breton game where players attempt to hit an upright stick, on which is balanced a coin, by throwing metal discs at it. The winner is the player whose disc rests nearest to the stick. For a demonstration, see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBCaOzaFcIo> .

I have also chosen to retain the French name of the hotel in the story: *hôtel des Quatre fils Aimon*. (The Four Sons of Aymon). The hotel is named after the popular medieval romance of the revolt against Charlemagne by the four sons of Duke Aymon. The story became widespread in European folklore traditions during the Middle Ages.

There is one particular feature of the published text that is worth commenting on, which is a significant narrative contradiction towards the end of the story. The first part of the tale implies that the castle to which Princess returns, after Jack's failed attempts to meet up with her by the water fountain, is the home of her father, a great king. However, the end of the story suggests that the old king in the castle is perhaps not her father, but her intended husband, as Jack and the Princess later escape together to her father's house. It is then also unclear as to whom Jack finally inherits the throne from – is it the old king in the castle, the Princess's father, or are they one and the same?

It is interesting that Luzel made no attempt to 'correct' the text and clear up any confusion for the reader. It is possible, but unlikely, that Luzel made either an error in transcription or in translation from the original Breton. There are, however, two more likely explanations for this textual anomaly, both of which lie in the status of the text as a record of those words spoken as part of a live performance, ie as a *performed* text. The first is that it is possible that the confusion that exists for the reader was not present for the live audience, as the written text fails to capture other verbal and non-verbal modes of communication that the storyteller might have deployed at the moment of performance, such as gesture, expression, tone, cadence, etc. That is to say that any confusion may well have been addressed by the storyteller through

communicative means that are not captured within the record of the spoken word and, if this were the case, Luzel himself may not have been aware of the contradictions because in the context of performance, those contradictions may not have existed.

More likely is that this is a testament to the way in which performers and audiences collaboratively manage performative errors and make meaning out of a story. One feature of storytelling performance is that the storyteller will inevitably make mistakes: as the story is reconstructed in the moment, details may be forgotten, words may be stumbled over and narrative contradictions will be introduced. This is a natural feature of storytelling performance and will be expected by the audience. In fact, these narrative imperfections are welcomed by audiences as signs of spontaneity and authenticity (audiences are often suspicious of performances that seem over-rehearsed or faultless). Audiences are more tolerant of these kinds of mistakes in oral performance than a reader would be of a written text, as there is no opportunity to revisit, edit and improve the text.

This idea of the ‘vulnerable text’ is, therefore, valued by audiences and, as they are more interested in the successful rendition of the story, rather than any displays of technical virtuosity by the storyteller, they will use such imperfections as opportunities to fulfill their responsibilities as co-creators. In other words, the audience will never let such performative vulnerabilities get in the way of a good story. The fact that Luzel decided to restrain his editorial instincts of improving the text means that he has retained an important performative feature that might otherwise have been lost and storytellers today, wishing to liberate this translation from the page, will no doubt decide on their own strategies for dealing with this. .

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Tuppenny Jack

A Breton Tale

Listen and you will hear;

You can believe it if you want to,

You can disbelieve it if you want to,

This is what I have to say:

There was once in the parish of Ploubezre, near to Lannion, a young orphan who lived by going from door to door every day to beg for charity.

One day, a gentleman who was passing by, met him on the highway and gave him tuppence. This made him so happy and he thought himself to be so rich, as he'd never before possessed so much money, that he ran through the streets of the village, crying out, "I've got tuppence! I've got tuppence!" and he laughed and danced with joy. The poor boy had not been at the front of the queue when the brains were handed out, but he made up for it with the size of his gob, as the saying goes. Because his clothes were all in tatters, he wanted to get some new ones. He went to a draper's shop and asked that he make him a new outfit, a pair of trousers and a jacket.

“Have you got any money, boy?” the draper asked him.

“Yes, look!” he replied, showing him his tuppence.

“Get along with you, Tuppenny Jack!” the draper said to him and showed him the door.

And from that day on he was always known as Tuppenny Jack.

