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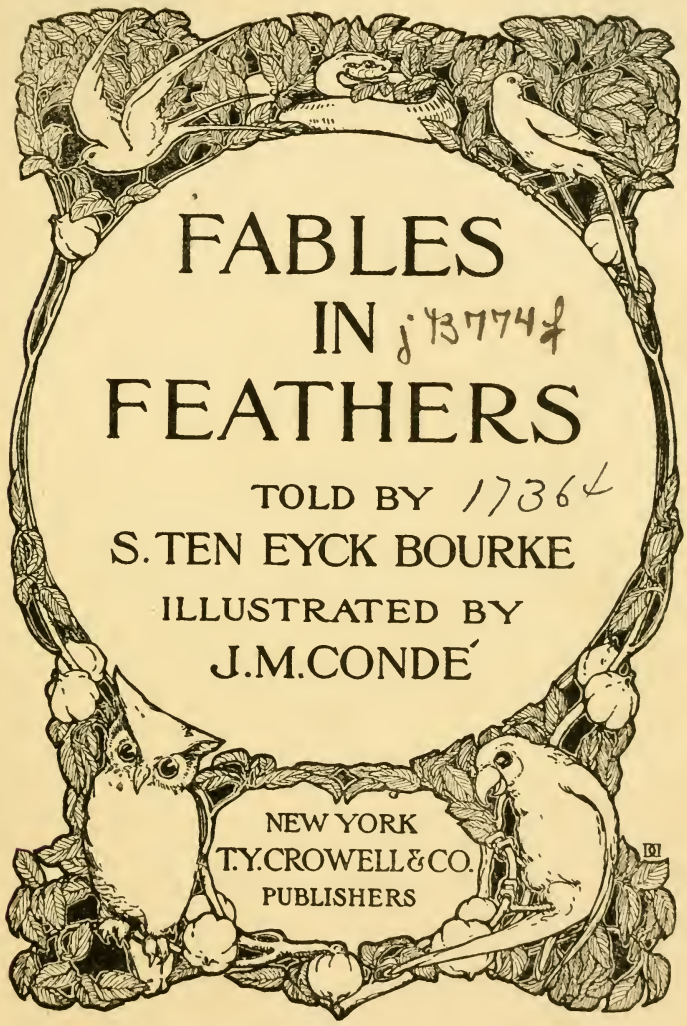
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FABLES IN FEATHERS



"I HAVE FORGOTTEN WHERE I HID IT."



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FEATHERS

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S. TEN EYCK BOURKE
ILLUSTRATED BY
J.M. CONDE

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FABLES IN FEATHERS

WHY THE SWALLOW WEARS A FORKED TAIL

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, there lived a King who ruled over all the earth. And the name of the King was Solomon.

The people who lived in the long ago, and the birds and the breeze and the trees, said that this great King was a magician, because to him the meaning of all the languages which his subjects used was clear. When the bees droned lazily, and the birds trilled, and the little gray squirrel called to his mate, the wise King knew what they were saying quite as well as they did themselves.

And so it was with all living things. Surely the great King Solomon was indeed a magician,

else how could he ever have understood all this humming and buzzing and droning?

Now in the days of the long, long ago when the old, old world was so very young, the wise King sat on his throne of gold of a wondrous carven form, on the crest of the moss-grown bank that went rolling down—down—down—

Below a silver stream, purling and swirling along on its way to the sea, flashed tiny diamond-like sprays in the sunlight as it rippled over the smooth, white pebbles gleaming on the golden sand.

The wise King held a wand of gold, ball-tipped, casting a magic shaft of light, and his golden crown rested upon his long, fair curls that shimmered more golden in the Sun than throne, or crown, or wand.

At his feet the grass grew, emerald-hued, a velvety circle, ringed within pearl-petalled daisies that proudly preened their hearts of gold before this golden King.

And in the days of the long ago the birds and the bees and their brother Man gathered without the grass-grown court. The insects were there, even the tiny mosquito—and in those days when the world was young the mosquito was quite

the tiniest creature of all—and each one of the King's subjects. The little, crawly creatures came, too, to the wise King's court; the big, crawly creatures also, for there by the side of the carven throne coiled a gleaming Serpent, gorgeous with silver rings around his slim, polished, black body.

