

eBook

The Magic Speech Flower

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The Magic Speech Flower

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THE MAGIC SPEECH FLOWER

I. THE FINDING OF THE MAGIC FLOWER

It was June and it was morning. The sky was clear and the sun shone bright and warm. The still air was filled with the sweet odor of blossoming flowers. To little Luke, sitting on the doorstep of the farmhouse and looking out over the fresh fields and green meadows, the whole earth seemed brimful of happiness and joy.

From the bough of an apple tree on the lawn O-pee-chee the Robin chanted his morning song. "Te rill, te roo, the sky is blue," sang he.

From the lilac bush Kil-loo the Song Sparrow trilled, "Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, the air is sweet."

Over in the meadows Zeet the Lark fluttered down upon a low bush and sang, "Come with me, come and see," over and over. Then he dropped down into the grass and ran off to the nest where his mate was sitting on five speckled eggs.

Bob-o'-Lincoln went quite out of his wits with the joy of life. He flew high up into the air, and then came fluttering and falling, falling and quivering down among the buttercups and daisies. He was very proud of himself and wanted everybody to know just who he was. So he sang his own name over and over. With his name-song he mixed up a lot of runs and trills and thrills that did not mean anything to anybody but himself and his little mate nestling below him in the grass. To her they meant, "Life is love, and love is joy."

Old Ka-ka-go the Crow, sitting on the top of the tall maple, felt that on such a morning as this he, too, must sing. So he opened his beak and croaked, "Caw, caw, caw, caw." What he meant to say was, "Corn, corn, corn, corn." Sam, the hired man, heard him and came out of the barn door with his gun. Old Ka-ka-go spread his black wings and flapped off to the woods on the side of the mountain.

Far up in the blue sky Kee-you the Red-shouldered Hawk wheeled slowly about in great circles. When he saw Sam with his gun, he screamed, "Kee-you, kee-you, kee-you," over and over.

That was a poor song, but a good war cry; It sent every singer plunging to cover. O-pee-chee the Robin hid himself among the thick branches of the apple tree. Kil-loo the Song Sparrow hopped into the thickest part of the lilac bush. Zeet the Lark and Bob Lincoln squatted in the thick grass. Not a bird note was to be heard.

But Ka-be-yun the West Wind was not afraid of the warrior hawk. He breathed softly among the branches of the trees and set every little leaf quivering and whispering. Then he ran across the meadows and the wheat fields. As he sped along, great waves like those of the sea rolled in wide sweeps across the meadow and through the tall wheat.

To little Luke it seemed as if the leaves and grass and wheat all whispered, "Come away. Come and play." Just then a great bumblebee flew by and now the call was clear. "Come away, come away! Follow, follow, follow me!"

The boy jumped up and ran down the path into the garden. There he met Old Klaws the House Cat, with a little brown baby rabbit in his mouth. "You wicked old cat," said little Luke, "drop it, drop it, I say." But Old Klaws only growled and gripped the little rabbit tighter. Little Luke seized the old cat by the back of the neck and choked him till he let go. The little brown rabbit looked up at him with his big round eyes, as much as to say, "Thank you, little boy, thank you." Then he hopped off into the thicket of berry bushes, where Old Klaws could not catch him again.

Little Luke went on down the path, through the garden gate, and into the meadow beyond. All at once Bob Lincoln sprang up out of the grass right before his feet.

Little Luke thought he would find Bob Lincoln's nest. So he got down upon his knees and began to look about in the grass very carefully. He did not find the nest, but he did find a fine cluster of ripe, wild strawberries. He forgot all about the nest and began to pick and eat the sweet berries. So he ate and ate till his lips and fingers were red as red wine and smelled strongly of ripe strawberries.

Suddenly, as he put out his hand for another cluster, up sprang a black and brown and yellow bird. That was Mrs. Bob Lincoln. Little Luke put aside the grass and there was the nest. It was so cunningly hidden that he could never have found it by looking for it.

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Lincoln were greatly frightened. They fluttered and quivered about, and talked to each other, and scolded at the boy. Little Luke could not understand what they said, but part of it sounded like, "Let it be! Don't touch, don't touch! Go away, please, p-l-e-a-s-e, go away." So he got up and said, "All right, don't be afraid. I'll not take your eggs, I'll go right away." And so he did.

When he had gone two or three rods, Mrs. Bob Lincoln fluttered down to her nest and settled herself quietly over her eggs. But Mr. Bob flew to a tall weed in front of little Luke. There he sat and swung and teetered and sang his merriest song. To the little boy it seemed as if he was trying to say, "Thank you, thank you, little boy."

There was an old apple tree standing near the meadow fence. On one of its branches was the nest of O-pee-chee the Robin. Both Mr. and Mrs. O-pee-chee had gone away to pick worms from the soft, fresh earth in the garden.

As little Luke drew near to the tree, he saw Mee-ko the Red Squirrel crouching by the side of the nest with a blue egg in his front paws. He had not yet broken the shell when he saw little Luke. At first he thought he would run away. But he wanted that egg; so he squatted very quietly where he was and hoped the little boy would not see him.

But little Luke's eyes were very keen. He saw Mee-ko and guessed what he was about. So he picked up a small round stone and threw it at the robber squirrel. His aim was so true that the stone flicked Mee-ko's tail where it curled over his shoulders.

Mee-ko was so scared that he dropped the egg back into the nest and ran along the branch and across to another. From the end of that he dropped down to the fence and scampered along the rails up toward the woods on the side of the mountain.

He went all the faster because Father O-pee-chee flew down into the branches of the apple tree just as little Luke threw the stone. He saw Mee-ko and understood exactly what had happened. He flew a little way after the thieving squirrel. Then he came back and lit on the highest branch of the apple tree and began to sing. "Te rill, te roo, I thank you; te rill, te roo, I thank you," the little boy thought he said.

Little Luke went over to the fence. In a bush beside the fence there was a big spider's web. Old Mrs. Ik-to the Black Spider had built the web as a trap to catch flies in. But this time there was something besides a fly in the trap. Ah-mo the Honey Bee had blundered, into the web and was trying hard to get away.

Old Mrs. Ik-to was greatly excited. She was not sure whether she wanted bee meat for dinner or not. She knew very well that bees are stronger than flies and that they carry a dreadful spear with a poisoned point.

Mrs. Ik-to ran down her web a little way, then she stopped and shook it. Ah-mo the Honey Bee was not so much entangled by the web that he could not sting and the old spider knew that. So she ran back again to one corner of the web.

Little Luke stood and watched poor Ah-mo for a moment. Then he took a twig from the bush and set him free. Ah-mo rubbed himself all over with his legs and tried his wings carefully to see if they were sound. Then he flew up from the ground and buzzed three times round little Luke's head.

The little boy was not afraid. He knew that bees never sting anyone who does not hurt or frighten them, and besides, he thought the buzzing had a friendly sound to it. It seemed to him as if Ah-mo was trying to say, "Thank you, little boy, thank you," as well as he could.

When Ah-mo had flown away, little Luke looked around to see what old Mrs. Ik-to was doing, but he could not find her.

Leaving the old spider to mend her web as well as she could, little Luke got over the fence into the pasture. As he was going along he heard Mrs. Chee-wink making a great outcry. She was flying about a little bushy fir tree not bigger than a currant bush. "Chee-wink, to-whee; chee-wink, to-whee!" she called. Little Luke thought she was saying, "Help! Help! Come here, come here!" And so she was.

[Illustration]

He went up toward the fir bush. As he walked along, he picked up a stout stick that was lying on the ground. When he came to the bush, Mrs. Chee-wink flew off to a tall sapling near by and watched him without saying a word.

At first he could not see anything to disturb anybody. But he knew that Mrs. Chee-wink would never have made all that fuss for nothing. So he took hold of the fir bush and pulled the branches apart. Then he understood. He had almost put his hand on A-tos-sa the Big Blacksnake.

A-tos-sa had a half-grown bird by the wing and was trying to swallow it. The young bird was strong enough to flutter a good deal and Mother Chee-wink had flapped her wings in the snake's eyes and pecked his head, so that he had not been able to get a good hold.

Little Luke struck at once. The stick hit the snake and he let go of the bird and slid down to the ground. Little Luke hit him again, this time squarely on the head. Then with a stone he made sure that A-tos-sa would never try to eat young birds again.

After he had finished with the snake, he picked up the young bird which had fallen to the ground. It seemed more scared than hurt, so he put it carefully into the nest, where there were two other young birds. Then he went on up toward the woods.

Mrs. Chee-wink flew back to the fir bush. She looked first at the dead snake and then at her nest. Then she said, "Chee-wink, chee-wink, to-whee, chee-wink, to-whee," two or three times very softly and settled down quietly on her nest. Of course that meant, "Thank you, little boy, thank you!"

Up above the fir bush in the pasture stood an old apple tree, all alone by itself. On a dead branch was Ya-rup the Flicker. He was using the hard shell of the dead branch for a drum. "Rat, a tat, tat," he went faster and faster, till the beats ran into one long resounding roll. Then he stopped and screamed, "Kee-yer, kee-yer!" Perhaps he meant, "Well done! good boy! good boy!"

You see he had seen little Luke's battle with the blacksnake and was drumming and screaming for joy. Little Luke stopped under the old apple tree and listened to Ya-rup's drumming and screaming for a while. Then he went on up to the edge of the big woods.

There he found an old trail which he followed a long way till it forked. Right in the fork of the trail, he saw a young bird. Its feathers were not half grown and of course it could not fly. Little Luke knew that it must have fallen out of the nest by accident. So he ran after the frightened little bird and picked it up very carefully. Just then O-loo-la the Wood

Thrush flew down into a bush by the side of the trail and began to plead, "Pit'y! pit'y! don't hurt him! Let him go, little boy; please let him go!" he seemed to say.

Little Luke looked around for the nest. Soon he saw it in a tangle of vines that ran over a dogwood bush.

Very carefully he picked his way through the bushes toward the nest. O-loo-la seemed to guess what he meant to do and hopped from bush to bush without saying a word.

When the little boy went to put the young bird back into the nest, he saw why he had fallen out. There were three young birds in it, and they filled it so full that there was scarcely room for another. Little Luke saw that the bird he held was smaller than the others. So he took one of them out and put his bird down into the middle of the nest. Then he put the bigger one back. When this one snuggled down into the nest, it was quite full.

When little Luke went back into the trail, O-loo-la flew to a branch over his head and began to sing very happily. The little boy thought that he, too, was trying to say, "Thank you, little boy, thank you."

Little Luke took the left-hand trail and followed it till he came to a beautiful spring which gushed from under a tall rock. He lay down upon his stomach and took a long drink of the cool, sweet water.

Just beside the spring stood a big beech tree. Near the ground two large roots spread out at a broad angle. Little Luke sat down between the roots and leaned his head against the tree. It was a very comfortable seat. So he sat there and dreamed with his eyes wide open. Just what he was dreaming about he did not know. He only knew that he felt very happy and very quiet.

Mee-ko the Red Squirrel ran out upon a branch just over his head and peeked and peered at him with his bright, inquisitive eyes. As little Luke sat very still, Mee-ko cocked his long tail up over his shoulders and sat and watched him.

Little Luke felt so very comfortable and quiet that he closed his eyes for a moment. At least it seemed only a moment to him. All at once he heard a loud hum. He opened his eyes and there was Ah-mo the Honey Bee just before his face. When Ah-mo saw that little Luke was watching him, he flew down toward the spring and lit upon a beautiful flower.

Little Luke was surprised; he had not seen that flower before. It was a very beautiful flower. He leaned over and looked at it. Its petals were blue as the sky, except near the heart, where they were pink as a baby's fingers; and its heart was as yellow as gold.

Little Luke reached out his hand to pick the strange flower. As soon as Mee-ko saw what he was doing, he fairly screamed. To little Luke it seemed as if he said, "Stop, stop, let it be. Leave it alone. Go away."

Little Luke was used to Mee-ko's scolding. He had heard it many times before, but never before had he thought there was any sense in it. It seemed very queer to him that he could understand the speech of a squirrel.

In his surprise he forgot about the strange flower and sat looking up at Mee-ko. At once Mee-ko became quiet. He ran along the branch and down the tree behind little Luke. Then he leaped to the ground and ran across to another tree. When he thought he was safe, he began to talk and scold again. To the little boy it seemed as if Mee-ko was saying, "Come here, come away, follow me, follow me!"

But little Luke did not care to chase Mee-ko. He knew he could not catch him, and besides, he wanted the strange flower. As soon as he reached out his hand for it again, Mee-ko began to scold more angrily than before. "Stop, let it

alone, go away," he screamed.

"That is queer," thought little Luke; "I wonder what is the matter with him. What can he care about the strange flower?"

Just then Ah-mo the Honey Bee flew up toward little Luke and then back again to the flower. Little Luke reached over and seized the flower. The stem was strong and he pulled it up, root and all. He put it to his nose. Its odor was strangely sweet. From the broken stem some clear juice oozed out upon his hand. Ah-mo the Honey Bee flew down and sipped it. Then he rose and began to buzz around little Luke's head. Without thinking, the little boy put his hand to his lips and his mouth was filled with a strange, sweet taste. At the same time a mist rose before his eyes, a strange feeling ran through his body, and his head swam.

In a moment the strange feeling passed away and the mist cleared from before his face. He looked up and could scarcely believe his eyes. There in a half circle around him sat a strange company--the strangest he had ever seen.

There was Mo-noon the Woodchuck, Unk-wunk the Hedgehog, A-pe-ka the Polecat, Wa-poose the Rabbit, A-bal-ka the Chipmunk, Tav-wots the Cottontail, Mic-ka the Coon, and Shin-ga the Gray Squirrel. At one end of the line stood Mit-chee the Partridge, Ko-leen-o the Quail, and O-he-la the Woodcock. On the branches above them were Ya-rup the Flicker, O-pee-chee the Robin, O-loo-la the Wood Thrush, Har-por the Brown Thrasher, Chee-wink the Ground Robin, Tur-wee the Bluebird, Zeet the Lark, and Bob Lincoln. Little Luke was surprised to see the last two, for he had never seen them in the woods before.

"What can have happened to me?" said little Luke aloud. All the creatures in that strange assembly stirred slightly and looked at Wa-poose the big Rabbit. Wa-poose hopped forward a step or two and stood up on his hind legs. His ears were stretched straight up over his head, his paws were crossed in front of him, and he looked very queer.

[Illustration: *The magic speech flower*]

Then to little Luke's surprise, he spoke. "Man Cub," said Wa-poose, "a wonderful thing has happened to you. You have found the Magic Speech Flower and tasted its blood. By its power you are able to understand the speech of all the wild folk of field and forest. This great gift has come to you because your heart has been full of loving kindness toward all the creatures that the Master of Life has made.

"Only he can find the Magic Flower who, between the rising and the setting of the sun, has done five deeds of mercy and kindness toward the wild folk of forest and field. These five deeds you have done."

Wa-poose paused. For a moment there was silence. All the wild folk looked steadfastly at the little boy, who in turn gazed at them with wonder-filled eyes. Then he spoke. "Five deeds! What five deeds have I done?" he asked, forgetting all about his morning's work.

"This morning you saved my child from the fierce jaws of Klaws the House Cat. You drove off Mee-ko the thieving Red Squirrel when he was trying to steal the eggs from the nest of O-pee-chee. You helped Ah-mo escape from the trap of wicked old Ik-to. You saved Chee-wink's fledglings from the cruel fangs of A-tos-sa, and you put the young one back into O-loo-la's nest safely.

