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The History of Tom Thumb, et. al.

Includes:

The Stories of the Cat and the Mouse

Fire! Fire! Burn Stick!

Edited by Henry Altemus

December, 1999 [Etext #1988]

The Project Gutenberg Etext of The History of Tom Thumb, et. al.

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The History of Tom Thumb

To which are added

The Stories of the Cat and the Mouse

and

Fire! Fire! Burn Stick!

Edited by Henry Altemus

*

The History of Tom Thumb

It is said that in the days of the famed Prince Arthur, who was king of Britain, in the year 516, there lived a great magician, called Merlin, the most learned and skilful enchanter in the world at that time.

This great magician, who could assume any form he pleased, was travelling in the disguise of a poor beggar, and being very much fatigued, he stopped at the cottage of an honest ploughman to rest himself, and asked for some refreshment.

The countryman gave him a hearty welcome, and his wife, who was a very good-hearted, hospital woman, soon brought him some milk in a wooden bowl, and some coarse brown bread on a platter.

Merlin was much pleased with this homely repast and the kindness of

the ploughman and his wife; but he could not help seeing that though everything was neat and comfortable in the cottage, they seemed both to be sad and much cast down. He therefore questioned them on the cause of their sadness, and learned they were miserable because they had no children.

The poor woman declared, with tears in her eyes, that she should be the happiest creature in the world if she had a son; and although he was no bigger than her husband's thumb, she would be satisfied.

Merlin was so much amused with the idea of a boy no bigger than a man's thumb, that he made up his mind to pay a visit to the queen of the fairies, and ask her to grant the poor woman's wish. The droll fancy of such a little person among the human race pleased the fairy queen too, greatly, and she promised Merlin that the wish should be granted. Accordingly, a short time after, the ploughman's wife had a son, who, wonderful to relate! was not bigger than his father's thumb.

The fairy queen, wishing to see the little fellow thus born into the world, came in at the window while the mother was sitting up in bed admiring him. The queen kissed the child, and, giving it the name of Tom Thumb, sent for some of the fairies, who dressed her little favorite as she bade them.

"An oak-leaf hat he had for his crown;
His shirt of web by spiders spun;
With jacket wove of thistle's down;
His trowsers were of feathers done.

His stockings, of apple-rind they tie
With eyelash from his mother's eye:
His shoes were made of mouse's skin
Tann'd with the downy hair within."

It is remarkable that Tom never grew any larger than his father's thumb, which was only of an ordinary size; but as he got older he became very cunning and full of tricks. When he was old enough to play with the boys, and had lost all his own cherry-stones, he used to creep into the bags of his playfellows, fill his pockets, and, getting out unseen, would again join in the game.

One day, however, as he was coming out of a bag of cherrystones, where he had been pilfering as usual, the boy to whom it belonged chanced to see him. "Ah, ha! my little Tommy," said the boy, "so I have caught you stealing my cherrystones at last, and you shall be rewarded for your thievish tricks." On saying this, he drew the string tight around his neck, and gave the bag such a hearty shake, that poor little Tom's legs, thighs, and body were sadly bruised. He roared out in pain, and begged to be let out, promising never to be guilty of such bad practices again.

A short time afterwards his mother was making a batter-pudding, and Tom being very anxious to see how it was made, climbed up to the edge of the bowl; but unfortunately his foot slipped and he plumped over head

and ears into the batter, unseen by his mother, who stirred him into the pudding-bag, and put him in the pot to boil.

The batter had filled Tom's mouth, and prevented him from crying; but, on feeling the hot water, he kicked and struggled so much in the pot, that his mother thought that the pudding was bewitched, and, instantly pulling it out of the pot, she threw it to the door. A poor tinker, who was passing by, lifted up the pudding, and, putting it into his budget, he then walked off. As Tom had now got his mouth cleared of the batter, he then began to cry aloud, which so frightened the tinker that he flung down the pudding and ran away. The pudding being broke to pieces by the fall, Tom crept out covered over with the batter, and with difficulty walked home. His mother, who was very sorry to see her darling in such a woeful state, put him into a tea-cup, and soon washed off the batter; after which she kissed him, and laid him in bed.