And as in those days there were not one-half, nor one-quarter, nor even one-tenth as many living creatures as there are now, each found his place at the great King's court, where Solomon gave hearing to every plaint; and in his wisdom spoke what should be done for one and all.

Thus it came to pass when the hedgerows were white with blossoming thorn, Man entered within the daisy ring, and bowed before the King.

Solomon waved his wand of gold. "Speak," he said, "and tell me your need."

"Lord," cried this brother of all living things, and of the King as well, "protect me from the Serpent. Hidden beneath bush and shrub, lurking in the cool forest depths, stealing through primrose-dotted meadows, he wars upon me, and sates his thirst with my innocent blood."

"Man," replied Solomon gravely, "the Serpent was my early guide. To him I owe the milk-white Pearl of Wisdom I wear upon my breast. Grateful for the knowledge thus bestowed I gave him what he chose to feast upon."

The wise King paused and glanced mournfully at the suppliant Man, waiting within the grass-grown court. Then a frown darkened his kingly brow, and he proudly drew himself up.

"Yet—" he exclaimed, "I *am* the King! Therefore I will not deny your plea. But as a just and honorable lord I must find a dainty as toothsome as even your succulent blood for the Serpent."

Again the wise King paused and thoughtfully glanced about. A smile chased the frown from his brow at last, and he waved his wand till the sun-motes danced in the shaft of light that streamed from its golden ball in dazzling rays.

"This is my command," the wise King cried. "The tiniest creature of all my subjects, the Mosquito, shall go forth into the world for a year, and taste of the blood of all living things. The most delicious, though it be even yours, oh Man, shall be the Serpent's portion. And you,

my people, gather here in a year from this day, that I may tell you of the result."

Solomon rose from his throne of gold, dismissing his court with a dignified wave of his magic wand. Then down from his throne the wise King stepped, past the wind-tossed daisies, and threaded his way through woodland and dell to his palace of gold sheltered behind tall pomegranates, and clustering roses, in the forest depths.

The hours sped along, the days lengthened into weeks, the weeks to months. The year had come, had gone. Pricking here, stabbing there, tasting everywhere, the little mosquito had faithfully fulfilled his allotted task.

He had fluttered through the dense leaves of the jungle to do the King's bidding on lion and tiger, although their fierce snarling had set his tiny heart a-throb with fear. He had crept through the matted tangle of fur that kept the bear so warm. Even the elephant's thick hide had felt his sting. Horse, dog, cow, eagle and nightingale, he had tested. Once flying boldly up the chimney of Man's dwelling he had chanced upon a swallow's nest. Warm and sheltered she lived there and fed on the crumbs

her benefactor scattered for her in daily profusion upon his hearth.

When the primrose blossomed again by meadow and field, the mosquito came drumming gaily along on his way back to Solomon's court when who should he spy but this very same swallow.

"Well met, Dame Swallow," he hailed her, steadying himself on the soft spring breeze by a skillful flutter of his left wing.

"Well met, Friend Mosquito," she replied gracefully circling forward to greet him, "have you accomplished your task?"

"Ah! my dear, my zeal has never flagged. You behold before you the gastronomical marvel of all creation." The little mosquito was so puffed with pride at his own importance he never once stumbled over the long words which were bigger far than his whole body.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the swallow, "Then tell me pray, whose blood do you prefer?"

The mosquito paused for an instant to draw a deep breath, then he said: "My dear, for lovely blood none can compare with MAN!"

"With whom?" cried the swallow, daintily flirting her feathery puffball wings, "I pray

you, Friend Mosquito, why speak so low? I could not catch the name."

The mosquito, meaning to speak out, oh, so loud! like a very foolish little insect opened his mouth wide, wide! Quick as a flash the swallow darted forward and pulled out his wicked little tongue.

The mosquito was dreadfully hurt and grieved at the swallow's attack. He quite made up his mind not to speak to her again. So he fluttered off, with the little bird closely following, and silently winged his way to the grass-grown court by the side of the silvery brook.

The Sun shone down on the birds and the bees and their brother Man in the early morn. Solomon sat on his golden throne, with his magic wand in his hand. His crown of gold rested upon his long, fair curls with their ruddy gleam, more golden far than throne or crown or wand.

And, as on that day one year before, the Serpent coiled dark and shining beside the wise King. Only the daisies had grown taller, their hearts gleaming brightly as the sunbeams whispered softly to them.