He went down to the quayside and there he found some children of his own age who were playing *galoche*. He wanted to play with them and very quickly he lost his tuppence. He started to cry like a baby, causing his friends to laugh at him. The evening came and he returned to the countryside in search of food and lodging. As he was going by Buzulzo, on the way to Ploubezre, he stopped to have a drink at a water fountain by the side of the road and there he fell asleep and spent the night.

The following morning when he woke up, he wanted to have another drink and, as he bent over the basin, he noticed an enormous toad at the bottom of it and he shrunk back in horror. Then the toad began to talk, like a human being, and spoke to him thus:

“Don’t be afraid, boy, and come and give me a kiss.” The toad had climbed up onto the rim of the water fountain.

“Kiss you? I’m not going to kiss a toad”, replied Jack.

“Look, give me a kiss and I’ll fill your pockets with silver and gold.”

“Really? You’ll fill my pockets with silver and gold?”

“Yes, really. And you will be able to buy yourself a new outfit and a white loaf and some apples and have enough money to play *galoche* with your friends as much as you like.

Jack could not resist such wonderful promises and so he steeled himself, approached the toad and kissed it.

“Well, where’s the silver and the gold then,” he asked straight away.

“Move the moss-covered stone over there, by the water, and you’ll find underneath it what I promised. Then, come back here tomorrow at the same time and you’ll find as much again in the same place.”

The toad immediately retreated to the bottom of the basin and Jack, having moved the moss-covered stone, found beneath it a pile of brand new silver and gold coins. He filled his pockets with them and returned to the town. Wherever he went, he cried out, “Look at me! My pockets are full of silver and gold! Look at me!” And he showed off handfuls of shiny silver and gold coins. All the town scallies² gathered around him and soon all of his silver and gold had passed out of his own pockets and into theirs.

The poor boy returned in tears to the water fountain at Buzulzo and again spent the night there.

² Scallies, plural of scally – a Northwestern English (especially Liverpudlian) dialect expression meaning a rogue, ruffian or ne’re-do’well. An abbreviation of the more familiar ‘scallywag’.

The following morning at dawn, he looked into the basin and there he saw the toad once again, but larger and more hideous than the day before.

“Good morning, Jack,” the creature said to him, “So here you are again?”

“Yes,” replied Jack, “the town scallies took all my gold and silver off me and I haven’t a single penny left.”

“Don’t worry, come and give me another kiss and once again you’ll have enough gold and silver to fill your pockets.”

Jack stepped forward to kiss the toad, which had once again climbed onto the rim of the water fountain, but the creature was so hideous and swollen up with poison that his heart was filled with horror and he lacked the courage.

“Don’t be frightened, my child,” the toad said to him. “Give me a kiss, like you did yesterday, and you’ll have as much gold and silver as you want.”

He kissed it for a second time. The toad told him to return the following day and pointed him towards a second hiding place where he found another pile of gold and silver coins. He filled his pockets with them and quickly returned to the town, where he was once again robbed and fleeced like the day before.

In the evening he returned to the water fountain and spent the night there for a third time. The following morning he saw the toad had become so large that it nearly filled the basin. He kissed it again and saw it immediately change into a beautiful princess, as soon as it received the third kiss.

“Bless you, Jack!,” said the Princess, “You have broken the spell! For many years I was bewitched in the hideous form that you saw and I was condemned to stay like that until I found a twenty-year old male virgin (Jack was in fact twenty years old) who would willingly give me three kisses. I am the daughter of a powerful king from the East and you will be my husband and, when my father dies, you will ascend to the throne and reign over his subjects. I am going to return to my father’s house and after one year and a day you must return to this spot next to the water fountain at eight o’clock in the morning, alone and with an empty stomach, and I will come for you and take you back to my father’s house. But in the meantime do not kiss another woman and be sure to have an empty stomach when you come back here. Otherwise you will never see me again. Take as much silver and gold as you want and do not forget me.”

Jack once more filled his pockets with gold and silver. The Princess bade him farewell, rose into the air, as if she had wings, and was soon out of sight.

So he returned to the town and this time he gave his gold and silver to the landlady of the *hôtel des Quatre fils Aimon* to look after so that it wouldn’t be stolen, as on the previous days. In this hotel there was a young servant by the name of Annettic who wanted Jack for her husband, even though he was a fool and the hotel guests made fun of him and played practical jokes on him. She was attentive towards him in all sorts of ways and did her best to defend and protect him. But Jack didn’t seem to notice any of this. One day she made clear her intentions towards him and Jack said to her:

“I cannot marry you, Annettic.”

