

TOM, THE TRADER.

"I really think that it is time to be deciding what our Tom is to be when he grows up," said an old woman one evening to her husband. "He is getting to be a good big boy, and almost before we know it he will be a man."

"I have been thinking about that a good deal of late," replied the husband, "and I have decided that he must be a merchant. That is about the only way that he will become rich. Now, I am a shoemaker, and a good one, but though I work early and late and live very plainly I can never get any more than our daily bread. But there is Bill Smith, whom I played with as a boy, his father was no richer than mine, but he became a merchant and is wealthy and people call him Mister Smith. Yes, Tom must be a merchant."

"Well, it is time he was learning how," said the wife. "A boy must be trained in his youth if he is to succeed in his age. How in the world can he ever become a merchant unless he learns something about it now? What is a merchant, anyhow?"

"How ignorant you are, my dear," said the shoemaker: "a merchant is a person who sells things."

"But how does he get things to sell?" the wife asked.

"How can he get them except by buying them?" exclaimed the shoemaker.

"Then he must have some money first," she said.

"Yes, of course," he replied; "but it does not take much to begin on. Now, to-morrow I am going to begin with our Tom. I will give him \$1 and tell him what to do with it and he will soon have plenty." The old woman thought that a good plan, for she said that if the boy was ever to be rich, the sooner he began the better. So the next morning as Tom was about ready to start for school the shoemaker gave him \$1, with a great many instructions as to how he should make use of it.

"I warrant you he will come home with \$2, if not \$3," he said to his wife as they stood in the door and watched Tom trudging away to the school-house with his hand in his pocket tightly holding the dollar. He had scarcely ever in his life seen so much money, and felt very proud to be trusted with it, and was fully determined to buy something with it as soon as possible.

"But it must be something that I can sell again for more," he said to himself. He had not got to the school house when he met another boy. Tom showed him the dollar and told him what he was going to do with it.

"I am glad you told me," said the boy, "for I have got something in my pocket that you can sell very easily," and he took out a fine new pocket-knife.

"There," he said, "you know that all boys like pocket-knives. They will give all the money they have for a good one. My uncle gave me this yesterday, and as I have an old one I do not need it and will let you have it for your \$1." Tom did not know how much the knife was really worth, but it was bright and new, and the best one that he had ever seen, so he gave the \$1 and put it in his pocket. When he got to the school he went around to all the boys, trying to sell the knife for \$1.50.

"Oh, ho! You must be a goose," cried one of the boys. "That knife is not worth half the money. You'll be lucky to get half a dollar for it. But I don't believe you'll get it, for you know very well that only the sons of very rich men have so much money to spend. Poor people can only spend money for what they have to have, and they can get along very well without pocket-knives. Now, to help you along I'll tell you how to sell the knife."

"You swap your new book bag for the knife. It will be easy enough to sell a book bag, for every scholar needs one. This seemed reasonable to Tom, so the knife was soon exchanged for the book bag. It was a very nice new one and Tom was soon trying to sell it, but none of the boys wanted to buy it. Some had no money and others said that they could get along very well carrying their books under their arms without any bag. Tom felt rather discouraged when the bell rang for school, but presently the boy behind him whispered, "I tell you what, Tom, I've got a beautiful picture book in my desk that I'll swap you for your book bag. It will be very easy to sell that. I was offered half a dollar for it only yesterday." Tom looked at the book, and as the picture were very pretty he made the trade and spent the time before recess looking at the pretty pictures instead of studying his lessons. At recess time he began looking for the boy who wanted to buy the book, but there was no such boy at school. One of the boys, however, admired it very much, and after turning over the leaves said:

"Say, Tom, this is a fine book and no mistake, I would like to have it for present to my sister, but you ask far too much for it. A quarter will buy as pretty a book as that in any store. I have a large humming top which was given me at Christmas. I will swap you that for your book, and you know yourself that boys like tops much better than books. There are very few boys who will look at a book unless they have to, but all boys like to spin tops."

"That is very true," said Tom; "perhaps I had better swap." So the exchange was soon made, and Tom went about with the pretty top in his hand offering to sell it. I was very pretty painted and hummed very musically when it was spun, but when Tom asked \$1 for it the boys all laughed at him. "Why, Smith, the merchant, has plenty of such tops as that to sell, and he only asks fifteen cents for them!"