"Two things you must remember if you wish to keep this magic power. You must never needlessly or in sport hurt or kill any of the wild creatures that the Master of Life has made and you must tell no one what has happened to you. If you give heed to these two things, we will all be your friends. When you walk abroad, you shall see us when no one else can, and we will talk with you and teach you all the wisdom and the ways of the wild kindreds."

Just then the sound of footsteps was heard coming down the trail. The gray mist rose again before little Luke's eyes and he heard someone say, "Wake up, little boy, it is almost noon. Your Aunt Martha will have dinner on the table before you can get back to the farmhouse."

Little Luke looked up and there was Old John the Indian, who lived in a lonely cabin on the other side of the mountain, and sometimes came to the farmhouse to sell game he had killed or baskets that he had woven.

Little Luke sprang up and rubbed his eyes. Not one of the wild folk was to be seen. But he held in his hand a broken and crumpled flower. He put the flower into his pocket and went along down the trail toward the farmhouse with Old John.

[Illustration]

II. LITTLE LUKE AND THE BOB LINCOLNS

That night little Luke dreamed of the Magic Flower. The next morning, as soon as he had finished his breakfast, he ran down through the garden and into the meadow. He was eager to see his wild friends again and to try his new gifts, "Perhaps," he thought, "it was only a dream after all."

As soon as Bob Lincoln saw him, he came flying across the meadow to meet him, his black and white uniform gleaming in the bright sunlight. "Good morning, little boy, good morning," he trilled, and his voice sounded like the tinkling of a silver bell.

"Good morning, Bob Lincoln," said the little boy, delighted that he really could understand Bob Lincoln's language. "How is Mrs. Bob Lincoln this morning?"

"Come and see, come and see," trilled Bob Lincoln, in his sweetest and friendliest voice.

Little Luke walked over to the nest. When she heard him coming, Mrs. Bob Lincoln was scared and flew up from the nest.

But as soon as she saw who it was, she fluttered down upon the top of a tall weed and said, "Oh, it's you, is it, little boy? I heard someone coming and I was frightened, but I am not afraid of you." And so she sat swinging and teetering on the tall weed.

The little boy looked at the nest and admired the pretty eggs. "Oh, they're coming on finely," said Mrs. Bob Lincoln. "In a day or two I will show you five of the handsomest baby Bob Lincolns you will ever see. I heard them peeping inside of the shells this morning."

The little boy looked at the father and mother birds. "Bob Lincoln," said he, "I wish you would tell me why you and Mrs. Bob Lincoln are so unlike. Your coat is white and black; her dress is black and brown and yellow. You do not look as if you belonged to the same family."

"Well," said Bob Lincoln, "that is a long story."

"Oh, please tell it," said little Luke; "I want so much to hear it."

"Well," said Bob Lincoln, "we have both had our breakfast and I have sung my morning song. So if Mrs. Bob will excuse me [Mrs. Bob gracefully bowed her permission] I will take the time. You go over there and sit down under the

old apple tree and I will come and find a comfortable twig and tell you all about it."

When little Luke had seated himself cozily with his back against the trunk of the old apple tree, Bob Lincoln began his story.

III. THE STORY OF THE SUMMER LAND

"Long, long ago when the world was new," said he, "the first Bob Lincoln family lived in a beautiful country in the distant north. In that country it was always summer. None of those who dwelt in that land knew what winter was.

"Ke-honk-a the Gray Goose, who spent half the year in northern Greenland, had mentioned it, but the people of the Summer Land did not understand him. They had never felt winds or seen ice or snow.

"But there came a time when Ke-honk-a said, as he flew over, 'Winter is coming, winter is coming.' But nobody understood and nobody cared. Why should they care about winter when they did not know what it was?

"Soon after this the people of the Summer Land noticed a change in the weather. One half of the year was cooler than the other half. The first time this happened they did not mind it at all. Indeed, they rather liked it. It was pleasant to have a change.

"The next year it was cooler and the next still cooler. And so it went on for some years, each winter getting colder than that which had gone before.

"One day a dull, gray cloud came up out of the north and hid the face of the sun. Out of its gray bosom there came floating to earth a whole flock of big, white snowflakes. The people of the Summer Land were amazed.

"As the great flakes came wavering lazily down through the air, they looked at them and thought that they must be some new kind of winged creatures. 'What a lot of them,' thought they, 'there must be to make that great cloud which hides the sun!'

"In a short time the sun shone out from behind the gray cloud. In the twinkling of an eye all the snowflakes were gone. 'Strange, strange!' thought the people of the Summer Land. 'What has become of all those white-winged creatures?'

"The next winter so many snowflakes fell that they hid the brown earth for many weeks. This happened again and again, and the people of the Summer Land began to understand what winter was. The snow became so deep for months at a time that they found it hard to get food.

"After a while life became so hard for them that they felt that something must be done. So they summoned a Great Council to consider the matter. After much talk they decided to send a messenger to the Master of Life, who lived far away among the western mountains, to beg him to come and help them. For their messenger they chose the swallow, the swiftest of all the birds.

"The swallow flew for many days, until at last he reached the lodge of the Master of Life, and told his story.

"Go back,' said the Master when he had heard it, 'and after four moons I will come to visit you. Summon all the people of the Summer Land to a Great Council and I will tell them what they must do.'

"At the time appointed, the Master of Life came. When all the people of the Summer Land had assembled, he spoke to them and said, 'I have heard of your troubles and have thought of a plan to help you.

"Henceforth, so long as the world shall last, there shall be summer and winter in this land. Half the year shall be summer and half the year shall be winter.

"While summer reigns, this is a pleasant land, and you may live here and find plenty of food. Before winter comes, you must leave this land and journey far away to the south, to another country where summer always reigns. But when the snow melts and winter returns to his home in the distant north, summer shall come again to this land, and so it shall be every year.

"When summer comes back, you may return with it and dwell in your own home until it is time for the return of winter.'

"When the people of the Summer Land heard this, some were glad, some were sorry, and some were angry.

"What!' said the angry ones, 'shall we leave our pleasant homes on account of winter? No, indeed; we will stay.' And so they did.

"When summer was over and the cold winds began to blow, the Bob Lincoln family, obeying the command of the Master of Life, set out for the Southland. On and on they traveled for many days.

"At last they came to the end of the land, and before them was the great, salt sea. But far on to the southward, they could dimly see islands rising out of the salt water.

"So they flew bravely on across the great, salt sea, till they reached the islands; and beyond these islands they saw others. On and on they flew from island to island until they reached another great land like the home they had left behind them. In it there were vast meadows and forests, mountains and rivers. In that land it is always summer and food is plenty all the year round. There in the pleasant meadows, the Bob Lincolns stopped and there they lived happily for half a year.

"When it was time for summer to revisit the Summer Land, the Bob Lincolns returned also and this they did every year.

"In those days all the Bob Lincolns wore black and white clothes like mine. But, as you see, this black and white dress is very con-spic'-u-ous.

"Now it happened that in their journeyings to and fro, the Bob Lincolns met many enemies, and these enemies wrought sad havoc in their ranks. When they were flying in the air, the hawks and the eagles would swoop upon them and kill them. If they sat upon the ground, the weazels and the minks, the wildcats and other four-footed prowlers, would pounce upon them and devour them. Even the Red Men, with their feathered arrows, would shoot them. So many of them were killed that they began to fear that soon none of their family would be left alive.

"So they called a family council, to consider their sad state and decide what it was best to do. When they were all assembled together, they talked the matter over and decided to go and ask aid from the Master of Life.

"I have heard your complaint,' said the Master of Life when they had finished, 'and I am willing to assist you. But first you must understand that the cause of all your trouble is your love of fine clothes. Your black and white uniforms are very beautiful, but they are too con-spic'-u-ous for your safety. By day your enemies can spy you afar because you are black; by night they can see you because you are white.

"Hereafter you shall wear different clothing. No longer shall your feathers be black and white; they shall be black and brown and yellow. When you sit upon the ground you shall look like the dry, brown grass, and when you fly through the air your enemies shall not be able to mark your flight from a distance. Thus it shall come to pass that, if you act wisely, you shall live in peace and safety.'

"When they heard this the Bob Lincolns were grieved at heart. They loved their gay black and white uniforms and sorrowed at the thought of parting with them. So they humbly begged the Master of Life to let them keep their gay clothing and tell them some other way of escaping their enemies.

"'There is no other way,' said he. 'But tell me, when do you suffer least from your enemies? Is it when you are dwelling in your old northern home, or when you are dwelling in the sunny Southland?' 'When we are dwelling in our old homes,' answered the Bob Lincolns.

"'Very well, then,' said the Master of Life, 'while you are dwelling in your old home, all the male Bob Lincolns may wear their black and white garments. Nevertheless they shall suffer for their vanity, for their enemies shall find and slay many of them.

"'But your wives and sisters must be content with a quieter dress. It is they who have the most to do with tending your nests and rearing your young ones. If they should wear your gay black and white garments, your enemies would find and kill you all, and the Bob Lincoln family would perish from the earth,'

"That is the story," said Bob Lincoln, "that my grandfather told me long ago in our distant winter home in the Southland. If you keep watch, little boy, for a month or so, you will see me put off my black and white suit for one just like Mrs. Bob Lincoln's. Then you will know that we are getting ready for our journey to our distant winter home in the sunny Southland, far away across the great, salt sea."

"Now," said Bob Lincoln, when he had finished his story, "it's time for me to be off to see how Mrs. Bob Lincoln is getting along."

And off he flew before little Luke had time to thank him for his pleasant story. The little boy sat quietly for a while under the old apple tree. Then he got up and went slowly back to the house.

IV. BOB LINCOLN'S STORY OF HIS OWN LIFE

During the long summer days little Luke went often to visit the Bob Lincolns. The more he watched them, the more he grew to love them. Bob Lincoln himself was the merriest, jolliest fellow of all the little boy's feathered friends.

Little Luke saw the baby birds as soon as they had broken their shells. He watched the anxious parents feed them. And how those young Bob Lincolns could eat! How their busy parents had to work to support the little family! Back and forth over the meadow the old birds flew hour after hour, searching for food for their hungry babies. And they were always hungry! Whenever they heard anyone coming, they would close their eyes, stretch their long necks, and open wide their yellow mouths.

The young birds grew larger and hungrier every day. And every day Bob Lincoln became busier and quieter. Little Luke noticed that the jolly little fellow did not sing so much and that his gay coat was becoming rusty. One by one his bright feathers fell out and dull brown or yellow ones took their place, until at last he looked just like his little wife.

"Well, little boy," said Bob Lincoln one morning, "we must be getting ready to move. These youngsters can fly pretty well, and it is time for us to go. I am sorry, for I love our meadow home, and a long and dangerous journey is before us."

"Tell me about it," said little Luke.

"Well," said Bob Lincoln, "you must know that I was hatched in this very meadow. There were five of us and I am the only one that is left.

"When we young ones had learned to fly pretty well, we started south. After a few days we reached a land where there were broad marshes covered with reeds. There we stopped for a while. But the men of that country hunted us with their fire-sticks. They called us reed birds and liked us to eat. They shot many of our friends, but for a few days our family all escaped. But one morning we heard a sound like thunder and our mother fell to the ground and we saw her no more.

"This frightened us and we flew on to the southward for many days. Of course wherever we found a good place, we stopped to rest and eat. But we did not stop for long until we came to a land where there were great fields of rice. There we found great flocks of our kindred, who had grown fat by feeding upon the rice.

"But here again were men with their fire-sticks and they killed two of my brothers. All the time we stayed there, we lived in fear. So after some days we left the rice land and went on toward the south. We crossed the great, salt sea and at last found the winter home of our kindred.

"In the spring we came back again to this meadow. And here I found Mrs. Bob Lincoln. I courted her with my sweetest songs, and after a short time we were married and set up house-keeping.

"That autumn I led a family of my own on the long journey to our southern home. Three times have I made the journey to and from this meadow, and each time some of my family have fallen a prey to our many enemies. But the men with their fire-sticks are the worst of all. Why are they so cruel to us?"

"Alas," said Bob Lincoln, after a pause, "I dread this journey. Not many of my friends have escaped so long. I fear I shall never return. But it cannot be helped, we must go. I think, little boy, we shall start this morning. So I will say good-bye now."

"Good-bye, Bob Lincoln," said little Luke, "I hope it will not be as you fear. I shall look for you again next May."

The Bob Lincoln family started on their long southern journey and little Luke went sadly back to the house. Now that the Bob Lincolns were gone, the meadow no longer seemed so pleasant to him.

V. LITTLE LUKE MAKES FRIENDS AMONG THE WILD FOLK

While little Luke spent a good deal of his time with the Bob Lincoln family, he did not neglect his other friends among the wild folk. Almost every day he had long talks with one or more of them. Thus it came to pass that he soon became exceeding wise with the wisdom of the wild kindreds; for his eyes were sharper and his ears keener than those of any other of the house people.

There was Sam, the hired man, who thought he knew a good deal about the wild folk. And there was Old Bill, the hunter, who had done little besides hunting and trapping all his long life; even these did not begin to know the beasts and birds as little Luke knew them. Before the Finding of the Magic Flower, he had thought them marvels of woodcraft and fieldcraft. Now they seemed to him almost blind and deaf.

As he went about with them, he found that for all their boasting (and they often boasted) they really knew little about the wild folk. Many times they would pass Wa-poose the Rabbit sitting unseen on his form within a few feet of them. Mother Mit-chee the Ruffled Partridge made her nest in plain sight on the ground beside the old trail and they passed by a hundred times and never saw her. And so it was with many others of the wild folk. Often they went quietly about their business before the very eyes of the house people who did not see them.

During that summer little Luke spent much time with Old John the lone Indian, who lived at the foot of Black Mountain. For Old John, seeing the little boy's love of woodcraft and his wonderful keenness of ear and eye, and understanding, came to love him more than he had loved anyone or anything for many years.

He would make some excuse to come to the farmhouse. Then, when his pretended business was finished, he would sit with the little boy on an old bench on the lawn and tell him stories of the Red Men or of the wild folk.

Sometimes, too, the little boy would go up the trail and sit by the spring where he had found the Magic Speech Flower and wait for the old Indian. Or, when Old John started for home, he would go along with him up into the woods and there they would sit on a fallen log and talk of the old days when the Red Men dwelt in that land, or of the wood folk they saw and heard about them. These were most enchanting tales, and little Luke enjoyed them exceedingly.

And he learned that in some matters Old John was very wise. But these were mostly concerned with hunting and trapping. Little Luke did not like the idea of killing any of his wild friends, even though he knew that their flesh and fur were very useful. He knew, too, that the Law of the Wild Kindred allowed everyone to kill to supply his need and so he did not much mind the killing in Old John's stories, for he knew that the old man never killed any creature needlessly.

And he learned, too, that the old Indian had some strange notions about the wild folk. He believed that long ago they had all been very much like men. "In those days," he said, "the animals could talk and build wigwams just as the Red Men did." He believed, too, that the forefathers of some tribes of the Red Men had been animals, and that the forefathers of some of the animal kindreds had been men. All this seemed queer to the boy, but not half so queer as it would have seemed before the Finding of the Magic Speech Flower and his talks with the wild folk.

Now the tale of the Finding of the Magic Flower was told abroad among all the tribes of the wild folk round about. For this reason, as time went on, many of them came to see the wonderful Man Cub (as they often called little Luke) who could speak and understand the language of the wild kindreds.

In that way little Luke came to know many of the wild folk that he had never seen before. Some of them were furry folk, who lived in the woods and fields and along the brooks, and some were beautiful feathered folk, who came down from the tops of the tall pines and spruces and hemlocks.