Soon after the adventure of the pudding, Tom's mother went to milk her cow in the meadow, and she took him along with her. As the wind was very high, fearing lest he should be blown away, she tied him to a thistle with a piece of fine thread. The cow soon saw the oak-leaf hat, and, liking the look of it, took poor Tom and the thistle at one mouthful. While the cow was chewing the thistle Tom was afraid of her great teeth, which threatened to crush him in pieces, and he roared out as loud as he could:

"Mother, mother!"

"Where are you, Tommy, my dear Tommy?" said his mother.

"Here, mother," replied he, "in the red cow's mouth."

His mother began to cry and wring her hands; but the cow, surprised at the odd noise in her throat, opened her mouth and let Tom drop out. Fortunately his mother caught him in her apron as he was falling to the ground, or he would have been dreadfully hurt. She then put Tom in her bosom and ran home with him.

Tom's father made him a whip of barley straw to drive the cattle with, and having one day gone into the fields, he slipped a foot and rolled into the furrow. A raven, which was flying over, picked him up and flew with him to the top of a giant's castle that was near the seaside, and there left him.

Tom was in a dreadful state, and did not know what to do; but he was soon more dreadfully frightened; for old Grumbo, the giant, came up to walk on the terrace, and seeing Tom, he took him up and swallowed him like a pill.

The giant had no sooner swallowed Tom than he began to repent what he had done; for Tom began to kick and jump about so much that he felt very uncomfortable, and at last threw him up again into the sea. A large fish swallowed Tom the moment he fell into the sea, which was soon after caught, and bought for the table of King Arthur. When they opened

the fish in order to cook it, every one was astonished at finding such a little boy, and Tom was quite delighted to be out again. They carried him to the king, who made Tom his dwarf, and he soon grew a great favorite at court: for by his tricks and gambols he not only amused the king and queen, but also all the knights of the Round Table.

It is said that when the king rode out on horseback he often took Tom along with him, and if a shower came on he used to creep into his majesty's waistcoat pocket, where he slept till the rain was over.

King Arthur one day asked Tom about his parents, wishing to know if they were as small as he was, and whether rich or poor. Tom told the king that his father and mother were as tall as any of the persons about the court, but rather poor. On hearing this the king carried Tom to the treasury, the place where he kept all his money, and told him to take as much money as he could carry home to his parents, which made the poor little fellow caper with joy. Tom went immediately to fetch a purse, which was made of a water-bubble, and then returned to the treasury, where he got a silver three-penny-piece to put into it.

Our little hero had some trouble in lifting the burden upon his back; but he at last succeeded in getting it placed to his mind, and set forward on his journey. However, without meeting with any accidents, and after resting himself more than a hundred times by the way, in two days and two nights he reached his father's house in safety.

Tom had travelled forty-eight hours with a huge silver-piece on his back, and was almost tired to death, when his mother ran out to meet him, and carried him into the house.

Tom's parents were both happy to see him, and the more so as he had brought such an amazing sum of money with him; but the poor little fellow was excessively wearied, having travelled half a mile in forty-eight hours, with a huge silver three-penny-piece on his back. His mother, in order to recover him, placed him in a walnut shell by the fireside, and feasted him for three days on a hazel nut, which made him very sick; for a whole nut used to serve him a month.

Tom was soon well again; but as there had been a fall of rain, and the ground was very wet, he could not travel back to King Arthur's court; therefore his mother, one day when the wind was blowing in that direction, made a little parasol of cambric paper, and tying Tom to it, she gave him a puff into the air with her mouth, which soon carried him to the king's palace.

Just at the time when Tom came flying across the courtyard, the cook happened to be passing with the king's great bowl of furmenty, which was a dish his majesty was very fond of; but unfortunately the poor little fellow fell plump into the middle of it, and splashed the hot furmenty about the cook's face.

The cook, who was an ill-natured fellow, being in a terrible rage at Tom for frightening and scalding him with the furmenty, went straight to

the king, and said that Tom had jumped into the royal furmenty, and thrown it down out of mere mischief. The king was so enraged when he heard this, that he ordered Tom to be seized and tried for high treason; and there being no person who dared to plead for him, he was condemned to be beheaded immediately.

On hearing this dreadful sentence pronounced, poor Tom fell a-trembling with fear, but, seeing no means of escape, and observing a miller close to him gaping with his great mouth, as country boobies do at a far, he took a leap, and fairly jumped down his throat. This exploit was done with such activity that not one person present saw it, and even the miller did not know the trick which Tom had played upon him. Now, as Tom had disappeared, the court broke up, and the miller went home to his mill.