The mosquito darted close to the great King's

throne, whirling up and down. Solomon waved his wand of gold and the sun-motes swarmed in the warm, strong light that fell from its magic ball.

“Welcome Mosquito,” spoke the wise King. “Your task is done on the very morn I bade you return. That is well. Now tell me quick, whose blood is best in all my realm?”

“Oua! Oua!” chirped the mosquito gaily, staying his whirl at the King’s words.

Solomon stared in amaze at the tiny thing. Here was a sound he could not understand, the only one in the whole wide world.

“What is the meaning of that word?” asked the puzzled King. “Speak louder, little mosquito, and see that the words come distinctly this time.”

“Oua! Oua!” stammered the little mosquito again, very much astonished himself at the queer noise he was making.

A grim frown settled on the wise King’s brow. He had a great respect for himself, and being the King he commanded that all his subjects should have as well. His anger grew at the thought that the little mosquito was mocking him.

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"Have a care, stammerer," he cried, "what ails your mocking tongue?"

The swallow came circling forward past the gleaming daisies, to the great King's feet.

"Lord," she murmured in tones as soft as the Moon's silver sheen on broad oak leaves, "he really is not to blame. Yesterday, as we were flying along, suddenly—he lost his tongue."

"Then why does he try to speak?" rustled the breeze.

"And how shall we know the riddle's answer?" questioned the brook.

"We must still wait a year, and send forth another into the world on the selfsame quest," the wise King said.

"But no one else has such a delicate probe, we cannot be sure he has judged quite right," protested the frog.

"Peace," commanded Solomon, "if I say he is right that must suffice. Now who shall I send—"

"Nay, Lord," interrupted the swallow, "there is no need. Fortunately Friend Mosquito had already taken me into his confidence. I know the secret of his choice. Shall I speak for him?"

The wise King smiled with relief and nodded to the fluttering bird. "Surely, since it seems he can't speak for himself," he replied. "Whose blood then has best pleased his dainty palate?"

The swallow paused and glanced around. Without the circle of gleaming hearts the birds and bees and their brother Man gazed anxiously at her, each dreading his doom. Only the frog sneered scornfully at them.

"There are times," he scoffed, "when it's pleasant to know that either you have no blood at all, or 'tis very cold, like mine."

"Lord," exclaimed the swallow at the words, "Friend Mosquito mightily praised—the Frog's."

The birds, the bees, the squirrel, the breeze, and even the King stared in speechless amaze, all save the mosquito. He too stared speechlessly, but only because he had no tongue with which he could speak. In a terrible rage he darted wildly about, rolling his eyes furiously, and flapping his wings like a mad thing. But what could he do? There wasn't a word he could say.

At last Solomon recovered his breath and forgot his surprise. He shook his wand reprov-ingly at the tiny mosquito whose antics disturbed

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him not a little. Then he glanced down at the Serpent coiled dark and shining beside his golden throne, and the wise King smiled gently, very gently.

"Friend Serpent," spoke the great King, "no longer shall you feast upon Man, for his blood is unworthy the service you've done me. The Frog will prove a better meal. Feast, then, upon him at your leisure."

The wise King spoke; then rose from his throne, and waving his magic wand of gold dismissed his court. Slowly, very slowly, he passed through the green forest back to his hidden palace of gold where the tall pomegranates flowered crimson beside the fragrant, clustering roses.

For an instant the birds and the bees and their brother Man lingered without the daisy ring.

"The Swallow will always have space in my heart, and a home 'neath the eaves wherever I dwell," murmured Man in gratitude.

The owl cast a scornful glance at him.

"'Tis Friend Mosquito, you should thank, for his penetration," he hooted. But Man only smiled as the bird flew off.

The poor Serpent was forced to submit to his

dreadful fate. But his rage and fury knew no bounds.

When the swallow, laughing a silver mocking laugh, circled mockingly past—Pouf! Pan! Pounce! he shot wickedly up, and struck venomously with his great poison fangs.

But the dainty swallow, well-knowing the thoughts of his wicked heart, soared lightly away, far, far up where the fleecy clouds were lazily drifting in the blue sky.

The Serpent caught only the tip of her tail—right in the middle.