"For my part," said one, "I don't care for humming tops, anyway. I much prefer a plug top. You can have a heap more fun with that. Just fancy playing peg-top with that thing. It would be ruined in a minute. Now, I have two fine peg tops, and as it is top time now all the boys want tops. I don't need but one, so I'll swap you the other for your old hummer."

Tom looked at the top and it was just such a one as he longed to have himself, but he never had the money to buy it. He knew that it was only worth five cents, but then he could get nothing at all for the humming top, so he concluded to exchange. Just then the school bell rang and the boys all had to go in. Tom was sitting in his seat looking at his top, when the boy in front of him whispered: "What a silly you are, Tom, to get a top this time of the year! Don't you know that top time is about over and that it is marble time now? You will see after school. Every boy who is lucky enough to have a marble will be playing, and the tops will all be put away till next year. Now, if you had some nice marbles you might do something with them."

"But I haven't got any marbles," said Tom.

"Well, you have a fine top. Why don't you swap that for some marbles?"

"Have you got any to swap?" asked Tom.

"I've got some," said the boy, "but I don't care to part with them. However, I will give you a glassy and five chinias for the top, just to oblige you."

Tom thanked him very much for his kindness, and the trade was made. School was soon out, but instead of playing marbles, as the boys had told Tom they would, the boys all played with their tops. Tom asked some of them to play marbles, but none of those who had tops cared to play. Tom tried to sell the marbles, but nobody wanted them.

"They're no good," said one of the boys; "the glassy is cracked and the chinias have the painted stripes worn off of them. I wouldn't give you a cent for the whole six."

"Well, I don't know what to do," said Tom.

"It's too bad," said the boy; "I'm sorry that you are in such bad luck, and I'll take back what I said and give you a cent for the marbles. You can buy candy with that, and candy is easy to sell to boys. Every one will buy that has any money."

So Tom took the cent and going to the store he bought a cent's worth of candy and returned to the playground to try to sell it to his companions. Unfortunately for him none of them had any money. They all wanted the candy and begged Tom for a taste. Tom would not give it to them. He said it was too late and not to give away. Presently it began to grow late and the boys went away to their homes one and two at a time, until Tom was left quite alone. "Well, if I cannot sell the candy," he said to himself, "at least I can eat it." So he started for home, eating the candy as he went, and by the time he reached the gate it was all gone. When he entered the house the first thing that he saw was a note pinned to the door. It was from his father, asking what he had done with the \$1. "Let me see your money!" said the shoemaker.

"I haven't any money," said Tom.

"What did you do with your \$1?" asked his mother.

"I bought a fine new pocket knife with it," said Tom.

"That was good business," said she; "every boy would like to have a pocket knife."

"You sold it for a good deal of money, I suppose?" said his father.

"No; I could find nobody to buy it, so I exchanged it for a splendid new book bag."

"What a smart boy that is!" cried his mother. "If one thing would not sell, he exchanged it for something that would!"

"You surely got a good price for the book bag?" said the shoemaker.

"No; nobody seemed to want a book bag, so I traded it for a beautiful picture book."

"Now, that's what I call common sense!" said the mother. "A picture book is very impressive to the mind, and, besides, what would sell better in a school than a book?"

"And how much did you get for the book?" asked his father.

"Well, I didn't get any money for it," replied Tom, "but I did the best thing that I could. I exchanged it for a magnificent humming top."

"How smart!" cried the mother.

"Of course a fine humming top would be more suitable than an old book, which, no doubt, was somewhat thumb-nailed already."

"And you got a good deal of money for the humming top, I suppose?" said the shoemaker.

"Not money, exactly," said Tom, "as the big boys in our school do not care for humming tops, so I traded for a peg top."

"That was good business," murmured the mother.

"And what became of the top?" asked the shoemaker.

"I exchanged it for some marbles, because it is not top time," said Tom.

"What could be shrewder than that!" exclaimed the mother.

"And where are the marbles?" asked the shoemaker.

"I sold them for a cent," said Tom.

"Oh, how smart! I knew he would prove a merchant!" said the mother.

"Let me see the cent," said the father.

"I bought some candy with it to sell to the boys, because boys always love candy."

"Why, that was the smartest thing yet!" cried the mother.

"And how much did you get for the candy?" asked the shoemaker.

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