When Tom heard the mill at work he knew he was clear of the court, and therefore he began to tumble and roll about, so that the poor miller could get no rest, thinking he was bewitched; so he sent for a doctor. When the doctor came, Tom began to dance and sing; and the doctor, being as much frightened as the miller, sent in haste for five other doctors and twenty learned men.

When they were debating about this extraordinary case, the miller happened to yawn, when Tom, seizing the chance, made another jump, and alighted safely upon his feet in the middle of the table.

The miller, who was very much provoked at being tormented by such a little pygmy creature, fell into a terrible rage, and, laying hold of Tom, ran to the king with him; but his majesty, being engaged with state affairs, ordered him to be taken away and kept in custody till he sent for him.

The cook was determined that Tom should not slip out of his hands this time, so he put him into a mouse-trap, and left him to peep through the wires. Tom had remained in the trap a whole week, when he was sent for by King Arthur, who pardoned him for throwing down the furmenty, and took him again into favor. On account of his wonderful feats of activity, Tom was knighted by the king, and went under the name of the renowned Sir Thomas Thumb. As Tom's clothes had suffered much in the batter-pudding, the furmenty, and the insides of the giant, miller, and fishes, his majesty ordered him a new suit of clothes, and to be mounted as a knight.

"Of Butterfly's wings his shirt was made,
His boots of chicken's hide;
And by a nimble fairy blade,
Well learned in the tailoring trade,

His clothing was supplied.--
A needle dangled by his side;
A dapper mouse he used to ride,
Thus strutted Tom in stately pride!"

It was certainly very diverting to see Tom in this dress, and mounted on the mouse, as he rode out a-hunting with the king and nobility, who were all ready to expire with laughter at Tom and his fine prancing charger.

One day, as they were riding by a farmhouse, a large cat, which was lurking about the door, made a spring, and seized both Tom and his mouse. She then ran up a tree with them, and was beginning to devour the mouse; but Tom boldly drew his sword, and attacked the cat so fiercely that she let them both fall, when one of the nobles caught him in his hat, and laid him on a bed of down, in a little ivory cabinet.

The queen of fairies came soon after to pay Tom a visit, and carried him back to Fairy-land, where he lived several years. During his residence there, King Arthur, and all the persons who knew Tom, had died; and as he was desirous of being again at court, the fairy queen, after dressing him in a suit of clothes, sent him flying through the air to the palace, in the days of king Thunstone, the successor of Arthur. Every one flocked round to see him, and being carried to the king, he was asked who he was--whence he came--and where he lived? Tom answered:

"My name is Tom Thumb,
From the fairies I've come.
When King Arthur shone,
His court was my home.
In me he delighted,
By him I was knighted;
Did you never hear of Sir Thomas Thumb?"

The king was so charmed with this address that he ordered a little chair to be made, in order that Tom might sit upon his table, and also a palace of gold, a span high, with a door an inch wide, to live in. He also gave him a coach, drawn by six small mice.

The queen was so enraged at the honor paid to Sir Thomas that she resolved to ruin him, and told the king that the little knight had been saucy to her.

The king sent for Tom in great haste, but being fully aware of the danger of royal anger, he crept into an empty snail-shell, where he lay for a long time, until he was almost starved with hunger; but at last he ventured to peep out, and seeing a fine large butterfly on the ground, near his hiding-place, he approached very cautiously, and getting himself placed astride on it, was immediately carried up into the air. The butterfly flew with him from tree to tree and from field to field, and at last returned to the court, where the king and nobility all strove to catch him; but at last poor Tom fell from his seat into a watering-pot, in which he was almost drowned.

When the queen saw him she was in a rage, and said he should be beheaded; and he was again put into a mouse-trap until the time of his execution.

However, a cat, observing something alive in the trap, patted it about till the wires broke, and set Thomas at liberty.

The king received Tom again into favor, which he did not live to enjoy, for a large spider one day attacked him; and although he drew his sword and fought well, yet the spider's poisonous breath at last overcame him;

"He fell dead on the ground where he stood,
and the spider suck'd every drop of his blood."