That is why the swallow has worn a forked tail ever since that day in the long ago when the world was so very old; wears it now, and will always wear it until the world grows so old it cannot grow any older.

WHY THE ROBIN WEARS A RED BREAST

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, Solomon came from his palace of gold in the early dawn. Without, the dew lay heavy upon the scarlet bloom of the tall pomegranate trees and fragrant, clustering roses; the Sun still lurked in his dark hiding place; all nature slept.

The great King wore no crown, no wand; his mantle and sandals of purest gold he had cast beside his couch. The shadowing dusk fell upon his long, fair curls that no longer gleamed with the golden sheen. Grey were they; grey as the ashes of long dead sorrows.

Down his cheeks coursed pearly drops, falling heavier far than the dew on the sleeping grass, for the great King wept.

He had lost his milk-white Pearl of Wisdom. In his youth the Serpent had given it to him, bidding him wear it always upon his

breast. Thus his words had been wise and his deeds just, as befitted a great King, the ruler over all the earth. Too well the King knew that without its counsel, his rule would no longer be wise and just.

While the King still wept, the Sun rose golden and majestic, the breeze whispered softly, stirring the roses, and scattering the dew from their scented hearts. The bees droned, the birds stirred in their nests and the lark in the meadow rose high in the sky in a burst of song. The world was awake.

A robin, brown of breast and crest and wing and tail, came fluttering with merry wing from the woods.

"Greeting, greeting!" he gaily called. Then with a loving glance at the King's sad face, he circled close to his lord and settled on his shoulder with a merry chirp.

"What grieves you, Lord?" he asked.

"Lord am I no longer," sighed Solomon. "I have lost my milky Pearl. Gone is it and the wisdom that made me King over all the earth."

"But how could that be?" rustled the trees. "Did you go forth in the night and lose it in the dark?"

"We'll hunt by meadow and glade, and in every woodland dell," called the breeze.

"Nay!" replied Solomon, "that would not serve. I did not go forth in the night." And the great King sadly shook his head.

"Then how can you know the Pearl is gone?" chirped the robin. "Surely it must be within the palace. Chirp, chirp! I'll help you search."

Solomon shook his head again.

"Little brown Robin, this only do I know," he said. "Last night I slept on my golden couch with the milky Pearl on my breast. In the early morn before the dawn, a chill breath swept my face. I woke and felt for the Pearl. It was gone."

"Lord, I will find the milk-white Pearl for all that, and make your heart glad again," cheerily exclaimed the Robin.

"But little brown Robin," replied the King. "How can you do that?"

"Love can do more even than wisdom, Lord," chirped the robin. "Truly I love my little brown mate nestling among the roses, but you I love best of all. I will find the Pearl for you."

"Loving little Robin," replied Solomon, "the Pearl is gone, but glad am I that your love is

left me, though my wisdom be vanished as well."

"Robin, brown Robin," piped the little blades of grass at the King's feet. "Ask friend Serpent to aid you."

"Not so," spoke Solomon. "The Serpent has forsaken me, since the day I bade him harm Man no more. I have not seen him since."

"Yet he was here last night," persisted the grass blades. "We felt his slim coils glide past us into the palace. When he returned the silver rings on his polished black body gleamed strangely in the radiance of a soft, white light, that shone upon his brow."

"So did my milk white Pearl gleam in the darkness," sighed the King. For truly, without the Pearl his wisdom was gone, and he saw no hidden meaning in the Serpent's secret coming.

The robin's tiny brown feathers bristled with excitement.

"Lord," he chirped, "truly love can do more than wisdom, for I see what you do not. The Serpent hates you because he must at your command feed forever upon the Frog. He came last night and stole the Pearl to grieve you.

That was the radiance gleaming upon his brow, as he crept away in the early dawn."

"It may be so, yet what can I against his craft? He taught me all I know, and how to use the magic gifts of flower and Sun and stone," replied Solomon.

"Ah ha!" chirped the robin. "Leave friend Serpent to me. I doubt if his wisdom can outwit my love. I will find the Pearl for you."

But the great King only shook his head and sighed again, for his heart was heavy with woe.

"Fie, Lord;" encouraged the robin, as he poised for flight. "Cast aside your grief. Trust me this once. If I fail there'll be plenty of time to mourn."