These were mostly bird folk who had once lived in the Summer Land and had learned to travel southward before the return of Pe-boan the cruel Winter King. They loved the upper spaces of the great forests, and there they lived as some of the water folk live in the lower depths of the great sea.

These bird folk hated the open fields and even the lower air, in the thick forests, seemed heavy and unpleasant to them. So they seldom came down from their airy homes in the upper branches of the great trees. For this reason little Luke did not see much of them, but when he did see one of them, it was as if he had seen an angel.

[Illustration]

VI. LITTLE LUKE AND KIT-CHEE THE GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER

Down in the far corner of the orchard stood an old apple tree. Some of its limbs were dead and the rest of it was so covered with orchard moss that it seemed gray with age. As little Luke was passing one day, he noticed a round hole in one of its branches. "Now," thought he to himself, "I'll climb up and take a peep into that hole." And so he did.

As he looked into the dark cavity, there was a sudden explosion, which sounded like the noise made by an angry cat. The little boy jumped back so quickly that he almost fell to the ground. Just then he heard someone in the branches of the tree above him. "Whee-ree, whee-ree," sounded a mocking; voice, that made little Luke think that somebody was making fun of him. He looked up and saw Kit-chee the Great Crested Flycatcher.

"Ah-ha!" said Kit-chee; "so she scared you, did she?"

The little boy moved his hand toward the hole.

"Better not; better not," said Kit-chee; "that's Mother Kit-chee in there. She doesn't like to be disturbed, and she has a temper of her own, and a sharp bill to go with it."

"Excuse me, Father Kit-chee," said the little boy; "I didn't know. I only wanted to see what was in that hole."

"All right," said Kit-chee. "We don't mind you. Perhaps, if you ask her politely, she'll come out and let you take a peep."

"Pray, Mother Kit-chee," said the little boy, "aren't you hungry? There are some nice flies and bugs out here, and besides, if you will be kind enough to allow me, I should like a peep at your nest and eggs."

"Oh, very well," answered Mother Kit-chee, "I'll do anything to oblige you, when you speak in that way." And out she came.

Both Father Kit-chee and Mother Kit-chee were rather handsome, dignified birds. They each wore a coat of butternut brown, mixed with olive green, and a vest pearl gray toward the throat and yellow lower down.

"Thank you," said the little boy to Mother Kit-chee as she came out, "I'll not disturb anything. I'll be very careful." And so he was. He looked down into the hole, where he saw five creamy-white eggs, streaked lengthwise with brown. But the queerest thing he saw was a snake-skin which formed part of the nest.

"There's the skin of a snake," exclaimed the little boy. "How did that come there? Did the snake try to steal your eggs, and did you kill him?"

"Oh, no," replied Father Kit-chee, "I found that skin over yonder in the pasture. You know that A-tos-sa the Snake sheds his skin when it grows old and stiff, and grows a new one that fits him better. We just pick up the cast-off skins and build them into our nests."

"What on earth do you do it for?" asked the little boy. "I wouldn't want such a thing around my bed. I don't like snakes, or even their skins."

"I don't like snakes either," said Kit-chee, "but it's a custom in our family to use their skins in nest-building. Wherever you find a home of one of our tribe, there you will find a snake-skin. I've heard my grandfather say that our kinfolk, who dwell far to the south beyond the big seawater, have the same custom. There's a tradition about it, too."

"Oh, please tell me about it," said the little boy. "I'm sure it will be an interesting story."

"Very well; anything to please you," said Kit-chee.

VII. WHY THE KIT-CHEE PEOPLE ALWAYS USE SNAKE-SKINS IN NEST-BUILDING

"Long, long ago," began he, "when the world was new, all the beasts and birds were at peace with each other. In those days it was summer all the year round. After a while a change came."

"Oh, yes, I've heard about that," said the little boy. "Pe-boan the cruel Winter King came down from the frozen North and drove off Ni-pon the Queen of Summer. Then the animals and birds got hungry and began to kill each other. I've heard about that several times."

"Yes," said Kit-chee, "that was the way it was. The animals and birds began to kill and rob each other. No nest was safe. Mee-ko the Red Squirrel, A-tos-sa the Snake, Ka-ka-go the Crow, and many others learned to rob our nests and eat our young ones.

"Every one of the birds tried to hide her nest, but in spite of the best that they could do, the robbers would often find them. The worst of all our enemies was Kag-ax the Weasel. The Kit-chee families suffered terribly. They built their nests as we do now in holes in trees. Kag-ax is a good climber and has sharp eyes. It was almost impossible to hide a nest from him.

"After a while things got so bad that the Kit-chee family came together in a council. They talked over their troubles and made up their minds to go to the Master of Life and ask him to help them. And so they did.

"I am sorry for you,' said he, when he had heard their story, 'and will tell you what to do. As you say, your worst enemy is Kag-ax the Weasel. Now Kag-ax is more afraid of A-tos-sa the Snake than of any other creature in the whole world. He cannot bear even the sight of a snake-skin. You must weave a snake-skin into each one of your nests. Then he will not dare to trouble you.'

"But how shall we get the snake-skins?' asked Grandfather Kit-chee, the head of the family.

"That is easy,' answered the Master of Life. 'A-tos-sa, as you know, sheds his skin. If you look sharp, you can find the cast-off skins almost anywhere. Do as I have said, and you will be safe. Even Mee-ko the Squirrel and others of your enemies will be afraid of the snake-skin and let your nests alone.'

"The Kit-chee family did as the Master of Life told them to do. From that time to this they always have woven a snake-skin into their nests, and their nests have seldom been robbed."

"Thank you," said the little boy, "that was a good story. Now I must be going home. There's Aunt Martha calling for dinner." And he slid down out of the old apple tree and went across the orchard to the house.

[Illustration]

VIII. LITTLE LUKE AND NICK-UTS THE YELLOWTHROAT

Among little Luke's bird friends was little Nick-uts the Yellowthroat. He was a dainty little fellow, with an olive green back, a bright yellow breast, and a black mask across his face that made him look like a highwayman. Though he was lively and nervous, he had a gentle disposition and a sweet voice. His home was in some low bushes in the pasture.

Whenever little Luke went up to see him, he would hop up on a branch and call out, "Which way, sir? Which way, sir?" And when the little boy started to go away, he would say, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute."

Every time the little boy went for the cows he would stop and chat a moment with Mr. and Mrs. Nick-uts. To be sure, Mrs. Nick-uts never had much to say. She was a quiet little body, not so fidgety as Nick-uts, and besides, she had to stay close at home and see to the eggs and babies.

One morning, as little Luke was going for the cows, he saw Nick-uts bobbing around very excitedly.

"Come here. Come here," called Nick-uts, when he saw the little boy; "I want some help." And he hopped over by the nest.

Little Luke went over to the nest and looked in. "Look there," said Nick-uts, "see that big, ugly egg. Take it out, please."

"Take it out?" said little Luke. "Why should I do that? Isn't it yours?"

"No, indeed," said Nick-uts, "it's old Mother Mo-lo's. The nasty old wretch laid it in there while we were away from home. She's always sneaking around, the lazy old thing, to lay her eggs in some other bird's nest. She's cowardly too. She always picks out the nest of one smaller than herself. I wish I were big enough to give her a sound thrashing.

"Please take the egg out," he went on. "I can't do it myself, and if you don't take it out, we shall have to leave the nest and our own eggs and build a new one."

Little Luke took the egg out of the nest and threw it on the ground. "Why don't Mother Mo-lo build a nest of her own?" he asked.

"Oh, she can't. She doesn't know enough," answered Nick-uts. "In the old days she had a chance to learn the same as the rest of us. She wouldn't learn then, and now she can't. I don't believe she ever tries.

"She sneaks around and steals her eggs into the nests of other birds, and some of them are so silly they don't know the difference. They hatch the egg and bring up the young one as if it were their own. The young Mo-los are greedy things and they eat up everything away from the other little birds. Besides, they grow so fast that they crowd out the other young ones, so that they fall to the ground and die. I've known old Mother Mo-lo to fool O-loo-la the Wood Thrush that way. It's a shame for a decent bird to be imposed upon like that.

"She tried the trick twice on me last year. Once we managed to roll the egg out, and once we built a second floor to the nest, but we lost two of our own eggs by doing it."

"You said that Mother Mo-lo had a chance to learn to build a nest," said little Luke. "Tell me about it."

"Well," said Nick-uts, "since you have been so kind as to help me, I'll try. I haven't heard the story for a long while, perhaps I can't remember it very well. But I'll do the best I can."

IX. WHY MOTHER MO-LO THE COWBIRD LAYS HER EGGS IN OTHER BIRDS' NESTS

"In the beginning," said he, "the Master of Life made the world. When he had finished the land and the sea, the mountains and the meadows, he made the fishes, and then the four-footed kindreds. Last of all, he created the birds. But he didn't make them all at the same time. The last ones were Father and Mother Mo-lo.

"When Mother Mo-lo began to fly about, the other birds went to her and offered to teach her how to build a nest.

"Come with me,' said the oven bird; 'I'll show you how to build a nest on the ground where no one will find it. You must just push up some of the dry leaves in the forest, and then put some grass and twigs under them. It's very easy.'

"For my part,' said the woodpecker, 'I wouldn't build on the ground anyway. I should be afraid that a deer or a bear or some other creature would step on me. If you want a safe nest, I'll show you how to build one. You just find a dead limb, not too dead, and bore a deep hole into it. Put a little soft, rotten wood in the bottom, and there you are!

"That must be a close, stuffy kind of a nest; enough to smother one,' said the oriole scornfully. Come with me and I will teach you to hang your nest on the end of an elm branch. You just weave together some hair and grass and moss and hang it on a slender, swinging branch, where nothing can get to it. Then you'll be safe. The wind will rock your babies to sleep for you and you'll have plenty of fresh air.'

"I wouldn't like that at all,' said the sand martin. 'I'd be seasick the first half hour. A good hole in a sandbank suits me much better. To be sure, the sand sometimes caves in. But that doesn't matter much. A little hard work will clear your doorway.'

"What do you do when the high waters come?" asked the phoebe bird. 'For my part,' continued she, 'I like a rock ledge for a foundation with another one above for a roof. The rock never caves in on you. A little hair and grass, nicely laid down, with a little moss on the outside, and you are comfortable and safe. You'll never be drowned out there.'

"I don't like rocks,' said the robin. 'A fork in a tree suits me much better. Just lay down a few sticks for a foundation, then weave together some twigs and grass and plaster the inside with some good thick mud, and you have a serviceable nest, good enough for anyone. A few feathers in the bottom will make it soft and comfortable. It may not be so elegant as some others, but it suits me.'

"And so it went on. Each one of the birds praised its own nest and offered to show Mother Mo-lo how to build one like it.

"But Mother Mo-lo cared little for what they said. She wasn't even polite enough to pretend to pay attention. She was too conceited. thought that she was handsome and knew about all there was to be known."

"Handsome?" said little Luke; "the ugly old thing! It can't be that she had ever looked at herself."

"Oh, I don't know," said Nick-uts, "the sillier people are, the wiser they think themselves. And it's always the ugly ones who think themselves the most beautiful."

"Well," said little Luke, "I've seen a good deal of her, but I never thought her handsome in the least. You know she follows the cows about so much that we house people call her the cowbird."

"Well, at any rate," said Nick-uts, "she thought she knew a great deal more than she really did.

"So she said to the other birds, very haughtily, 'You are all very kind, and I am very much obliged to you. But I think I can get along without your help. I know how to build a nest that will suit me better than any of yours.'

"Indeed, is that so?" cried the other birds. 'You must have learned very quickly. Who was your teacher anyway?'

"Oh,' said Mother Mo-lo, 'nobody taught me, but I know how just the same.'

"Very well,' said the other birds, 'we only wanted to be kind and help you. But we won't bother you any more. Good-bye.' And they all flew away to attend to their own affairs.

"After a while Mother Mo-lo tried to build a nest. First she tried to bore a hole in a dead branch, but she couldn't do it. Then she tried the sandbank, but the sand caved in and got in her eyes and almost smothered her. Then she tried the other kinds of nests. But every one was a failure. At last she gave it up, and ever since then she has laid her eggs in other birds' nests and let them rear her young ones for her."

[Illustration]

X. THE STORY OF O-PEE-CHEE THE FIRST ROBIN

One day little Luke heard Old John the Indian speak of redbreast as Little Brother O-pee-chee. He wanted to ask the old man about the name, but did not get a chance. So the next morning he went down to the apple tree in the meadow and asked Father Redbreast about it.

"That," answered redbreast, "is an old tale which both the Red Men and our people know. According to the story, the first redbreast was an Indian boy, and that is why he calls us Little Brothers."

"Tell me about it," said the little boy.

* * * * *

"Long, long ago," began Father Redbreast, "there was a tribe of Indians which dwelt in the distant Northland. Their chief, who was a wise man and a brave warrior, had an only child, a little son. The boy was a bright little fellow, but not very strong. Somehow he was not so big and hardy as the other Indian boys. But his father loved him more than anything else in the world and wanted him to become the wisest man and the greatest warrior of his tribe.

"My son,' said the old chief one day, 'you are about to become a warrior. You know the custom of our tribe. You must go apart and fast for a long time. The longer you fast, the greater and wiser you will become. I want you to fast longer than any other Indian has ever fasted. If you do this, the Good Man-i-to, the Master of Life, will come to you in a dream and tell you what you must do to become wise in council and brave, strong, and skillful in war.'

"Father,' said the boy, 'I will do whatever you bid me. But I fear that I am not able to do what you wish.'

"Make your heart strong,' answered the father, 'and all will be well. Most of the young men fast only four or five days. I want you to fast for twelve days, then you will have strong dreams. Now I will go into the forest and build your fasting lodge for you. Make yourself ready, for to-morrow you must begin your fast.'

"The little boy said no more and on the morrow his father took him to the fasting lodge and left him there. The boy stretched himself upon a mat, which his mother had made for him, and lay still.

"Each day the old chief went and looked at his son and asked him about his dreams. Each time the boy answered that the Man-i-to had not come.

"Day by day the boy became weaker and weaker. On the eleventh day he spoke to his father.

"Oh, my father,' said he, 'I am not strong enough to fast longer. I am very weak. The Man-i-to has not come to me. Let me break my fast.'

"You are the son of a great warrior,' said the father sternly; 'make your heart strong. Yet a little while and the Man-i-to will surely come to you. Perhaps he will come to-night.'

"The boy shook his head sadly and his father went back to his wigwam.

"The next day when he drew near to the fasting lodge, he heard someone talking within it.

"My father has asked too much,' said a voice which sounded like, and yet unlike, the voice of his son. 'I am not strong enough. He should have waited until I became older and stronger. Now I shall die.'

"It was not the will of the Man-i-to,' said another voice, 'that you should become a great warrior. But you shall not die. From this time you shall be a bird. You shall fly about in the free air. No longer shall you suffer the pain and sorrow which fall to the lot of men.'

"The old chief could wait no longer. He opened the door of the lodge and looked within. No one was there, only a brown bird with a gray breast flew out of the door and perched upon a branch above his head.

"The old chief was very sad, but the bird spoke to him and said, 'Do not mourn for me, my father, for I am free from pain and sorrow. It was not the will of the Man-i-to that I should become the greatest warrior of the tribe. But because I was obedient to you and did the best I could, he has changed me into a bird.

"From this time, as long as the world shall last, I shall be the friend of man. When the cold winds blow and ice covers the streams, I shall go away to the warm land of the South. But in the spring, when the snows begin to melt, I shall return. And when the children hear my voice, they shall be happy, knowing that the long, cold winter is over. Do not mourn for me, my father. Farewell!