King Thunstone and his whole court were so sorry at the loss of their little favorite, that they went into mourning, and raised a fine white marble monument over his grave, with the following epitaph:

"Here lyes Tom Thumb, King Arthur's knight,
Who died by a spider's cruel bite.
He was well known in Arthur's court,
Where he afforded gallant sport;
He rode at tilt and tournament,
And on a mouse a-hunting went.
Alive he filled the court with mirth;
His death to sorrow soon gave birth.
Wipe, wipe your eyes, and shake your head,
And cry,--Alas! Tom Thumb is dead!"

The Cat and the Mouse

The cat and the mouse
Played in the malt-house:

The cat bit the mouse's tail off. "Pray, puss, give me my tail."
"No," says the cat, "I'll not give you your tail, till you go to the cow
and fetch me some milk."

First she leapt, and then she ran,
Till she came to the cow, and thus began,--

"Pray, cow, give me milk, that I may give cat milk, that cat may give
me my own tail again." "No," said the cow, "I will give you no milk,
till you go to the farmer and get me some hay."

First she leapt, and then she ran,
Till she came to the farmer, and thus began,--

"Pray, farmer, give me hay that I may give cow hay, that cow may give
me milk, that I may give cat milk, that cat may give me my own tail
again."

"No," says the farmer, "I'll give you no hay, till you go to the butcher and fetch me some meat."

First she leapt, and then she ran,
Till she came to the butcher, and thus began,--

"Pray, butcher, give me meat, that I may give farmer meat, that farmer may give me hay, that I may give cow hay, that cow may give me milk, that I may give cat milk, that cat may give me my own tail again."

"No," says the butcher, "I'll give you no meat till you go to the baker and fetch me some bread."

First she leapt, and then she ran,
Till she came to the baker, and thus began,--

"Pray, baker, give me bread, that I may give butcher bread, that butcher may give me meat, that I may give farmer meat, that farmer may give me hay, that I may give cow hay, that cow may give me milk, that I may give cat milk, that cat may give me my own tail again."

"Yes," says the baker, "I'll give you some bread,
But if you eat my meal, I'll cut off your head."

Then the baker gave mouse bread, and mouse gave butcher bread, and butcher gave mouse meat, and mouse gave farmer meat, and farmer gave mouse hay, and mouse gave cow hay, and cow gave mouse milk, and mouse gave cat milk, and cat gave mouse her own tail again!

Fire! Fire! Burn stick!

And old woman was sweeping her house, and she found a little crooked sixpence. "What," said she, "shall I do with this little sixpence? I will go to market and buy a little pig." As she was coming home she came to a stile; the piggy would not go over the stile.

She went a little farther, and she met a dog. So she said to the dog, "Dog! bit pig; piggy won't go over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the dog would not.

She went a little farther, and she met a stick. So she said, "Stick! stick! beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the stick would not.

She went a little farther, and she met a fire. So she said, "Fire! fire! burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy

won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the fire would not.

She went a little farther, and she met some water. So she said, "Water! water! quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the water would not.

She went a little farther, and she met an ox. So she said, "Ox! ox! drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the ox would not.

She went a little farther, and she met a butcher. So she said, "Butcher! butcher! kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the butcher would not.

She went a little farther, and she met a rope. So she said, "Rope! rope! hang butcher; butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the rope would not.

So she went a little farther, and she met a rat. So she said, "Rat! rat! gnaw rope; rope won't hang butcher; butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile and I shan't get home to-night." But the rat would not.

So she went a little farther, and she met a cat. So she said, "Cat! cat! kill rat; rat won't gnaw rope; rope won't hang butcher; butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night." But the cat said to her, "If you will go to yonder cow and fetch me a saucer of milk, I will kill the rat." So away went the old woman to the cow.

But the cow said to her, "If you will go to yonder haystack and fetch me a handful of hay, I'll give you the milk." So away went the old woman to the haystack; and she brought the hay to the cow.

As soon as the cow had eaten the hay she gave the old woman the milk, and away she went with it in a saucer to the cat.

As soon as the cat had lapped up the milk, the cat began to kill the rat; the rat began to gnaw the rope; the rope began to hang the butcher; the butcher began to kill the ox; the ox began to drink the water; the water began to quench the fire; the fire began to burn the stick; the stick began to beat the dog; the dog began to bite the pig; the little pig in a fright jumped over the stile; and so the old woman got home that night.

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