"Good luck speed you!" cried the grass and the breeze, as the robin flew boldly away in pursuit of the Serpent who had seized the King's stolen Pearl.

The great King went into the palace again, put on his golden crown and sandals of purest gold, slipped his long mantle over his shoulders and took up his magic wand. Then he hastened down to the carven throne by the grass-grown circle, where the pearl-petalled daisies nodded drowsily in the early breeze.

Day by day the great King waited, longing for the return of the robin.

The little brown bird had always been a merry, friendly little soul, and the trees and the breeze and the brook and the blossoms all loved him. So as he fluttered from bough to shrub, they told him of slim gliding coils, silver ringed, polished and black, that had passed in the dawn, then in the early morn and then in the noontide Sun.

Just as he came to the brink of a deep on-rushing river he heard a silvery, familiar voice.

"Whither away so far from home, little brown Robin?" cried the voice.

"Who are you, Broad Water?" asked the robin, pausing in his flight.

"Your old friend, the Brook, grown deeper and wider now, but with the same love for you," replied the river.

"Then perhaps you will help me, Broad Water?" said the robin. "I am searching for the Serpent; he has stolen the great King's milk-white Pearl of Wisdom."

"Oh, ho!" laughed the broad water, "gladly will I help you. I know the Serpent's haunt. The Sea Wind rushed up from the shore just

now and called as he passed: 'I saw the Serpent burrowing in the black mud of his lair awhile ago. He has something hidden there.' "

"Chirp, chirp!" cried the robin. "It was the Pearl! Show me where the Serpent lives, that I may find it for the King."

"Willingly," replied the on-rushing river, "but you must do as I tell you. My current flows more swiftly than your fluttering wings can carry you, and I may not tarry even for the King. Perch upon that green leaf that you see floating past and I will take you with me as I go."

The little brown robin gladly obeyed the river's command. All day long he floated, and the next and the next. At last at a bend the banks widened away. The river's swift current ebbed and flowed, then steadied itself for its onward course past the curve. Beyond, long stretches of dank marsh grass swayed in the salt-tanged air, and the black mud oozed down where the ripples frothed away from its touch.

As they drew near, the river cried:

"Listen well, little brown Robin. The Serpent dwells on the edge of yon marshy field. As I sweep round the bend, my waters dash

foaming across its low stretch. I'll send them on with such a rush this time that they'll wash away the mud in which the Pearl lies hidden. Watch closely till you see its milky gleam. Then dart forward and seize it if you can, and then return to this green leaf which has borne you safely so far."

Poor robin's heart fluttered wildly in his tiny brown breast, as he raced forward with the seething, rushing river, toward the green stretch where the wily Serpent dwelt. But remembering Solomon's great grief, he summoned all his courage to do the broad water's bidding.

Whirling, swirling, frothing, the waters dashed forward, seething, foam-crested they swept toward the dank marsh grass—A sibilant hiss, the moan of the oozing mud, a soft white gleam in the dark slime, a flutter of wings flashing downward, and brown robin snatched the milk-white Pearl from beneath the shining coils of the startled Serpent's black polished body! Swiftly he bore his prize to the green leaf.

"Bravo! little brown Robin!" sang the broad water, above the Serpent's angry hiss. "You are a loyal little friend and brave. I am glad I could help you. But now my time is almost



THE ROBIN SNATCHED THE MILK-WHITE PEARL.

spent. We are nearing the deep Sea and I cannot turn back to carry you safely to the great King's court."

"Oh, what shall I do if you leave me alone?" cried the little robin tearfully. "Ah me, I fear the great King will never have his Pearl, and my pretty brown mate will wait in vain for my return."

"I will send you across to that meadow yonder, where those red poppies are nodding among the wheat," replied the river. "They will aid you to escape your enemy. So good-bye, little brown Robin!"

A tiny wavelet floated the green leaf gently ashore and then rushed onward to meet the deep sea.

The robin's fear was great, for he knew the Serpent would pursue him; and well he knew, too, that he would be caught, for the milk white Pearl was a heavy burden for his little wings, so that he could no longer soar high in the clouds, nor speed swiftly along.

In the moon's misty light he paused for an instant, half tempted to drop the Pearl and be safely off. But he loved the King, and thinking the poppies might perhaps find a way to help

him outwit the Serpent, he fluttered close to the crimson flowers.