"Ever since then, when the Indian children hear a robin singing, they say, 'There is O-pee-chee, the bird that was once an Indian boy.' And no Indian boy ever hurts a robin."

[Illustration]

XI. HOW THE ROBIN'S BREAST BECAME RED

When the robin had finished his story, little Luke thought for a moment. Then he said, "That's a very interesting story. But there is one thing about it I don't understand."

"What is that?" asked Father Redbreast.

"Why," said the little boy, "you said that O-pee-chee's breast was gray. How does it come that yours is red?"

"That is another story," answered Father Redbreast.

"I should like very much to hear it. Please tell me about it," said little Luke.

* * * * *

"Once upon a time," said Father Redbreast, "long after the days of the first robin, old Mah-to the great White Bear dwelt alone in the far Northland. He was the king of all the bears and was very cunning and cruel. He was so selfish that he did not like anybody else even to come into his country.

"If a hunter wandered into the region where he lived, he would lie in wait for him and kill him. One stroke of his mighty paw and the man would fall, to rise no more. He killed so many of them that the hunters began to be afraid to go into that land. As for the beasts and birds, they all feared him and kept as far away from him as they could.

"After a time a brave hunter with his son wandered into the kingdom of the great bear to hunt. Day after day old Mah-to followed the man and boy. But the hunter was cautious as well as, brave, and the old bear was afraid of his sharp arrows and did not dare to attack him openly.

"When the snow began to fall, the hunter built a lodge and kindled a fire. He cut down a great many trees and brought the wood close to the door of the lodge.

"'Now,' said he, to his son, 'we must keep the fire going day and night. Then we shall not freeze.'

"Old Mah-to, who was sneaking about the lodge, heard this and thought, 'I will watch and wait until they have gone away or are asleep, and then I will put out the fire. Then they will have to go away or else freeze.'

"But the hunter was very careful. When he went out to hunt, he left the boy in the lodge to keep the fire burning. The old bear was afraid of the fire, which he thought was some kind of magic, and so he did not dare to touch the boy. At night the hunter and the boy watched the fire by turns, and so kept it burning brightly.

"The old bear watched for many days before his chance came. At last one day when the hunter had gone away, the little boy fell asleep and allowed the fire to burn low.

"'Now,' thought the old bear, 'now is my chance.' So he walked into the lodge and trampled the fire with his great, wet feet, until he thought he had put it all out. He meant to kill the boy, but the fire scorched his feet and scared him. So he went away again to the edge of the forest and sat there licking his burnt paws, waiting to see what would happen.

"Now O-pee-chee had followed the man and the boy into the Northland. He watched the old bear and saw what he did. When he went away, the robin flew down and scratched about among the ashes until he found a small, live coal. Then he brought some splinters and dry moss and laid them upon the coal and fanned it with his wings until the fire caught the wood and burned up strong and bright.

"The heat of the blazing splinters scorched his breast and made it red, but the robin did not stop until the fire was blazing brightly.

"Just then the hunter walked into the lodge and saw what the robin was doing. He saw, too, the big footprints of the great bear and he knew that the robin had saved his life and the life of his boy.

"All that winter the good hunter fed the kind robin and sheltered it in his lodge. When he went back again to his people, he told them the story, and they grew to love the robin more than before. To this day they are never tired of telling their children the story of O-pee-chee the Robin and how his breast became red."

[Illustration]

XII. HOW THE BEES GOT THEIR STINGS

Little Luke was fond of watching the bees. He was not afraid of them, for he knew that if he did not disturb or annoy them, they would not sting him.

One morning the bees in one of Uncle Mark's hives seemed greatly excited. They buzzed and buzzed about the hive, till there was a great swarm of them in the air. All at once they started in a body and flew down toward the orchard.

The little boy followed them. They settled in a great bunch on the branch of an apple tree. The little boy ran back and told Uncle Mark that the bees had swarmed. Then Uncle Mark and Sam the hired man took a beehive, a ladder, and a saw and went down to the orchard. Sam climbed the ladder, sawed off the limb, and lowered the bees to the ground. Uncle Mark set the hive over the swarm and left it awhile. He knew that the bees would settle down in the hive and soon feel at home and begin to gather honey. And so they did. But Sam the hired man was stung several times. One of his eyes swelled shut and one of his cheeks looked as if he had the toothache.

"Why did your friends sting Sam?" asked little Luke the next day of his friend Ah-mo the Honey Bee.

"Oh," answered Ah-mo, "he was too rough. The bee people have sharp tempers and ever since they got stings they are apt to use them when they get angry."

"Got stings!" exclaimed the little boy. "Didn't the bee people always have stings?"

"Oh, no," answered Ah-mo; "not always."

"How did they get them?" asked little Luke. "Tell me about it."

* * * * *

"Long, long ago, when the world was new," said Ah-mo, "the bee folk had no stings. They were just as busy workers as they are to-day. All day long and all summer long they flew from flower to flower and gathered wax and honey, which they stored against the winter, when there would be no flowers and no honey.

"But many of the other creatures liked honey as well as the bees. They would watch the bees till they found out where their storehouses were. Then they would break them open and steal all the honey. This was bad for the bee people. For without their honey they would starve to death during the long, cold winters.

"At last matters got so bad with the bee people that they sent a messenger to the Master of Life to ask him to come to their aid. When he had heard about their trouble, he said to their messenger, 'Go back to your people. In two moons I will come to visit you. By that time I shall have thought out a way to help you.'

"The bee people were very glad. They told their cousins, the hornets and the wasps, that the Master of Life had promised to assist them against their enemies. At the end of the two moons, the Master of Life came and all the bees assembled to meet him. The wasps and the hornets came also.

"'I have thought of a way to help you,' said the Master of Life to them. 'From this day you shall have stings. Hereafter, if anyone comes to steal your honey, you will be able to defend yourselves.'

"The bees were greatly pleased. They were no longer afraid of their enemies and did not try to hide their storehouses as they had done before.

"Now the worst of all the enemies of the bee people was Moo-ween the Black Bear. One day Mr. and Mrs. Moo-ween were walking by a hollow tree where the bees had made their home. They looked up and saw many of the bee folk going in and out of a hole in the tree.

"'What lots of honey there must be in that tree,' said Moo-ween. 'How good it would taste. Let us climb up and take it away from the bees.' So the two bears began to climb the tree.

"But the bees were not afraid of them. They did not fly away and leave the bears to eat their honey, as they had always done before. Instead, they flew down and began to sting the bears. The two bears could not understand it. They had never been stung before and they groaned and growled with pain. The bees settled upon their eyes, their ears, and their noses, and stung them again and again, until they had to let go of the tree, and fell to the ground. There they rolled over and over, growling and groaning and snapping their teeth. The bees kept on stinging them. The bears could not stand it. They got up and ran away as fast as they could, Since that time the bee folk have had stings and the courage to use them whenever any creature, little or big, attempts to annoy or injure them."

[Illustration]

XIII. THE STORY OF THE FIRST SWALLOWS

In May little Luke had watched Mr. and Mrs. Lun-i-fro the Eave Swallows while they had built their queer, pocket-shaped, mud hut beneath the eaves of the big barn. He saw them on the muddy shores of the river, rolling little pellets of mud, which they carried to the barn and built into their nest, and wondered at their odd ways.

"I wish," he often said to himself, "that they could talk. I would ask them how they learned to do it." At that time he had no idea he would ever be able to talk to them.

After he had found the Magic Speech Flower he often talked to Father and Mother Lun-i-fro. But their talks were always short, for the two swallows were always too busy chasing gnats and flies through the air to spend much time on anything else.

Early in September the swallows began to gather in large flocks. The young ones, who were now finishing their lessons in flying, were introduced to the rest of the tribe and the little boy often saw them training in squads. They would sit in a long row upon the peak of the barn roof. Suddenly they would start off all together and fly about for a while. Then they would come back and settle down upon the roof again.

One day as little Luke was watching them, Father Lun-i-fro happened to light upon a fence stake near him. "Father Lun-i-fro," said the little boy, "what are you swallow folk doing these days?"

"We are holding our councils and getting ready to go to the sunny Southland for the winter," answered the old swallow.

"Before you go," said the boy, "I wish you would tell me how you learned to build your nests in such an odd way."

"Well," said Father Lun-i-fro, "since you have been so nice to us this summer, I'll tell you."

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"Long, long ago," went on the old swallow, "there was an Indian village upon the top of a high hill.

"The grown-up people of the village were very good. But alas! the children were naughty. They were so disobedient that they could never be trusted to mind anything that their parents said to them. The old people often talked to them and did their best to make them behave better, but it did no good. As soon as their backs were turned, those naughty children would begin to quarrel and fight and steal and run away.

"The old people were much troubled. The woods were full of bears and panthers and wolves, and they felt sure that some time the wicked children would be eaten up by them.

"They did everything they could think of to make it so pleasant for the children that they would stay at home. They made bows and arrows for the boys, and Indian dolls for the girls, and all sorts of playthings for all of them, but it did no good. They would run away just the same.

"At last the elders of the village held a council to see if they could not think of some plan to make their children behave better. After much talk it was thought best to call in all the children and have the village chief talk to them. This was done, but it did no good. The next day they ran away just the same. Their parents had to search far into the night before they found them. This time the old folks were very angry.

"Another council was held. They talked the matter over a long time and made up their minds to send for Gloos-cap the good and wise Magician, who was yet upon the earth. And so they did.

"When he came he found that, as usual, the children had run away from home and could not be found. They had already been gone two or three days.

"Gloos-cap frowned and looked very stern. 'I will find them,' said he, 'and when I find them I will punish them as they deserve.'

"By his magic power he was able to follow their trail, which their parents had not been able to find.

"At length he saw them. They were playing about on the muddy shore of a small lake. Out of the mud they were making many different kinds of objects, especially little wigwams.

"He walked down to where they were. 'You naughty children,' said he, 'are you not ashamed of yourselves, to disobey your parents and make them so much sorrow and trouble?'

"'No, we are not,' spoke up one bold, saucy little fellow. 'We don't care for what they say. We've been having a good time all by ourselves.'

"'Very well,' said Gloos-cap, 'since you are not willing to obey your parents, you shall never trouble them any more. You shall become birds. Since you love to play in the mud, you shall always build your nests of mud; and since you love to gad about so much, you shall wander about the earth forever.'

"And so it has been with the swallow folk since that time.

"But," went on the old swallow, "our foreparents learned their lesson, and since that time we always bring up our children to be very obedient. No doubt you have noticed how very well they mind."

[Illustration]

XIV. LITTLE LUKE AND A-BAL-KA THE CHIPMUNK

One of little Luke's best friends among the wild folk was A-bal-ka the Chipmunk. He was a dainty little fellow about five inches long, with a tail of the same length. His coat was of a yellowish-brown color, with black stripes running down his back. This fine, striped coat made him look much prettier than his cousin Mee-ko the Red Squirrel.

He was a clean, jolly, little chap, and very fond of singing, though he knew but two songs. One was a sharp chip, chip, chip, which he would sometimes keep up for a long time. At a distance it sounded like the call note of some bird. The other was a cuck, cuck, cuck, which sounded much like the song of the Cuckoo. A curious thing about this song was that one could scarcely tell where it came from. Little Luke was often deceived by it. Sometimes when it sounded as if A-bal-ka was near by, he was really a good way off, and when it sounded as if he were a good way off, he was really close by.

Beside these songs, A-bal-ka had an odd way of saying chip, chur-r-r-r, when he was scared. This meant, "I am not afraid of you," and he never said it till he was safe in some hole where no one could get at him.

A-bal-ka never harmed any one, nor did he scold and steal like Mee-ko the Red Squirrel. Yet he had many foes. Ko-ko-ka the Owl, Ak-sip the Hawk, Kee-wuk the Fox, Kag-ax the Weasel, Ko-sa the Mink, and A-tos-sa the Snake were always ready to pounce upon him at sight and make a meal of him. Even Mee-ko was not to be trusted. Sometimes he would chase A-bal-ka and rob him of the nuts which he was carrying to his storehouse. He would have robbed the storehouse, too, if he could have got into it. But A-bal-ka's door was too small, and his hallways too narrow for Mee-ko.

Little Luke knew all about A-bal-ka's underground dwelling. The way he found out was this: Uncle Mark and Sam the hired man were digging stones on the hillside in the edge of the woods for the foundations of a new barn. While at this work, they uncovered the home of one of A-bal-ka's brothers. It was made up of a long, winding passageway, ending in a sleeping chamber, near which was a storehouse, and in this storehouse there was a large quantity of nuts. These nuts were all good ones. The greater part of them were little, three-cornered beech nuts, which the squirrels like better than anything else. In all there was as much as half a bushel of nuts, enough to last a chipmunk all winter. The bedroom was a neat, little, round chamber, nicely filled with leaves, grass, and moss. In such a house as this, with its store of nuts, a chipmunk could live snug and warm all winter long and come out sleek and fat in the spring.

Because of A-bal-ka's many enemies, he was very watchful. He seldom went far from home, and when he did venture to go abroad, he nearly always followed the same path. At first it ran along under the side of a fallen log. From the end of this, a few quick leaps carried him to a brush pile. A jump or two more brought him to a rock and yet a few more to a stone fence. Once there, he felt safe. At the least alarm, he could run into a hole too small for any of his foes except, perhaps, A-tos-sa, whom he dreaded more than any of the others.

All along the stone fence stood nut trees,---oaks, hazels, walnuts, beeches, and others. And at one end was a cornfield.

This made it very handy for A-bal-ka. He could gather the nuts which fell upon the stone fence, and when he went for corn, he could keep to the fence and thus avoid his enemies. Early in the fall he began to fill his storehouse. To and fro he went along the fence with his cheek-pouches full of corn and nuts.

Little Luke often amused himself by watching him. He would pick up the nuts with his paws and put them into his cheek-pouches, and it was amazing how many they would hold. When he started for home, his cheeks sometimes looked as if he had a very severe case of the mumps.

One day in the autumn little Luke found out a queer thing about A-bal-ka. He was going up the trail with Old John. A-bal-ka started to cross the trail, but seeing the old Indian he became scared and ran up a tree. This was a thing which he seldom did; never unless he was obliged to, to escape from his enemies. He is a ground squirrel, and no tree climber, like his cousins the Red and the Gray Squirrels.

"Now," said Old John, "I'll show you something." So he got a stout stick and began to tap the tree. Tap, tap, tap, tap, as if he were beating time to music. This tapping had a strange effect upon A-bal-ka. At first he was greatly excited and tried to run farther up the tree. Soon he gave this up, turned around, and began to come down head foremost. He would lift his little feet and shake them as if something hurt them. Lower and lower he came, until the old Indian could easily have killed him with his club or caught him with his hand. He did neither. He just laughed and threw away his stick.

"There," said he, "that's the way to make a chipmunk come down out of a tree. They'll always do it, if you tap long enough,"

"That's queer," said the little boy; "what makes them come down? Why don't they run farther up?"

"I don't know," said Old John, "perhaps they think you are trying to cut down the tree, or maybe the jar hurts their feet. The Red Men used to think that there was some kind of a magic charm about it."

"I am glad you didn't hurt him," said the little boy, as they went on up the trail.

"Hurt him!" exclaimed the old Indian, "why, don't you know that no Indian ever hurts a chipmunk?"

"Why is that?" asked the little boy.

"It's an old, old story," said Old John, "but come, let us sit down on this log, and I'll tell it to you."

So when they were both comfortably seated, the old Indian began the tale which you will find in the next chapter.