“Why ever not, Jack?”

“Because I am already engaged to a beautiful princess whom I freed from a spell that had changed her into a toad.”

“You rescued a princess? You’re making fun of me, Jack. Where is she then, your princess?”

“She has returned to her father’s palace, far, far away from here. But she has promised to come back after a year and a day, and then I will go back with her to her father’s house and we will celebrate our marriage.”

“What a story! And where are you going to meet up again with this beautiful princess?”

“By the water fountain near Buzulzo. She told me to go there alone and on an empty stomach and in the meantime not to kiss any woman or girl or I will never see her again.”

Poor Jack said all this when he should have kept his mouth shut.

“That’s good!” thought Annetic to herself. “I know just how to put to stop to their plans.” And she threw her arms around Jack’s neck and kissed him. And she did it again the next day, and every day after that.

Meanwhile the anointed time drew near and Jack was counting off the days. He was impatient to see the Princess again.

“Tomorrow’s the day, Annetic!” he said to the young servant one evening.

“You’re wrong, Jack”, she replied. “It’s not for another eight days.”

“No, no, it’s definitely tomorrow. I’ve been counting the days and I shall turn up in good time for the rendez-vous by the water fountain at Buzulzo.”

The following morning Jack put on his best clothes and set off early for the water fountain at Buzulzo. He hadn’t eaten or drunk anything. But Annettic, unbeknownst to him, had slipped a pea into his jacket pocket.

When he arrived at the water fountain, he didn’t see anybody, because in his impatience, he had arrived ahead of time. He sat down on a stone next to the fountain to wait and when he put his hand into his jacket pocket he found the pea that Annettic had slipped in there. He was surprised to find it, looked at it, put it in his mouth and swallowed it. Immediately he felt drowsy and fell asleep.

The Princess arrived, exactly at eight o’ clock, and seeing that he was asleep, said, “Alas! He’s eaten something or kissed a woman!” Indeed he had done both. Into his hand she put a note on which she had written the following words:

“Alas, Jack, you have eaten something or perhaps kissed a woman, before coming here, and you have fallen asleep. I shall come back tomorrow at ten o’ clock. Come back to the water fountain, but have an empty stomach and do not kiss any woman or girl.”

She rose into the air and disappeared.

Upon waking up, Jack cried out, “I fell asleep and the Princess came and she has left this note in my hand. But what does it say? I don’t know how to read, but I’ll take it to Annettic who will tell me.”

And he rushed off to take the note to Annettic, who didn’t know how to read any more than he did.

When she saw him come back on his own, she asked him, “Well, Jack, where’s your princess then?”

“Alas, my dear Annettic, I fell asleep by the water fountain and I didn’t see her. She did come, though, and this note that she left in my hands proves it. Tell me what is written on it.”

Annettic took the note, had it read to her, and announced its contents to Jack.

“Oh!” he said, “Tomorrow I won’t fall asleep, that’s for sure. I shall go to bed early this evening so I don’t feel sleepy.”

The following morning Jack returned again to the water fountain, with a completely empty stomach. But Annettic had again, without his knowledge, slipped a broad bean into his jacket pocket. When he arrived he sat down on a stone by the water, as on the previous day, to wait for the moment when the Princess would arrive. He found the broad bean in his pocket, ate it again, without thinking, and immediately fell asleep. The Princess arrived soon after and, finding him asleep, as on the previous day, was

overcome with sadness and once more placed in his hand a note which said that she would return the following morning at midday for the last time and, if she found him asleep, he would never see her again. Then she rose into the air and disappeared.

When Jack woke up he was very upset to see that he had once again fallen asleep and he rushed off to show Annettic the note that has been left in his hands and asked her tell him what was written there.

Annettic had it read to her, as before, then told Jack, who was so sad that he burst into tears and went straight to bed so that he wouldn't be sleepy the following morning.

To cut a long story short, the following morning before he left, Annettic again placed a fig in his pocket, without his knowing, and he ate the fig, just as he had eaten the pea and the broad bean, and once again fell asleep.