“Help me, dear Poppies, help me!” he cried, and told of the milk-white Pearl and the King’s great grief because of its loss.

The poppies listened gravely, their scarlet cups swaying with interest and love in the soft night wind.

“Dear little brown Robin,” murmured the tallest poppy, “my petals are heavy with dew. See how it glistens red in the moonlight. Plunge your tiny body deep in my cup. The ruddy drops will stain your brown plumage scarlet. Then, not even the wily Serpent will know where you are.”

The robin sank deep in the poppy’s heart, but even his tiny body was far too large for the generous cup. The dew-drops tinged only his breast with their crimson stain. When he fluttered out, a cloud went drifting across the moon, so the poppies could not see that his head and wings were still brown.

“Take this fuzzy green bud on my stem,” advised the tall poppy, as the robin prepared to fly away. “You can hide the Pearl in its heart. Then who shall know that you are brown Robin

with King Solomon's milk-white Pearl in your beak?"

The robin thanked the tall poppy and caught up the fuzzy green bud.

He fluttered away toward the great King's court, with a joyful heart. Once, as he journeyed along, he caught a glimpse of the Serpent's shining black body. The slim coils were wound around a slender sapling where two linnets housed. His great head peered curiously into their nest. Then turned aside as brown robin sped past. But the sun shone full on that crimson breast. The Serpent saw, but knew him not.

The great King sat on his throne of gold waiting—waiting, day by day, for the Pearl was heavy in the little bird's beak and his flight was slow.

The birds had gathered without the velvety circle of emerald grass. The breeze and the brook and all living things waited there, too. But their joy was gone, for their lord was sad.

The sun-god rose high in the sky when a week was gone and the daisies drooped beneath their weight of dew.

"Lord," they nodded, "where is the Robin?"

Just as they spoke, a strange feathered bird fluttered past them, his breast flashing crimson in the golden sun-beams, as brown robin's had never done.

Sir Red-breast darted forward with a merry chirp, perched upon the King's knee, and into his open empty palm dropped a little fuzzy green bud.

"Truly lord, love *can* do more than wisdom!" chirped the bird. "See, I have brought you the milk-white Pearl. Chirp, chirp!"

The King stared in wonderment. Well he knew that merry, chirping voice, but never before had he seen the little brown robin with this bright red breast. In his amazement his hand closed sharply over the fuzzy green bud, crushing it cruelly. Then as the petals opened, the milk-white Pearl gleamed soft and clear.

The little robin chirped joyously as the glinting sheen of joy brought back the glory of the King's golden Kingship.

"And what of yourself, loving little friend?" questioned the wise King. "How shall I reward you?"

Gently he stroked the tiny feathered head, while the robin told of all that had befallen him,

since that grey dawn of the long, long ago, when the old, old world was so very young, and the King stood white and forlorn without the palace gates.

When the tale was told the great King said:

“So your red breast saved you? Then, little brown Robin, wear it always. When your enemy seeks you from morn to night and morn again, he will never be able to find you, to do you harm.”

Robin still wears his red breast—loving little Robin Red-breast—while the world grows older, older yet.

The Serpent, untiring in his search, pursues every bird that flutters across his path.

But never since the old, old world was a very young world indeed, has he found that little robin, brown of crest and breast and wing and tail, who stole from his lair the great King's milk-white Pearl of Wisdom.

WHY THE WOODPECKER GOES A-TAPPING

ONCE upon a time, in the long, long ago, when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the breath of the Spring went quivering throughout the land, in every emerald-hued leaf and rosy gold bud, for the birth of the new year was come.

Solomon sat musing on his throne of gold, with his crown and his golden wand, and his long, fair curls, that shimmered more ruddy than throne or crown, in the glinting light of the Sun.

Once again without that grass-grown court, ringed with its pearl-petaled daisies, the birds and the bees and their brother, Man, gathered as was their wont, when the Frost Lord fled to the north, to learn the King's will for the coming year. Only the Serpent, silver-ringed, with polished back coils, defied the wise King and came not.

A great oak grew on the moss-grown bank, by the silver brook.

"Lord," spoke the tree, "a blight fell upon my brethren in the year that is gone. Willingly we shelter and feed the little tree-mites, but ungrateful they swarm beyond what is right, sapping our strength until we grow rotten and useless."