[Illustration]

XV. HOW A-BAL-KA GOT HIS BLACK STRIPES

"In the old days before winter had come into the land, the beasts and the birds, the fishes, and even the insects, all had one language. They could speak the speech of the Red Men and they all lived together in peace and friendship.

"In those days, there was no killing and no war. But after winter had come upon the land, the Red Men learned to kill the wild folk and to use their flesh for food and their skins for wigwams and for clothing.

"At first this was bad enough, but after men had learned to use bows and arrows, spears, knives, and hooks, it was still worse. They became more and more cruel. They delighted to slaughter even creatures for which they had no use. Out of heedlessness, they trod upon the worms and the frogs, and killed them without caring for the pain and suffering which they caused. At last the animals made up their minds to try to find out some means to check the slaughter of the wild kindreds.

"The bears were the first to meet in council. After much talk, they decided to begin war at once against the human race.

"What weapons shall we use against them?" asked one of the bears.

"'Why,' answered another, 'the same that they use; bows and arrows, of course.'

"'But how shall we make them?' asked one bear.

"'Oh, that is easy,' said another. 'I'll show you how to do it. You know I lived for a long time in one of their villages.'

"'So this bear got a piece of ashwood and a string, some straight reeds and pieces of flint, and made a bow and some arrows.

"'The White Bear, who was chief of the council, stepped out to make a trial of the bow. He pulled back the string and let the arrow fly, but his long claws caught the string and spoiled the shot.

[Illustration: *The testing of the bow*]

"'Seeing this, one of the bears proposed to cut off his own claws and make another trial. This was done and the arrow went straight to the mark.

"'Now all the bears were ready to cut off their claws that they might practice with the bow and arrow. But their chief, the old White Bear, was wise.

"'No,' said he, 'let us not cut off our claws. If we do, we shall not be able to climb trees or to tear our food to pieces, and we shall all starve together. It is better to trust to the teeth and claws that the Master of Life has given us. Man's weapons are not for us.'

"'All the bears agreed to this, and the council broke up without any plan for dealing with their cruel enemies.

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"'The deer were the next to hold a council. Each one had some story to tell about the cruelty of men. Each one had lost his father or his mother, his wife or his children, his brother or his sister.

"'After much talk, their chief, Little Deer, spoke. 'It is a law,' said he, 'among all the kindreds that each may kill to supply his needs. The men folk need our flesh to eat and our skins for clothing.

[Illustration]

"'But there is another law. It is that no one shall kill cruelly or needlessly. Upon such as do so, let us send pains and aches. Let us make their joints swell and become stiff, so that they cannot follow us and kill us. Besides, let us make another law, that when a hunter kills one of the deer family, he must pray to the spirit of the deer for pardon. If he has killed to supply his needs and without cruelty, he shall be pardoned. If not, he shall become a helpless cripple.'

"'The deer people all agreed to this and sent word to the nearest Indian village, to tell the hunters about the new law.

"'Since that time every Indian hunter is careful to pray to the spirit of the deer which he has killed.

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"Next the fishes and the snakes held a council. Each one had complaints to make against the cruelty of men. After much talk, A-tos-sa the chief of the snakes spoke.

"'We of the snake kindred,' said he, 'will afflict men with diseases of their nerves. They shall tremble and shake when there is nothing to be afraid of. And when they draw the bow-strings, their arrows shall go wide of the mark by reason of the unsteadiness of eye and hand. And we will send upon them in their sleep evil dreams. The ghosts of the snakes which they have needlessly killed shall twine about them, with fearful fangs, ready to pierce their flesh, and the cold sweat of terror shall ooze from their skin, and they shall awake with cries and tremblings.'

"After him the chief of the fishes spoke.

"'We,' said he, 'will afflict men with diseases of the stomach. In their sleep, they shall dream of eating raw or decayed fish and their appetites shall pass from them.'

"These plans were agreed upon, and the council of the fishes and the snakes broke up.

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"After this, the smaller animals, the birds and the insects, gathered themselves together in a common council. Here, too, all were bitter against the useless cruelty of mankind. After all complaints had been heard, Am-wee-soo the Wasp addressed the council.

"'Each creature,' said he, 'has the right to live. Our cruel enemies deprive us of our lives which they cannot restore. It is just that they shall be punished. We, the wasps, the bees, and the flies, will send upon men boils and wasting fevers, which shall sap their strength and bring them to their graves.'

"'And we,' said Da-hin-da the Bull Frog, 'will afflict men with colds and coughs, which shall make them weak and short of breath.'

"'We, the birds,' declared E-kes-ke the Blue Jay, 'will afflict them with sores and diseases of the skin.'

"And so it went on. Each of the tribes of the wild folk agreed to afflict mankind with some sort of sickness.

"A-bal-ka the Chipmunk alone spoke in favor of the men. But he had hardly said ten words, before the others became so enraged that they fell upon and drove him from the council. He barely escaped with his life.

"And as it was, Up-wee-kis the Lynx fastened his claws on A-bal-ka's neck and tore four gashes the length of his back. You can see the marks to this day. That is the way the chipmunk got his black stripes."

XVI. HOW A-BAL-KA THE CHIPMUNK HELPED MEN

"The wounded ground squirrel hid himself in his den beneath the roots of a great oak, where his enemies could not get at him. There he remained until the other creatures had departed and his wounds were somewhat healed.

"When he was well enough to get about again, he visited the villages of the Red Men. Everywhere he went, he found sickness and death. The kind-hearted chipmunk was sorry to see so much suffering and sorrow. So he revealed the secret plans which had been formed in the councils of the wild folk.

"Men now knew what was the cause of their troubles. But this knowledge did little good, since it did not heal their diseases or save them from death. For a time, it seemed as if the human race would be entirely destroyed.

"In their despair, they appealed to their kind friend A-bal-ka the little ground squirrel. 'What shall we do?' they wailed. 'Cannot you, who are so kind of heart and so wise, help us?'

"I will do my best,' he replied, 'but I must take time to think about it.' After turning the matter over in his mind carefully, he went about among the plants and trees and told them what had been done by the wild folk against their friends the men.

"Cannot you,' said he, 'do something to heal their diseases and save the human race from destruction?'

"After much coming and going on the part of A-bal-ka the ground squirrel, and much talking and thinking on the part of the plants and trees, it was resolved that they, too, should hold councils, to see what they could do toward checking and overcoming the evils which had befallen the human race.

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"First the big trees of the forest and the shrubs held their council. They talked over the matter and agreed that each should do all in its power to furnish remedies to cure the diseases which the wild folk had inflicted upon men.

"We,' said the pine, the spruce, and the balsam trees, 'will give our gums and our balsam.' The slippery elm offered its bark; the sassafras its roots; the cherry tree its bark and its berries. One after another, the other trees and shrubs offered their berries, their bark, their leaves, or their roots as medicine to heal the diseases of men.

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"Next the plants held their council and resolved to come to the aid of men in their distress. 'I,' said the ginseng plant, 'will give my roots to make a healing drink. It shall be good for headaches and for cramps and for many other kinds of pains and aches.'

"And I,' said the snake-root, 'will give my roots also for a healing drink. It shall cure fevers and coughs and many other diseases.'

"And so it went on. The silkweed, the skull-cap, catnip, boneset, the peppermint, wild ginger, wintergreen, and scores of other plants, all gladly offered their roots, their berries, or their leaves.

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"Their number was so great that the little striped squirrel, who had attended both councils, was scarcely able to remember them all.

"After the councils were over, he went about among the villages of the Red Men and told them what the trees and the plants had said. They at once began to gather and prepare the medicines which they needed to cure the different diseases from which they suffered. And from this time, on account of the use of these medicines, they were sometimes able to heal their diseases and save many of their people from death.

"This is the story of how diseases came upon men and medicines to cure them were found.

"The Red Men were grateful to the little ground squirrel for the help he had given them, and loved him more than any other of the wild folk, and to this day no Indian boy will injure a chipmunk."

[Illustration]

XVII. LITTLE LUKE AND MEE-KO THE RED SQUIRREL

One day as little Luke was sitting on a fallen log in the woods, Mee-ko the Red Squirrel ran out on a branch over his head. There he sat up on his hind legs and began to chatter and scold and cough.

He remembered the day when the little boy had stoned him away from the nest of O-pee-chee the Robin. Ever since that time he had never missed a chance of saying bad words at him. But the little boy didn't mind Mee-ko's scolding; he only laughed at him for his bad temper and spitefulness.

"Mee-ko," said he, "what makes you cough so? Tell me. I think there must be a story about it."

"Well, suppose there is?" snapped Mee-ko. "I wouldn't tell you anyway. A Man Cub has no business to know the animal talk. I did my best to keep you from touching the Magic Speech Flower. I hate you! I hate you! I wish I were as big as my forefathers were, I'd drive you out of the woods!"

"Come, now, Mee-ko," replied the boy, "don't be so spiteful. I haven't done you any harm. I stopped you from stealing Mother O-pee-chee's eggs, but you had no business with the eggs anyway. How would you like to have some one eat up your young ones? Let bygones be bygones and tell me about your forefathers."

"I'll not be friends with you on any terms," replied Mee-ko. "I wish you'd stay about the farmhouse where you belong. You've no business sneaking about in the woods, disturbing us wood folk, and spying on us and tattling about us. Go away. You know too much now."

"Yes, no doubt he knows too much about you. We all do," said a voice. Little Luke looked up and there was old Ko-ko-ka the Big Owl, sitting in a hole in a tree. "As for spying and tattling," Ko-ko-ka went on, "you are the worst of all the wild folk. It runs in your blood. The Mee-ko family have always been meddlers. It was the first of your tribe, as all the wood folk know, who, with his tattling; tongue, set Mal-sum the Wicked Wolf trying to kill Gloos-cap the Good. Your foreparents were thieves and murderers too; and you take after them.

"The Master of Life has formed some of us so that we must kill to live and for us to kill is lawful. It is not so with you. You were made to live on seeds and nuts, yet Kag-ax the Weasel, whom we all hate, is scarcely more bloodthirsty than you are. And you are a coward to boot. You haven't the courage to fight and you kill for pleasure and by stealth."

Mee-ko started to talk back at Ko-ko-ka, but the big owl snapped his beak angrily and rustled his wings. Mee-ko saw and heard and he didn't wait to finish his remarks. He scurried along the branch, took a flying leap to the next tree, and disappeared.

"Let him go. His room is better than his company," remarked Ko-ko-ka.

"That's so," said little Luke, "I never did like him much anyway. But tell me, what did he mean about his forefathers?"

"Well," answered Ko-ko-ka, "I've had a good nap and haven't anything to do till sundown. So, if you like, I'll tell you about it."

[Illustration]

XVIII. THE STORY OF THE FIRST RED SQUIRRELS

"Long, long ago," began the old owl, "when the world was new, there dwelt upon the earth a wise and good man whose name was Gloos-cap. He was a servant of the Master of Life, who had sent him to teach the men and all the other creatures everything that was good for them to know. So he went about from place to place, teaching the kindreds.

"He taught the Red Men how to build their wigwams and to plant corn and care for it. He taught the beavers how to build their lodges and the birds how to build their nests and care for their little ones. To all the kindreds he taught the things which each most needed to know.

"At first all the creatures were good and heeded the teachings of Gloos-cap. But after a time their hearts became evil. Gloos-cap often spoke to them and did his best to turn them from their wicked ways, but in vain. They grew more and more envious, spiteful, and quarrelsome. At last they became so wicked that they began to fight and kill each other. Worse than all else, the victors took to devouring the bodies of the slain.

"The good Gloos-cap was grieved and disgusted. He made up his mind to invite them to a feast and try once more to turn them from their evil ways. When they came, he set before each one of them food in abundance. Although each had enough and more than enough for himself, some of them were not satisfied. They began to quarrel and fight, each striving to take from the other his portion.

"Now Gloos-cap was a mighty magician. By his magic power, he caused the food to turn to ashes in the mouths of the greedy ones. As soon as they tasted the ashes, they tried to talk and scold, but they could scarcely say two words on account of the ashes which got into their throats.

"The angry Gloos-cap waved his hand over them, and by his magic power the quarrelsome, envious, and greedy ones disappeared. In their place there were a number of red squirrels, who chattered and scolded and coughed as red squirrels always do even to this day. These were the foreparents of all the red squirrels in the world.

"'Now,' said Gloos-cap to the other creatures, 'take warning by the fate of these who are now squirrels and cease from being quarrelsome, envious, and greedy.'"

XIX. HOW THE RED SQUIRREL BECAME SMALL

"Now in those days Mee-ko the Red Squirrel was much larger than he is to-day,---as large as Moo-ween the Bear; and his temper was even as his size. He desired most earnestly to take revenge upon Gloos-cap the Good for what he had done to him. So he sought out the brother of Gloos-cap, even Mal-sum the Wicked Wolf, and tempted him to kill his brother.

"'I would gladly slay him,' said Mal-sum, 'but I know not how it may be done. On account of his magic power, there is only one thing in all the world that can hurt him, and I know not what that is.'

"'Go you,' said Mee-ko, 'and pretend to be friendly with him and find out his secret. Then you may slay him.'

"Mal-sum thought this good advice, and acted according to it. For many days he behaved to his brother with pretended kindness, always watching to find out his secret.

"My brother,' said he, one day when they were hunting together, 'you know that there is but one thing in all the world that can hurt either of us, one thing for you, and another for me. Tell me what it is with which you may be slain?'

"Now Gloos-cap the Good knew the wickedness and spite that lay hid in the heart of his brother. So he said, 'Nay, but tell me first, what it is with which you may be slain?'

"And the wicked Mal-sum thought in his heart, 'What would it matter even if he knew the truth? I shall slay him before he can harm me.' So he answered truly, 'By the stroke of a fern-root only can I be slain. Now what is your secret?'

"But Gloos-cap, knowing his brother's wickedness, was unwilling to trust him. So he answered falsely and craftily, 'By the stroke of an owl's feather it is fated that I shall be some day slain.'

"Now the wicked Mai-sum was greatly rejoiced in heart at hearing this. So he left his brother, making some excuse, and went off into the woods alone. There finding an owl, one of my foreparents, he shot him, and, taking some of his feathers, returned home.

"That night while Gloos-cap was sleeping, the wicked Mai-sum arose, and taking the owl's feather, struck his brother upon the forehead. But Gloos-cap, awakened by the blow, only laughed. 'It is not really a feather,' said he, 'but a pine-root that shall end my life. I was but joking with you this morning.'

"But the wicked Mai-sum feigned that lie, too, had been only in sport, and the two brothers lay down again and slept.

"But the next night, while Gloos-cap was sleeping, Mai-sum again arose and struck him upon the forehead with a pine-root.

"This time Gloos-cap, seeing the wickedness of his brother's heart, and that he was bound to take his life, arose and drove Mai-sum forth into the woods. Then he went away and sat down by the brookside, considering what he should do.

"Truly,' said he to himself, 'he will yet slay me. If he but knew that a flowering rush is fated to be my bane, my life would not be safe for a moment.'

"Now it chanced that the beaver was hidden among the reeds in the brook and heard what Gloos-cap had said. So he went off to Mal-sum, and told him his brother's secret for a reward.

"The reward was that Mal-sum by his magic power should grant whatever the beaver might ask. So the beaver asked that he might have wings like a wood dove. But Mal-sum only laughed at him. 'Wings for you!' he chuckled; 'you, who have nothing to do but paddle about in the mud and eat bark! what need have you of wings? Besides, how would you with that flat tail of yours look with wings!'

"Now you may be sure that the beaver was angry at being thus made sport of. So he went straightway to Gloos-cap and told him that Mal-sum had found out his secret.