Great was the sadness of the Princess when she found him fast asleep for the third time and she let out a deep sigh. She placed in his hand one half of her golden ring and a piece of paper that said that she would not come back again and she would return to her golden castle that was suspended above the Red Sea by four golden chains and that if he wished, he could see her again there, but only after enduring many terrible trials and tribulations. She added that as soon as he returned to the hotel he should tear the buttons of his clothes and for each button he tore off, one person in the house would die.

When Jack woke up he was distraught and started to cry like a baby. This time he had the piece of paper read to him, not by Annettic, but by the schoolmaster at Ploubezre. When he found out what it contained, he returned to the hotel and immediately set about tearing the buttons off his clothes and with every button he tore off, somebody in the house immediately died. Everybody there died and Annettic was the first.

So Jack said, “Now I will set off in search of the Princess in her golden castle that is suspended above the Red Sea by four golden chains, and I will not stop walking, by day or night, until I have found her.”

And so he set off, a stick in one hand and one half of the Princess’s golden ring in his pocket and, by the grace of God, not knowing which direction to take.

He walked and he walked straight ahead, further and further, and further still, asking wherever he travelled where he might find the golden castle above the Red Sea, but nobody could tell him anything about it.

One day he met an old hermit in the forest. He also asked him if he knew the way to the golden castle above the Red Sea.

“Alas, my son,” the old man replied, “I do not now where it is, but I have a brother who is also a hermit and older than me and who lives in another forest, two hundred leagues from here, and who is the master of all the animals of the land, and perhaps he will be able to tell you something useful on the subject.”

“But, Sir, how will I know which way to go in order to find him?”

“Here is a ball, which will lead you straight to him. It will roll along the ground by itself in front of you and all you have to do is to follow it. And here too is a pot of ointment that you will also find very useful. I know the properties and powers of all the plants of the forests and meadows and there is no wound or injury that cannot be healed by this ointment.”

Jack took the pot of ointment and thanked him. Then the hermit placed the ball on the ground just outside his cell and said to it, “Go, my ball, go straight to my brother, the hermit, to his cell, that lies two hundred leagues from here.”

Immediately the ball started to move and Jack followed it. They arrived – but not as quickly as it just took me to say it – at the dwelling of the second hermit. The ball banged against the door and the hermit opened it and, recognizing the ball, said, “Welcome to you, ball of my brother, what’s new?”

“Good day, Sir,” said Jack, “I am on my way to find the Princess of the Golden Castle, who lives in her castle above the Red Sea, and your brother the hermit sent me to you to see if you could help me succeed in my quest.”

“Alas, my son,” replied the hermit, “I don’t know where to find the castle of which you speak, but God has made me master of all the animals of the land and one of them ought to be able to help in this matter. I will summon them and we shall see.”

And the old man blew on a silver whistle and immediately from all directions animals of all kinds, came running, small and large, from the mouse to the lion, from the horse to the camel, but not one of them knew about the castle in question.

“I have another brother,” the master of the animals of the land then said, “who lives in another forest three hundred leagues from here. God has made him the master of all the birds of the sky and perhaps he will be able to help you. Here is a ball that will take you to him.”

Jack bade farewell to the second hermit and went on his way, following the ball, which rolled ahead of him of its own accord. The travelled on and on, with nothing holding them back. Jack was very weary when the ball finally banged against the door of the third hermit’s dwelling.

The door opened and in the doorway appeared an old man with a long, white beard, who spoke thus:

“Greetings to you, ball of my brother, and to you too, Tuppenny Jack, as I know you well and I know why you have come here. You saved a princess, who was bewitched in the form of a hideous toad, but you have lost her and she has returned to her golden castle above the Red Sea, and you would like to join her.”

“That’s absolutely right, Sir,” replied Jack, astonished, “and I hope you will help me and give me some news of the Princess.”

“I do not know where the golden castle is, but God has made me the master of all the birds of the sky and I think that one of them will be able to give us some news. I will summon them and we shall see.”

And the old man blew on a silver whistle and birds of all shapes and sizes, from the wren to the eagle, arrived immediately in such great numbers that the sky was blocked out. The eagle was the last to arrive and only after it had been called twice. None of the others knew anything about the golden castle.