The wise King glanced up at the stately tree.

"Aye," he spoke, "I remember the birds and the bees brought the tale to my court."

"The insects buzz in the branch where I nest," chirped the robin. "They said that the wily Serpent had banded them together to make war against the trees."

"That's because they provided Man with wood for his dwelling," twittered the swallow, circling closely to the nodding daisies.

Solomon frowned as he thought of the evil the Serpent had wrought.

"I *am* the King!" he exclaimed. "I will find a way to protect the trees." And he waved his magic wand till it blazed in a shimmering shaft.

"But how can you learn their needs?" swarmed the sun-motes. "Alone of all your subjects, the flowers and trees and shrubs and

earth-growing things cannot come to your court to protest.”

“We must stay where we grow,” rustled the oak. “Our roots hold us fast.”

“True,” spoke the wise King. “So I promise to send a royal messenger every spring, to learn the strength of each tree, that I may decree the number of insects and mites permitted to house in the bark.”

“Then waste not a moment, Lord,” urged the oak, “Now is the time when we grow apace. Soon the mites will gnaw to our hearts and destroy the fountain of our sap.”

“That I know,” replied Solomon. “But the very best way to find the secret of your strength and the enemy’s vantage point is puzzling me not a little.”

“Lord,” cried the oak, “I and my brethren store one drop of the dead year’s sap in our hearts until the breath of the spring sends a new life bounding through our veins. One short week more and it will be gone. Send your messenger with this little cup of mine to gather the precious drops. So you can judge for yourself.”

The oak rustled his branches mightily as he

spoke, and a tiny acorn fell into Solomon's outstretched hand.

"Wisely spoken!" said the King. "Now who shall I choose for my messenger?"

Red-breast fluttered forward close to the carved throne.

"Send me!" he chirped. "I proved myself sharper than the Serpent. Surely the mites cannot outwit me."

"Nay Robin, your flight is too slow, and there is but a short week for the task," refused the King of Gold.

"But I," cried the swallow, "am fleet of wing. I swept past the Serpent too swift for his venom, and soared to the skies, as you know."

The wise King slowly shook his head and said:

"Fleet of wing you are, but you could never carry the acorn so far."

The parrot strutted pompously past the gold-headed daisies.

"I am wise with the wisdom of ages to come," he remarked. "There's nothing I need to learn. Send me, for I'll save you the trouble of judging. I'll do it myself as I go."

Solomon laughed at the vain-glorious bird.

"You're over-fond of prating of your wis-

dom. Merit, my friend, needs no placard. Besides, I've already chosen. The woodpecker is strong of wing, with long, stout beak."

"Have no fear," trilled a brisk little bird, silver-vested, with russet wings. "I once thrust my beak in the spruce-gum tree. It caught but I pulled and came away free. It's a bit rusty brown, but strong as can be."

Then fluttering down he picked up the tiny acorn.

"Go!" bade the King. "Remember you have but a week. When the spring settles down the insects are housed and not even I may drive them forth. But accomplish this task and you shall be honored forever as my royal messenger."

Proud of his mission, the little woodpecker set off; gaily he raced the scented breeze to a distant grove, purple-tipped with warm sunny haze, against the cloudless sky. In its cooling shade where balsam and pine mingled with larch and fir, he glanced about.

"Here begins my work!" he cried, and straightway steadied himself against a young larch, laced with the twining tendrils of a honeysuckle vine.

"Mistress Honeysuckle, will you hold my cup

while I do the King's bidding? For you must know," he added proudly, "that I am the royal messenger, sent to protect the trees from the blight that befell them last year."

The slender vine nodded, and opening its buds breathed forth an exquisite perfume of sympathy.

"Gladly," she murmured, "but you must not ask every vine you meet. Some are parasites, seeking only to harm the trees. You will never see your acorn again if you entrust it to them."

"But what am I to do?" asked the woodpecker ruefully. "I cannot hold it in my beak and go a-tapping too."

"No," replied the honeysuckle, "but I'll make you a network of young shoots, in which you can carry it hidden beneath your wing." And deftly she threaded her tendrils around him in a wonderful fairy film.

The woodpecker thanked the gracious vine, then, fully determined to keep his treasure safe hidden, flew off with a light heart until he came to a huge maple. Perching against the rough bark he thrust his beak into the trunk,—tap, tap!