"Now,' said Gloos-cap to himself, 'I must needs slay him. He does naught but evil in the world, and I have not yet finished the good work which the Master of Life sent me to do.' That night he arose and, taking a fern-root, smote the wicked Mal-sum on the head so that he died.

"Now Gloos-cap knew that Mee-ko the Red Squirrel had tempted his brother to try to slay him, and since Mee-ko was so large and of such an evil temper, he feared that he would do much harm. So meeting Mee-ko one day in the woods, he

said, "Tell me, what would you do if you should see a man?"

"If I should see a man,' answered Mee-ko, 'I would dig up the trees of the forest, so that they would fall upon and slay him. Then I would feast upon his dead body.'

"You are too large and too wicked,' said Gloos-cap. 'I fear I cannot change your temper, but I can your size,' So he passed his hands over the big red squirrel's back, and behold, he shrunk and shriveled until he became small, even as small as he is at this day. But his temper remained almost as bad as before. Even to-day, he can scarcely see any creature without scolding and saying bad words."

XX. LITTLE LUKE AND MOTHER MIT-CHEE THE RUFFLED PARTRIDGE

Up in the woods on the side of the mountain Mother Mit-chee the Ruffled Partridge built her nest, close beside the trail. It was nothing but a little hollow in the ground, lined with leaves.

It was in plain sight and you would have supposed that anyone going along the trail would have seen it. But they didn't. Old John the Indian and Sam the hired man passed it a dozen times and never noticed it. Even Old Boze did not find it, although he followed Sam up and down the trail many times.

You see, Mother Mit-chee knew enough to sit perfectly still, and her mottled feathers blended so exactly with the tree trunks and the dead leaves about her that only the sharp eyes of the Finder of the Magic Flower ever found her out.

Little Luke saw her one day as he was walking up the trail beside Sam the hired man, and with Old Boze following at his heels. But he went right on by, as if he had not seen Mother Mit-chee at all. He did not want Sam or Old Boze to see her, for he knew they could not be trusted. They would be almost sure to try to kill Mother Mit-chee, or at the very least, they would rob her nest.

The next morning the little boy went up the trail alone, to pay Mother Mit-chee a visit. "Good morning, Mother Mit-chee," said he, "I saw you yesterday, but Sam and Old Boze didn't, and I wouldn't tell them."

"I knew you saw me," replied Mother Mit-chee, "and I knew you wouldn't tell. You are too kind-hearted for that, especially since you found the Magic Flower and learned the animal talk. We all trust you. You may come to see me as often as you like, but be careful not to leave any trail near my nest. I don't want Old Boze nosing around here. And when you come along with any of the house people, just go right by and don't look this way. I am more afraid of Old John the Indian than of anyone else. He looked right at me the other day and I was sure he saw me. I was scared, I tell you. I was all ready to fly away. But he didn't see me. If he had, I never should have seen my eggs again."

"All right," said the little boy, "I'll do just as you say." And after some more talk, he went on up the trail to visit some of his other friends among the wild folk.

Many times during the days that followed the little boy stopped and talked with the Mother Partridge. "If you will come to-morrow," said she, one day, "I'll show you as fine a brood of partridge chicks as anyone could wish to see."

"I'll be sure to come," answered the little boy, "for I want to see them very much."

As he came up the next day, Mother Mit-chee stepped off her nest. "There," said she, "there they are. Now aren't they fine ones?"

The little boy looked. In the nest there were a dozen of the daintiest, downiest, little creatures he had ever seen. They were scarcely bigger than an acorn. "They surely are a fine brood," said he. "Aren't you afraid that something will catch them?"

"Of course I am afraid. I'm always afraid." said Mother Mit-chee, "but the creature that catches them will have to be pretty sharp. I know a trick or two that will fool most of the wild folk, and the house people as well. You come up to-morrow and I'll show you. They are pretty young now, and I don't want to disturb them unless I have to."

The next day the little boy found the nest empty. He looked carefully about for Mother Mit-chee and her brood. Suddenly something rose almost from under his feet, and whizzed off through the wood. There was a sound like an explosion, followed by thunder, which scared the little boy so that he jumped. But he saw that it was only Mother Mit-chee, and he had seen her do that before.

He knew that the chicks were near at hand, and looked around carefully for them.

Pretty soon Mother Mit-chee sailed around through the woods and dropped to the ground but a little way from the boy. She seemed to have been hurt, badly hurt. One wing dragged as if it was broken, and she limped sadly.

"Ha, ha," laughed the little boy, "you can't fool me with that trick. You needn't keep it up any longer, I shan't follow you. I know that you are not hurt at all. Old John told me all about it. He told me that he saw you playing that very trick on Kee-wuks the Red Fox only the other day."

[Illustration]

"Well, well!" said Mother Mit-chee. "Did Old John see that? I didn't know he was anywhere about. Yes," she went on. "Kee-wuks thought he had me that time. I let him get close up. Then he jumped for me; but when he landed where I was, I wasn't there! If I hadn't made him believe he could catch me he might have found my chicks."

"Well," said Little Luke, "I heard Sam say that no one could find a young partridge chick, but I'm going to try it. You know since I found the Magic Flower my eyes are sharper than those of any of the other house people."

"All right," said Mother Mit-chee, "I'll call them out. I'm afraid if you walk around there, you'll step on them; they're right around your feet." And she began calling to the chicks. "Kreet, kreet, come out, come out, right away," she called.

Right before little Luke a dead leaf that was curled up seemed to come to life, but it wasn't really the leaf. It was the partridge chick that had squatted upon it that moved. Just before him, little Luke saw a tiny bunch under the dead leaves. He reached down and seized it, but very carefully. It was another one of the chicks. And the ground about him seemed alive with the little ones as they came out at their mother's call.

"Well done," said Mother Mit-chee, "your eyes certainly are good. But handle him carefully. Don't squeeze too tight. There now, you've hurt him!" (The little one was peeping as if in pain.)

Little Luke set him very carefully on the ground. "Don't worry," said he, "he isn't hurt, he's only a little scared."

"Well," said Mother Mit-chee, "I must take these babies of mine down to the spring and teach them how to drink. They have never tasted water yet."

"Kreet, kreet, come along, come along," called Mother Mit-chee.

"Peep, peep, we're coming, we're coming, mother," said the little ones. And they all started down the mountainside toward the spring.

It took a good while to get there, for the chicks were young, and their little legs so short and so weak that Mother Mit-chee had to wait for them a good many times. But it was a pretty sight. The yellow, downy, little fellows marched along boldly behind their mother. Sometimes she would go on a little way ahead. Then she would stop and call, "Kreet, kreet, come along, children," and the little fellows would race to see who could catch up first.

Some of them were not so strong as others, and at times they would squat upon the ground to rest. Mother Mit-chee would wait as long as she thought proper, and then tell them to "come along." And away they would go down the mountainside.

At last they reached the spring. The little ones had never seen water before, and did not know what to do. But Mother Mit-chee took a drop of clear, cold water in her bill, and raised her head before she swallowed it. Each chick copied her motion exactly. It was fun for the little boy to watch them. Nearly the whole dozen would clip their little bills into the water at once, and raise their heads to swallow it, as they had seen their mother do.

"Mother Mit-chee," said the little boy, after they had all finished drinking, "what makes you raise your head before you swallow the water?"

"Oh," said Mother Mit-chee, "that is our way of giving thanks to the Master of Life for the cool, sweet water. Our family learned to do it a long time ago, and we have always done it since."

"That sounds as if there might be a story about it," said the little boy, who was always on the watch for stories.

"Well," said Mother Mit-chee, "there is a story about it."

XXI. WHY THE FEATHERED FOLK RAISE THEIR HEADS WHEN THEY DRINK

"A long time ago," she went on, "there came a summer when no rain fell for many weeks. As you know, all the feathered folk can get along pretty well if there are only dew-drops to drink. But after a time there was no dew, and even the grass withered and died.

"All the feathered tribes suffered terribly from thirst. At last they gathered together in a great council, and asked the Master of Life to take pity on them in their sad state. He heard their prayer, and sent the angel who cares for the wild folk to speak to them.

"'The Master of Life,' said he, 'has seen your sufferings and heard your prayers. He is merciful and kind, and has given orders to the Angel of the Rain Clouds to supply your needs. Look!' said he, pointing to the west. All the feathered folk looked, and behold, in the distance, the dark Rain Clouds were already flying toward them, driven by the breath of the Angel of the Winds.

"Soon the rain began to fall, the grass, the flowers, and the trees revived, the springs were filled, and the sweet murmur of running water was again heard in the brooks and rivers. The wild folk drank and were refreshed.

"Before the Angel of the Wild Folk departed, he said, 'From this time on forever when you drink, you must raise your head as a token of thankfulness to the Master of Life who has sent you the refreshing rain.'

"If you watch them, you will notice that all the feathered folk show their gratitude to the Master of Life in the same way."

XXII. LITTLE LUKE AND FATHER MIT-CHEE

"Where is Father Mit-chee?" asked the little boy of the Mother Partridge, one day.

"I don't know," she answered; "I haven't seen him since I began to sit."

"Well," said the little boy, "I think he's a mean, lazy scamp, to go off and leave you to take care of the family alone."

"Well," said Mother Mit-chee, "it would be rather nice to have some help. I feel a bit lonesome sometimes, especially when I notice how kind Father O-loo-la is to his wife and family. But it isn't the custom in our family. The fathers leave the mothers to take care of the family. They never come near us until their children are able to take care of themselves. I've taught these youngsters of mine what to eat and where to find it. They have learned to fly pretty well, and taken some lessons in whirring, so that they can frighten their enemies. I wouldn't be surprised to see Father Mit-chee any day. Why, there he is now! I can tell his drumming any time."

The little boy listened. Far off in the distance he heard thump!--thump!--thump!--thump!--thr-r-r-r-r!

"Let's go and meet him," said Mother Mit-chee. "He doesn't know you, so I'll go ahead. Then he won't be frightened."

So they went through the woods, Mother Mit-chee in the lead, till they came in sight of the Father Partridge. He was standing on a fallen log and drumming. Just how he did it the little boy could not tell. He flapped his wings like a rooster, and seemed to beat the log or his own sides. As the little boy watched him, he thought that perhaps the sound was made by Father Mit-chee's wings striking together over his back. When he saw Mother Mit-chee coming, he walked up and down the log very proudly. Then he stopped and drummed louder than ever.

"Well," said Mother Mit-chee, "so you've come back at last, have you? Here are your children. Don't they look as if I had taken good care of them?"

"Why, yes," replied Father Mit-chee, "they're looking pretty well. I've heard of you several times, and knew that you were getting along all right. But who's that over yonder?" he asked, as he caught sight of Little Luke.

"Oh," answered Mother Mit-chee, "you've heard of him before. He's the boy who found the Magic Flower, and learned the animal talk."

That was the way little Luke came to know Father Mit-chee.

XXIII. THE STORY OF THE FIRST PARTRIDGE

"Father Mit-Chee," said little Luke one day as the two were sitting together on the drumming log, "can't you tell me a story?"

"Why, yes," said Father Mit-chee, "I suppose I might, I might tell you the story of the first partridge."

Long, long ago an Indian was hunting in the woods. As he went along, he heard a noise as of people jumping and dancing on hard ground. "That is queer," said he to himself. "I will go and see what is going on."

So he turned his steps in the direction of the sound, and went on through the forest swiftly but silently. Though at the first the noise had seemed to come from a place near at hand, it was a long time before he came in sight of the dancers. They were a man and a woman, and they were jumping and dancing about a tree, in the top of which was Hes-puns the Raccoon.

Now all three of them, the raccoon as well as the man and woman, were magicians. The man and the woman were enemies to the other, and as their magic was stronger than his, he had turned himself into a raccoon to escape them.

[Illustration]

The hunter did not know this. He went toward them, and as he drew near, he saw that the dancers had worn a ditch waist-deep about the tree.

He went up to them and asked them why they did this strange thing.

Now the man and the woman did not want the hunter to know the truth of the matter. So they said, "We are trying to wear away the earth from the root of this tree, so that we can get it down and catch Hes-puns, We are hungry and we have no tomahawk."

"Well," said the hunter, "I have a good tomahawk and I will cut down the tree for you. But you must give me the skin of Hes-puns."

They agreed to this, and the hunter soon brought the tree to the ground. They caught the raccoon and killed and skinned him. Then they gave the skin to the hunter, who went home.

A few days after this, the hunter saw a stranger coming toward his lodge. On his head he wore a strange kind of cap which looked like a small wigwam. When the hunter went out to meet him, the stranger took off his cap and set it upon the ground. At once it grew larger and larger until it became a beautiful lodge with several fine rooms in it.

The hunter was greatly amazed, but invited the stranger into his own lodge and set food before him. While eating, the visitor chanced to see the pelt of Hes-puns hanging on one of the lodge poles.

Now he was a magician and the brother of the one who had turned himself into a raccoon. As soon as he saw the skin, he knew it by certain marks to be the skin of his brother, and supposed that the hunter had killed him. So he thought, how he might be revenged upon him.

"That is a fine pelt you have there," said he to the hunter. "I should like to buy it."

"Yes," replied the hunter, "it is a fine one, but I do not care to sell it."

"I will give you more than it is worth," said the magician. And he offered everything that he had except his magic wigwam.

"No, I do not care to sell it," answered the hunter to each new offer. But finally, he said, "If you will give me that fine lodge of yours, you may have the skin."

"It's a bargain," said the magician; "the lodge is yours. But you must keep me overnight. We will sleep in your new lodge, which is much finer and better furnished than this."

"Very well," replied the hunter, "but you must show me how to carry my new lodge upon my head as you did."

"Oh, that is easy," returned the magician, "you just pick it up and put it on your head. Come out and try it now."

The hunter went out and picked up the lodge and put it upon his head. He found he could carry it easily, for it was as light as a wicker basket.

When he put it upon the ground, it at once grew as large as before. So the hunter and his wife and the stranger went into the lodge. Its new owner was greatly pleased with it. It contained several large rooms, in one of which was a very fine bed covered with a white bear skin. On that bed the hunter and his wife lay down to sleep, while the stranger found a bed in another room.

In the morning when the hunter and his wife awoke, they were more delighted than ever with their new lodge. It seemed large and airy, and from the beams high above their heads hung all kinds of things good to eat. There were ducks and geese, rabbits and venison, ears of corn, and bags of maple sugar.

In their joy, the man and his wife sprang out of bed and made a jump toward the dainties. At once the white bear skin melted and ran away, for it was nothing but the snow of winter. At the same time, their arms spread out into wings, and they flew up to the food, which was only the early buds of the birch tree on which they hung. For the magician had cast a spell upon the man and the woman and they had become partridges and had been sheltering themselves from the storms of winter under a snowdrift, after the manner of their kind, and now came forth to greet the pleasant spring.

And these two were the first partridges, the foreparents of all the partridges that are now in the world.

"That is a strange story," said the little boy. "I thank you for telling it. But now I must go home. Good-bye for to-day."

XXIV. WHY PARTRIDGES DRUM

A few days later little Luke went up into the woods again. As he walked along the trail, he heard Father Mit-chee drumming. He knew where the drumming log was, so he went over to it and sat down on one end.

"Father Mit-chee," said he, when the old partridge had finished, "I noticed a queer thing about your drumming. One day I heard Old John pounding on a canoe he was building. At a distance your drumming sounded just like his pounding. Why was that?"

"Well," said Father Mit-chee, "I suppose it was because Grandfather Mit-chee, the first partridge, was a canoe builder. When he stopped building canoes he kept up his drumming."

"Tell me about it, please," said the little boy.