“Why did you not come as soon as I called you?” the hermit asked the eagle.

“I was a long way away, master,” replied the king of the birds. “I was at the golden castle above the Red Sea. The Princess will be married tomorrow and there are major preparations for the feasts and celebrations that will take place. A great number of animals of all sorts have been slaughtered – cows, calves, sheep... and I also had my share.”

“So you know where the golden castle is?”

“Of course, master, I have just come from there.”

“Excellent! Then you must take this man there immediately.” And he pointed towards Jack.

“I would happily do that, but on the condition that I can eat whenever I want, as it is a long way from here.”

“Don’t worry, you shall be able to eat.”

A dozen sheep belonging to a giant, whose castle was nearby, were slaughtered, cut into quarters and loaded onto the back of the eagle, then Jack climbed on top of everything and the eagle rose into the air and set off in the direction of the golden castle. Whenever the bird wanted something to eat, it would cry out, “Awk!”, and Jack would give it a quarter of a sheep. But the cry of “Awk!” came often and soon the supplies started to run low. And then they were above the Red Sea. “Awk! Awk!” cried the eagle incessantly. Everything had been eaten and the eagle continually cried out, “Awk! Awk!”

“I have nothing left, my poor creature, you have eaten everything,” Jack said to him.

“I have to eat to keep up my strength,” replied the eagle.

“How can I give you anything to eat when there’s nothing left? Don’t give up! We’re not far away. I can see the castle walls.”

“Give me something to eat, quickly, or I’ll throw you off – I can’t go any further without eating.”

So Jack cut off a piece of his right calf and gave it to the eagle to eat.

“That’s good, but it’s very small!” said the eagle as he swallowed it.

A moment later the eagle cried out again, “Awk! Awk!” and said, “Give me something to eat or I’ll throw you off.”

So Jack cut off a piece of his left calf and gave it to him.

And after that he had to sacrifice his right buttock, and then his left buttock...

At last the eagle reached the castle and set Jack down outside the walls. He had lost so much blood that he was almost dead. Fortunately he remembered that the first hermit he had visited on his journey had given him a small pot of ointment that he had promised him would be a certain cure for wounds and injuries, however serious they might be. He rubbed himself with it and immediately his calves were restored, his buttocks as well, and he found himself fully restored and as healthy and vigorous as he had ever been.

At around ten o’ clock, just as the procession was on its way to the church with great pomp and ceremony, Jack went to place himself on the route in such a way that he would be noticed. The Princess recognized him and was very moved. She pretended to be unwell and unable to go any further and asked that the ceremony be postponed until the following day, which was done. For the next three days she performed the same routine. On the third day the wedding breakfast took place, even though they hadn’t been to the church, and Jack was also invited as if he was a foreign prince who

had come from afar, as the Princess had found a way to provide him with some fine clothes, decorated with diamonds.

Towards the end of the meal everybody was very merry and they were all telling stories of their conquests and tales of derring-do.

“And what about the new bride?” said the old King. “What have you got to tell us?”

So the Princess stood up and spoke thus:

“There is one thing that troubles me, Sir. You have the age, experience and wisdom to undoubtedly help me out of a spot of bother.”

“Speak, Princess,” said the old man, flattered by the compliment.

“Some time ago I lost the key to my treasure-house and I had to have a new one made. But I happened to find the old one, so that I now have two of them. Which one would you advise me to use, the old one or the new one?”

“Honour is always due to that which is old,” replied the King, “so you should give preference to your old key.”

“That was my thought exactly,” replied the Princess.

And pointing to Jack, she said, “This is the man who saved me when I was bewitched in the form of a hideous toad. And he’s the one who has had all the trouble. And thus he is also the one who will be my husband and no other!”

And going to Jack, she took him by the hand and together they went out of the banqueting hall to the great astonishment of everybody and without anybody saying a word. Once they were in the castle courtyard, a beautiful golden carriage came down from the sky. They climbed inside and immediately the carriage once again rose into the air and soon disappeared. The Princess took Jack to her father’s palace and there they were married and this time there were magnificent feasts and celebrations.

The old King died soon after and Tuppenny Jack reigned and governed in his place and they say he did so very wisely.