"All right," said Father Mit-chee, and he began this story.

* * * * *

"In the olden days, Mit-chee the Partridge was the canoe builder for all the birds. Once upon a time they all came together on the bank of the river, and each one got into his own bark. Truly that was a fine sight to see!

[Illustration]

"Kit-chee the Great Eagle paddled off first, using the ends of his broad wings. After him went Ko-ko-ka the Owl; Kusk the Crane; Wee-so-wee the Bluebird; and Chip-sis the Blackbird. Even tiny A-la-moo the Humming Bird had a neat little boat. But his wings were so small that Mit-chee had made for him a dainty little paddle. Some of the birds thought it rather too large, for it was almost an inch long. So the fleet of canoes stood bravely out to sea, and after a pleasant voyage returned safely to land.

"Now the partridge had not taken part in the voyage, for he had built no canoe for himself. 'It's great sport,' said the other birds, on their return. 'Why didn't you build a canoe for yourself?' But Mit-chee only looked wise and drummed upon the log on which he was sitting, and the sound was the sound of one making a canoe.'

"But the birds kept asking him to build a canoe for himself and join them. At last he remarked that he was about to do so, and that when he had finished it, it would be a wonder, something new such as no eye had ever before beheld.

"Then he went off into the woods by himself and was seen no more for several days. When he came back, he invited all the birds to come and see his wonderful canoe,---one he had built for himself on an entirely new plan.

"Now Mit-chee had reasoned that if a boat having two ends could be rowed in two ways, one which was all ends (that is, round) could be rowed in every direction. So he had made a canoe exactly like a nest, perfectly round. When the honest feathered folk saw this, they were greatly amazed and wondered that so simple a thing had not occurred to all of them.

"But when Mit-chee got into his new canoe and began to paddle, their wonder turned into amusement, for he made no headway at all. However hard he worked, the canoe simply turned round and round.

"After wearying himself, and all in vain, he went ashore, and flew off far inland. There he hid himself for shame under the low bushes in the woods, and there he has lived ever since. But at certain seasons, when he thought no one was looking, he would get upon a dead log and drum with his wings, and the sound was like the sound which he used to make when he was building canoes.

"And so his children have always done since that day."

[Illustration]

XXV. MOTHER WA-POOSE AND OLD BOZE THE HOUND

Up at the edge of the woods the wood-cutters had felled a tree into the open pasture. As they trimmed the trunk, they threw the smaller branches into a big pile. Uncle Mark intended to burn them when they became dry enough, but forgot all about it. There they had lain for years, till they were dead and covered with moss. Over the heap of half-rotted brushwood a tangle of wild vines had spread, and up through them a thicket of blackberry bushes had grown.

This was just the place for a rabbit nest. Mother Wa-poose could squat anywhere in the pile and her brown coat would blend with the dead brush so perfectly that only the keenest eye could see her. No hawk or owl could swoop through such a tangle of vines and brush, and no fox or dog could creep through the close-set hedge of thorny blackberry bushes without losing a good deal of his hide.

Through the thicket Mother Wa-poose cut two or three paths just wide enough for herself, but not big enough for a dog or a fox. In the middle of the brush pile, she dug a little round hollow about a foot across and lined it with coarse grass. On the top of this she placed another lining of finer grass. Then she filled the hollow quite full of soft fur from her own coat. No bird's nest could be cosier or safer. To be sure, it was on the ground, but the land sloped and no water could

settle into it.

One day as little Luke was passing by the brush pile, his keen eye saw Mother Wa-poose. "There," said he to himself, "is just the place for a rabbit's nest. I'll take a look at Mother Wa-poose's babies."

So he got down on his hands and knees, pulled the bushes apart, and crept into the thicket. He saw the nest, but could not get quite to it because of the sharp thorns on the blackberry bushes.

"Good morning, Man-cub," said Mother Wa-poose.

"Good morning, Mother Wa-poose," said little Luke; "don't be afraid, I only want to take a look at your babies."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," said Mother Wa-poose. "None of us are afraid of you any more. Look all you want to. But don't come any nearer. I am afraid you will open a path for Kee-wuk the Red Fox, or for Old Boze the Hound. Both of them have been around here several times. They know that I and my babies are here, but they can't get in. Old Boze tried it the other day, but went back to the house with a pair of bloody ears for his pains."

"Yes, I noticed his ears," said little Luke, "and wondered what he had been up to."

The little boy sat down as comfortably as he could and looked at Mother Wa-poose and her babies.

"Mother Wa-poose," said he after a while, "what makes you wriggle your nose so?"

"Oh," said Mother Wa-poose, "I do that to keep my smell clear. You see we have so many enemies that we have to be on the watch all the time, and I can smell a fox or a dog almost as far as I can see them. You see I always sit with my nose to the wind, and my ears in the other direction. My nose tells me who is coming in front; my ears tell me who is coming from behind; and my eyes keep watch on both sides. I sleep most of the day, but my eyes, my ears, and my nose are always awake. Why, I knew you were coming almost half an hour ago. My nose told me. It is only in such a place as this that my three sentinels ever get any rest.

"When I haven't any babies to care for, I like to sit in a more open place in the sun. So long as I have a chance to run each way, I am not much afraid of anybody. And if it wasn't for the men with their dreadful fire-sticks, we of the Wa-poose family would have a pretty safe and easy time of it."

Just then the deep bay of a hound was heard. "There," said Mother Wa-poose, "there's Old Boze now. Would you like to see how I can fool him?"

"I would indeed," said little Luke, "if you are not afraid. Old Boze is a wise, old hound, and he may catch you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," said Mother Wa-poose. "You just sit here where you can see, and I'll go down there and give Old Boze the time of his life. I think he must be trailing me now by the sound. I was down in the garden last night after a meal of cabbage leaves, and I suppose he has found my track."

Mother Wa-poose sprang out of her hiding place and went down the slope ten feet at a bound. She crossed her old track near the pasture bars and hopped slowly on to the edge of the blackberry patch. There she sat till she was sure that Old Boze had found her new trail. Then she skipped here and there through the briar patch till she came out on the other side. With a great leap she cleared the fence and ran on down through the cornfield. When she was clear of that, she ran along beside the stone wall till she came to the creek. Over the creek she went at one leap; then down through the alder

bushes till she came back again into the pasture. Two or three times she crossed the brook. Then she came around up through the woods to the brush pile, where little Luke was sitting. From its lower edge there was a good view all down through the pasture. There Mother Wa-poose sat up and watched the old hound, her big, round eyes shining with glee.

Old Boze followed her trail into the blackberry thicket. Round and round he followed the scent, pushing his way through the stout bushes. Every bush was armed with a thousand sharp hooks, and every hook clung to the old hound's skin. He fairly whimpered with pain. Now and then he gave tongue, until at last he came out on the other side. But his ears were in tatters and blood drops oozed from his skin in a thousand places.

At the fence he was balked. Up and down beside the fence he ran several times, nosing the ground for the scent.

"Look at him! Look at him," said Mother Wa-poose, fairly shaking her sides with laughter. "Isn't he a sight? But that won't teach him anything. He'll do it the next time. Rabbit chasing must be lots of fun for him."

"I really do think he enjoys it," said little Luke.

Old Boze jumped over the fence and found the trail again. He followed it until he came to the creek. There he was puzzled. But he crossed the brook and found the trail at last. Over in the pasture he lost it again. Mother Wa-poose had been too cunning for him this time. After nosing the ground in all directions for a long time in vain, the old hound gave it up, and went back to the house.

"You see," said Mother Wa-poose, "if it wasn't for the fire-sticks, the hounds would not bother us much. Why will the house people be so cruel to us? We never harm them. Last fall the fire-sticks killed six of my children." And Mother Wa-poose's eyes filled with tears at the thought.

"It is too bad," said little Luke, "but Uncle Mark says that if some of the rabbits weren't killed off every year, they'd soon eat all the grass from the sheep and cows, and we wouldn't be able to raise any cabbages or turnips at all. Besides, you know, the house people like rabbit's flesh to eat. I used to eat it myself, but I'll never do it any more."

"How dreadful!" said Mother Wa-poose. "I don't see how anybody can eat flesh. Clover, or a nice, tender cabbage leaf is a good deal better."

XXVI. MOTHER WA-POOSE AND OLD KLAW'S THE HOUSE CAT

A few days after little Luke saw something that gave him a new feeling of respect for Mother Wa-poose.

He was going up to make her another visit. As he came near the brush pile, he heard a thump! thump! thump! "That's Mother Wa-poose," said he to himself, "and she's angry about something. I wonder what can be the matter."

He went around to the other side of the brush pile and then he knew. There was Old Klaws the House Cat, his tail twitching and his round eyes shining hungrily.

Just as the boy caught sight of the old cat, Mother Wa-poose sprang out of the thicket. She sprang straight at Old Klaws. The cat snarled and shrank to one side. But Mother Wa-poose was too quick for him. As she went over, she struck him a sounding thwack with her hind feet. It fairly made the old cat's ribs crack, and he rolled over and over down the slope. In a second he sprang up, snarling and spitting. Again Mother Wa-poose sprang at him. This time she hit him squarely on the side of the head. Old Klaws went down, rolling over several times before he could right himself. The last thwack took all the fight out of him. He scrambled to his feet and went flying down the hillside at his best speed.

[Illustration]

"There," said old Mother Wa-poose, "I guess he'll know enough to keep away from here after this."

"Why, Mother Wa-poose," said the little boy, "I didn't know that you were such a fighter."

"Well," said Mother Wa-poose, "we of the Wa-poose family never fight if we can help it. We'd rather run. But we aren't really afraid of anything our size. And this time I couldn't run. If I had, Old Klaws would surely have carried off one of my babies. He got one of them this spring. You remember the one you took away from him. He is grown up and has gone out into the world for himself now. You know we Wa-poses have three or four families each year."

[Illustration]

XXVII. THE RABBIT DANCE

"Would you like to see a rabbit dance?" asked Father Wa-poose one day in September.

"Indeed, I should," replied little Luke.

"Come out to-night then," said Wa-poose, "and sit down in the shadow of the stone wall in the corner of the clover field. There you will see something you have never seen before."

"I'll be there," said the boy.

That night little Luke went up to his room early. He took off his shoes and threw them heavily upon the floor, and blew out the light. Then he jumped upon his bed, so that it creaked loudly. Without taking off his clothes, he got under the blankets, and when Aunt Martha looked in, he seemed to be sound asleep. She did not look into the closet to see whether his clothes were hanging up there or not.

When he thought Aunt Martha had gone to bed, the little boy got up quietly, took his shoes in his hand, and slipped softly down the back stairs. Silently he unlocked and opened the kitchen door, and went out into the moonlight.

He did not feel that he was doing quite right, but he was afraid to ask Aunt Martha. You see he was afraid that she might ask questions, which he could not answer without telling about the Magic Flower and his wild friends.

He went over to the clover field and sat down in the corner of the stone fence where some bushes hid him from view.

For some time nothing happened. Pretty soon he heard a queer thump! thump! thump! He looked up and there was old Father Wa-poose close beside him. He had come into the field so quietly that little Luke had not heard a sound.

"Hi! hi! there you are, Man-cub," said the old rabbit. "Now you sit very still, and you'll see something worth seeing. Of course we are not really afraid of you, but if some of the young folks should see you, they might get nervous. I'll just go out and get my supper, and when the fun begins I'll come back and keep you company. I don't care much for dancing. I leave that mostly to the young people."

Soon from all sides, rabbits came leaping over the fence into the field. There were young rabbits and old rabbits, big rabbits and little rabbits.

Sometimes one of them would stop and thump the ground with his hind feet. This seemed to be a signal; for when one thumped, another would come hopping toward him. The two would touch noses and then turn to on the sweet, young clover, that had grown up since the July mowing.

Their feast lasted for an hour or more. Then the fun began. Several of them would hop close together in the centre of the field. Then they would skip slowly about in a sort of stately dance. Little by little the movement became faster and faster until they were spinning around like a pinwheel in a brisk breeze. Round and round they went until it made little Luke's head dizzy to watch them.

Suddenly a rabbit stamped with his hind feet,---thump! thump! thump! Instantly every rabbit squatted motionless. It was a danger signal, but a false one. Nothing happened.

Soon the fun began again. Several of the rabbits had a game of tag. Round and round they went, leaping ten feet or more at each bound. Sometimes in the midst of their race, one of them would take a sky-hop. Up straight into the air he would go as if he were trying to reach the moon.

"Why do they do that?" asked little Luke of Father Wa-poose, who had come back and was sitting quietly beside him.

"They do that," answered the old rabbit, "to get a clear look all around them. You know we always have to be on the lookout for our foes."

Not far from little Luke two rabbits were having a boxing match. They stood up to each other just like men. Little Luke could hear a soft spat, spat, spat, as the blows went home. Their paws were so soft that the blows did not hurt and it was great fun.

Suddenly thump! thump! thump! sounded the danger signal again. Not for nothing this time! Ko-ko-ka the Great Owl came sailing over the clover field as silently as a ghost. But for all his great eyes, the old owl could not see a single rabbit. Neither could little Luke.

"Where have they all gone to?" he asked Father Wa-poose.

"Oh," said he, "they're all there. So long as they sit perfectly still old Ko-ko-ka can't see them."

"Why didn't they run away?" asked little Luke.

[Illustration]

"What's the use?" replied the old rabbit; "so long as we know he is coming, we aren't afraid of Ko-ko-ka. If he should swoop at one of them, he'd just give a bound and get out of danger. Old Ko-ko-ka can't catch a rabbit who knows he's coming. It's the way he comes that makes us fear him. His wings are covered with down and do not make a sound. That's the reason we all dread him so. Ugh! I fairly shiver when I think of him. He nearly got me once. His sharp claws scratched my ears."

Ko-ko-ka was very hungry. He knew the rabbits were in that meadow, and hated to go off without one. While Wa-poose had been talking, he had been sailing slowly round the field. Now he was coming back again.

As he flew over little Luke's head he looked down. Perhaps he saw a slight movement as little Luke tried to look up at him. Instantly he swooped and his sharp claws struck the little boy's hat.

"Hi, there!" said little Luke in astonishment. It was Ko-ko-ka's turn to be astonished now. He dropped the hat, flapped his great wings, and floated off towards the woods.

Little Luke left his hat where it fell and waited to see what the rabbits would do. After a short time the fun began again. There were two young ones that little Luke noticed in particular. They began their race in the middle of the field. Round and round they went and each time round their circles became larger.

Now on the other side of the clover field there was an open gap in the fence. All at once the danger signal sounded again. Thump! thump! thump! Again every rabbit squatted, with ears and eyes alert to catch sound or sight of an enemy.

It was too late. Through the gate bounded a ball of reddish, yellow fur. Snap! And the teeth of Kee-wuk the Red Fox had seized one of the young rabbits by the neck. Swinging the limp body over his shoulders, he trotted quietly off through the gap.

That ended the fun. As they saw the Red Fox every rabbit sprang to his feet, and with a hop, skip, and jump went over the fence and out of the clover field. And little Luke saw them no more that night.

XXVIII. WHY THE WILD FOLK NO LONGER TALK THE MAN-TALK

Now in his talks with his wild friends little Luke noticed that they used many Indian words such as he had learned from Old John the Indian.

"Why is it," said he, one day to Wa-poose, "that you wild folk use so many of the Red Men's words?"

"Well," said the old rabbit, "that is a long story. But if you will sit down here beside me, I will tell you about it."

* * * * *

"In the first days," said Wa-poose, "when the world was new, the men and the wild folk were much alike. They all spoke one language.

"In those days it was always summer. All the year round the grass was green and the flowers bloomed. Twelve times a year the vines and bushes and trees bore fresh blossoms, and twelve times a year they were loaded with ripe berries, fruits, and nuts.

"In those times there was no hunting and no killing. All the wild kindreds lived in peace with each other and with the Red Men, who then dwelt in this land. You see there was plenty to eat and the weather was so warm and pleasant that the Red Men did not need the skins of their wild brothers to keep them from the cold.

"But after a while a change came. Pe-boan the dreadful Winter King came down from the North and made war upon Ni-pon the Queen of Summer. After many battles peace was made and the year was divided; half the year was ruled by the Queen of Summer, and half by the Winter King.

"Now it came to pass that after the war was over the vines and bushes and trees put forth their buds and blossomed and bore fruit but once a year. The Red Men and the wild kindreds suffered dreadfully from hunger, and their hearts became hard and cruel. Then the hunting and the killing began. The Red Men hunted many of the wild kindreds for their flesh and their fur, and the wild kindreds began to kill and devour each other. And so it has been since that day.

"In those times the Wa-poose folk were much larger than they are now, even as large as Mo-ween the Bear. But they refused to take part in the killing and flesh eating, and so they suffered more from hunger than some of the wild kindreds. Year by year, on account of the scarcity of food, the Wa-poose folk became smaller until they were as you see them now.

"In the beginning, as I have said, the Red Men and the wild kindreds spoke one language. Even to this day, the Red hunters have kept many of the watchwords of the wild folk, and by means of them are able to deceive and kill them.

"Now by reason of the great slaughter that was made by the Red Men, the wild kindreds gathered themselves together in a great council to discuss their condition. After much talk they decided to ask help of the Master of Life.

"'There is but one way,' said he, when he had heard their story, 'you must change your speech. Then the Red Men will no longer be able to deceive you so easily and slay so many of you.'

"The wild folk did as the Master of Life told them to do. They changed their language, and refused to speak any longer with the Red Men. But some of the Red Men's words they have kept to this day, and that is why you hear us use them."

XXIX. THE TALE OF SUN-KA THE WISE DOG

One day Old John the Indian came down the trail to the farmhouse. He was on his way to town to sell some baskets. As Uncle Mark was going to town with the team, he invited him to ride. Since the town was several miles away, the old Indian gladly accepted the invitation, leaving Ke-ha-ga his old hound at the farmhouse.

In the afternoon little Luke was sitting on the fence when old Ke-ha-ga came over to him. Putting his front paws on top of the fence, he licked the little boy's hand.

"Hello, Ke-ha-ga," said little Luke, "so you have come out to see me, have you? Can't you tell me a story?" he added as he gently patted the old hound's head.

"What kind of a story do you want?" asked the old dog.

"Oh, most any kind will do," said the boy. "Tell me a story about some dog of the olden days,---the days before the white men came to this country."

"Very well," said Ke-ha-ga, "I'll tell you a legend that my grandfather told to me when I was a puppy." And he began the following tale.

[Illustration]

"Many winters ago there was a wise dog whose name was Sun-ka. He lived with an old Indian woman. Now Sun-ka was a good hunter, and often brought home to the lodge rabbits and other small animals which he had hunted and caught by himself.

"But his mistress was a bad, greedy old woman. She took all the game which he brought, and used it for herself. What she could not eat at once, she dried and put away for another time. To Sun-ka she gave only the bones and other poor scraps, so that most of the time he was half starved.

"At last there came a season when game was very scarce. The old woman, it is true, had plenty of dried meat in her wigwam, but she gave none of it to Sun-ka. He almost died of starvation.

"At last he said to himself, 'Why should that old woman have plenty to eat, and I scarcely anything at all? Most of the meat which she has hidden in her lodge, I caught for her myself. It is as much mine as it is hers. Since she will not give me my share of it, I'll just take it without asking her.'

"But the old woman was very watchful. When Sun-ka tried to get the meat, she beat him over the head with a club until he ran away yelping with pain.

"The next morning one of his dog friends came to visit him. 'Good morning, Sun-ka,' said he, but Sun-ka made no reply. Indeed, his head was so swelled from the blows he had received, that he could hardly open his mouth.

"'Well, well,' said his friend, after looking him over carefully, 'you seem to be in a sad case. What has happened to you?'

"'Oh,' replied Sun-ka, speaking with difficulty, 'I tried to get my share of the meat, which my mistress has in her lodge, and she beat me for it. She beat me till I am stiff and sore, and can scarcely move.'

"'Well,' said his friend, 'I wouldn't stand it if I were you. The meat is just as much yours as it is hers. You caught most of it yourself and you helped her to catch the rest of it, I'll tell you what we'll do; well pay her off for it. I'll go and call our friends; I'll call Rainmaker, Stillbiter, Strongneck, and Sharptooth.' And so he did.

"Rainmaker caused it to rain, and it rained all the day through until dark, and when it was dark it was very dark. Then Stillbiter crept up softly to the lodge and bit off all the thongs which fastened the covering to the lodge poles.

"When this was done, Strongneck crept in and seized the meat and carried it away. Then Sharptooth ripped open the bag which held the meat, and before morning the six dogs ate it all up.

"When the meat was all gone, Sun-ka ran away and became a wild dog. What became of the old Indian woman I do not know."

"Served her right," said the little boy. "If she hadn't been so stingy with her meat, she wouldn't have lost it. And Sun-ka would have stayed with her to help catch more."

XXX. HOW THE DOG'S TONGUE BECAME LONG

It was hot. Little Luke sat on the doorstep in the shade. Over in the pasture Old Boze the Hound gave tongue. He was at his favorite sport of trailing rabbits all by himself. He really didn't have any spite against the rabbits, but when he struck a fresh trail, he felt that he just must follow it. And when he had puzzled out a balk or break in the trail, he couldn't for the life of him keep still.

But it was really too hot for trailing, especially when there was nothing in it but fun. The old hound would have stuck to it longer if Sam the hired man had been around somewhere, hiding behind the bushes with his thundering fire-stick. Old Boze wasn't afraid of the fire-stick. He liked to hear it roar, and see the poor rabbits fall before its deadly breath.

Well, after a while he gave it up and came back to the house. Going around to the doorstep, he lay down on the cool porch with his head close to the little boy's shoulder. He was tired, and his dripping tongue hung far out from his open mouth. The little boy looked at it.

"Old Boze," said he, "what a long tongue you have. Why is it that dogs have such long tongues?"

Old Boze shifted his eyes uneasily and looked the other way, but said nothing.

"Come, now," said the little boy, "I am sure there is a story about that long, red tongue of yours."

"To be sure there is," said a voice that came from just behind the boy's ear. He looked around and there was Old Klaws the House Cat.

"What do you know about it?" asked the little boy.

"Oh, I know all about it," answered the old cat. "But ask Old Boze," he went on with a grin, "perhaps he'll tell you."

Old Boze got up slowly and with dignity. "I am too tired to tell stories," said he, "but I'm not too tired to shake the foolishness out of a cat."

"Here now," said the little boy, "no quarreling and fighting. I won't have it. And Klaws shall tell me that story about your long, red tongue, if he will."

"To be sure I will," said Old Klaws, delighted to be able to tease Old Boze safely. Of course there was another time coming when little Luke might not be at hand, but then the old cat trusted to speed and sharp claws to put himself up a tree and out of the reach of the old hound.

"All right," said Old Boze, "if you're fond of the company of a sneaking, mouse-eating, old tabby. I'm not. I'll take myself off. But my memory is good," he added, glancing at Old Klaws with a snarl that showed all his sharp, white teeth.

"Well, now for the story," said the little boy, when Old Boze was out of sight around the corner.

"Long, long ago," began Old Klaws, "when all the animal kindreds could talk the man-talk, the dogs were the greatest telltales in the world. They told everything they knew, and sometimes a great deal more. Their masters often flogged them for tattling, but it did little or no good.

"In those days there was a great hunter whose name was Man-e-do. He wanted a dog to help him hunt, but he did not want a tattletale. So he took a fine, young pup, and tried to bring him up to be a good hunter and to keep his tongue. He took good care of him. He often told him how foolish it was to tell everything he knew. The pup would promise not to tattle, but he was only a dog, and blood will tell after all.

"When the pup was big enough, his master took him with him when he went hunting for small game. The dog was a good trailer by this time, and together they killed many rabbits and other small animals.

"But when they went home, the dog couldn't hold his tongue. He would brag to the other dogs, and tell them what a great hunter he was, and how at such and such a place he had caught the biggest rabbits that ever were seen. Then the other dogs would lead their masters to those places and clear them of game. Whenever Man-e-do went to a place a second time, he found no game there.

"Besides, if they were hunting near the village and made a kill, the dog would pretend to go off after more game. But when he was out of sight of his master, he would run home and tell some of his chums about his kill. Then the other

dogs and their masters would come out and kill or scare away all the game there was in that place. Many times Man-e-do caught the dog tattling, and scolded and beat him for it, but it did no good. He just couldn't keep anything to himself.

"One time Man-e-do went off on a long hunt. He took three horses and traveled several days before making his camp. He thought he would get so far away that the dog could not go back to the village and tattle.

"While hunting in the mountains near his camp, he found a valley which was full of game. There he made many kills, and soon had all the meat his three horses could possibly carry.

"'To-morrow,' said he to his dog, 'we will start for home. When we get there, you must keep your tongue in your mouth. You must not tell where we have been. If the other hunters do not find our valley, we can come back at any time and get all the meat we want.'

"'All right,' said the dog, 'I'll keep the secret.'

"'See that you do,' added his master; 'for if you don't, I'll make you sorry for it.'

"The next morning they started for home. That night they camped beside a brook. At daybreak Man-e-do arose and made ready to start, but the dog was nowhere to be seen.

"'Where can he be?' said he to himself. 'Surely he has not gone home to the village.' You see, he thought that at last he had broken the dog of his tattling. Why then should he go on ahead?

"So he turned about and went back to his camp near the valley. The dog was not there. 'Perhaps,' thought he, 'a bear or a panther has killed him.'

"So he turned about and went home to his wigwam alone. There he found the dog as well as ever. He had been home a long time, and told all he knew about the valley of game and more too. According to his stories, he and his master had killed more game than had ever been seen before, and there was plenty more in the valley yet. All the hunters in the village were getting ready to go there to hunt.

"Man-e-do was very angry. He caught the dog, and gave him the worst whipping any dog ever had. 'I'll stop your tattling,' said he. And he caught the dog by the tongue and pulled it nearly out of his mouth. Then he shoved a round stick back into his mouth and tied his mouth shut over it.

"He left the stick there for a long time. When he took it out, the dog's mouth was larger, and his tongue longer than any dog's mouth and tongue had ever been before.

"Since that time, all dogs have had big mouths and long tongues.

"But," added Old Klaws, "they don't tattle as much as they did before."

While Old Klaws had been telling this story, Old Boze had been lying in the shade and resting. After a while, he thought to himself, "I'll give that old mouser a scare and I'll do it before little Luke can hinder me."

So he got up and walked silently around to the corner of the porch. With one foot raised, he stopped scarcely three feet from Old Klaws, who was sitting on the end of the top step.

Just as the old cat finished his story, Old Boze sprang toward him with a loud, "Bow-wow-wow." The old cat bounded as if he were made of India-rubber of the best quality. Such a cat-jump the little boy had never seen before. The first leap carried Old Klaws far out on the garden walk, and in the twinkling of an eye he was among the topmost branches of the old pear tree. When he felt himself safe, he turned round and began to spit and snarl and say bad words at Old Boze, who was looking at him with his long tongue hanging out of his mouth, and his face all wrinkled up into a broad grin.

Little Luke had jumped almost as lively as Old Klaws, but when he saw who it was and took in the old cat's language, and the old dog's funny looking face, he lay down on the porch and laughed till the tears came.

[Illustration]

XXXI. THE STORY OF THE FAITHFUL DOG

"Dear Old Boze," said the little boy, after the fun was over, "can't you tell me a story of the old days?"

"Yes," replied the old hound, "I can. And since Old Klaws has told you about one dog, I'll tell you about another."

"Once upon a time," went on the old hound, "there was an Indian hunter who had a dog that he loved very dearly. And the dog on his part loved his master more than his own life.

"For many years, master and dog hunted together. When night came they ate of the same food, and shared the same bed. Many and many a time, each saved the life of the other. At last both began to grow old.

"One morning in winter a stranger entered their lodge. 'I am the Man-i-tou of Death,' said he to the hunter. 'The Master of Life has sent me to summon you to the Happy Hunting Ground. Make ready at once, for when the sun rises for the third time, you must set forth.'

"'It is well,' replied the hunter, 'the summons shall be obeyed.'

"At once he began to make ready. He danced the death dance and sang the death song. His wife and his two sons mourned and wept, and the dog joined in the death chant.

"On the third morning, the hunter was ready to depart on the long journey from which he could never return.

"'Alas, my husband,' said his wife, 'I cannot live without you. I will go with you. Where you are, there will I be also.' And so also said his two sons.

"The hunter tried to comfort them, and to persuade them to remain until they too should be summoned by the Master of Life. But they refused to be comforted, and at last they all set forth.

"Meanwhile the dog had said nothing. But when they started, he was close at the heels of his master.

"Day after day they traveled toward the south-west. After a time, they entered a desert land, where water was scarce and there was no game. Soon they began to be hungry as well as weary.

"The younger boy's strength and courage gave out, and he turned and followed the trail back to the wigwam.

"A little farther, and the older son said, 'Alas, my father, I am famished, and my strength has gone from me. I will return and seek my younger brother. When I have found him and we have rested and eaten, we will come and overtake you.' So he turned back, and that was the last that was seen of him.

"Seeing that her children had turned back, the wife said, 'Be of good courage. I am still with you, I am strong and we shall yet enter the gate of the Happy Hunting Grounds together.'

"The dog said nothing, but though he was hungry, footsore, and weary, he still followed close at his master's heels.

"Now the trail entered a region of desolate mountains. The way became rough and rocky. Their moccasins were worn from their feet, and there was no food to be found.

"At last the wife cried, 'Oh, my husband, I am faint and weary. I can go no further. Let us rest here.' And she sat down beside the trail.

"'Nay,' said the hunter, 'I may not stop. The Master of Life must be obeyed. The summons was not to you, but to me. Rest here beside the trail, and when your strength has returned, go back to the wigwam and dwell with our two sons until the Death Man-i-tou comes for you.'

"Then he went on, up the steep trail. He had not noticed the dog, who, footsore and famished, now limped painfully at his heels, and when he camped for the night, came silently and lay down at his feet.

"The next morning, they arose and continued their journey. After many days, they saw far before them a narrow gap between two tall snow-capped mountains. Through this the trail went, and at the further end they found the gateway to the Happy Hunting Ground. Beside the gateway stood the lodge of the keeper of the gate.

"Before the lodge the hunter stopped and lifted up his voice, and cried, 'The Master of Life called. Here am I.'

"Hearing his cry, the keeper of the gate came from his lodge.

"'You are welcome,' said he to the hunter, 'but where are those who set out upon the long trail with you?'

"'They are not here,' returned the hunter, 'the way was long and toilsome, and their feet grew weary,'

"'Who is that,' again asked the keeper of the gate, 'who stands beside you, and looks upon you with eyes of love?'

"'That is he,' said the hunter, 'who loved me best of all.'

"'His great love and his faithfulness have made him worthy,' said the keeper of the gate. 'He shall enter with you,' and he opened the gate.

"With a bark of joy the dog sprang forward and entered the Happy Hunting Ground beside the master whom he had loved more than his own life."

* * * * *

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