"Crarr-rr, crarr-rr!" came his musical call.

"I am the royal messenger come for the dead year's sap. Crarr-rr! crarr-rr!"

The maple sighed softly while the strong beak kept tapping, tap, tap. Slowly a liquid silver drop stole through the opening and fell in the woodpecker's cup.

Then the woodpecker flew off to a neighboring oak and went tapping again, tap, tap.

Day and night he labored up the world and down, pausing only to sip the sweet juice of the berries, with never a thought for worm or mite.

"Crarr-rr, crarr-rr!" with never a moment to sleep. "Crarr-rr, crarr-rr!" with each tap a fresh store in his cup. At last so great was his haste he found he had finished before the last day of the week.

Poor little woodpecker! He was very tired with such a long journey to go. What wonder he sought a brief rest before he sped back to the great King's court? Carefully searching the thicket he found a slender sapling rooted in a hollow tree-trunk that had fallen slantwise across the undergrowth.

"The best of all hiding places!" he thought, and nestled in a dark corner with the precious acorn snugly folded from sight.



"HO, HO! THE KING'S MESSENGER ASLEEP!"

He only meant to rest with one eye to his treasure. But the poor little bird was so tired he slept very soundly at once.

A glow-worm came from a glade of fern to the old tree-trunk. Softly his tiny lamp lit up the dark hollow. The little tree-mites came scurrying down to see its wondrous glow.

"Ssh-ssh-ssh!" The mites swarmed.

"Ssh-ssh-ssh!" Round the sleeping bird they circled.

"Ssh-ssh-ssh!" But the woodpecker never stirred.

"Ho, ho!" laughed a malicious voice, and the Serpent coiled dark and slim by their side. "Ho, ho! the King's messenger asleep, and you waste your time. Ho, ho!"

His great head shot forward, swaying balefully above the sleeping woodpecker.

"Ho, ho! How fine to rob him of his acorn! Then you could feast on the trees to your hearts' content."

The little tree-mites stirred uneasily.

"Do it for us, Sir Serpent," they begged.

"That I may not, for none may destroy the King's messenger. My mouth is too large to handle the cup without harm to the bearer. See

how frail is that network of tendrils. It would snap at a touch. Ho, ho!" he mocked. Then swiftly uncoiling he glided away in the night.

"Ho, ho!" echoed the evening breeze. "Ho, ho!"

"Ssh-sssh-ssh!" Closer, closer swept the tree-mites.

"Ssh-ssh-ssh!" Then one more venturesome than his fellows settled upon the green tendrils. Tick, tick, tick, tick! And the acorn rolled helplessly down.

The glow-worm paled as the sunlight dawned; the mites crept back to the sapling. The little woodpecker stirred, yawned, fluttered his tiny wings, then paused dismayed. There lay the oak-cup, and empty!

Poor little woodpecker! But he was a brave little bird and honest. Off he flew to the great King's court by the side of the silvery, swirling brook.

The great King sat on his carven throne and looked expectantly down. For an instant the woodpecker paused dismayed. 'Twas no easy task to confess his failure. Yet there was nothing for him to do but to brave the King's wrath.

"Lord," he cried ruefully, "I have failed."

"He, he!" laughed the parrot. "You would not trust me, Lord."

But the great oak sadly rustled its boughs. The spring was come and he knew the trees had no more sap for the King.

"Perhaps I sent you forth too late?" spoke Solomon, pitying his crestfallen little messenger.

"Nay, Lord," answered the woodpecker, "the trees gave me their message but I grew weary at last. I slept and I dreamed that the tree-mites swarmed and I felt the chill breath of the Serpent. When I awakened the acorn had fallen and the sap was gone."

Solomon frowned angrily, and the birds and the bees and their brother Man stirred uneasily at the thought of the war that the Serpent waged on the King and all of his subjects.

"Woodpecker," said Solomon at last. "You may no longer serve as my royal messenger. Yet your answer was truthful, so you shall atone by acting as my royal policeman. Day and night, year in and year out, you shall watch over the trees, destroying the mites when they swarm beyond what is right."

The woodpecker ruffled his crest proudly.

“In that at least,” he exclaimed, “I will prove faithful! I vow never again to feed only on berry and flower. The mites and the insects shall be my prey until I have rid the trees of this pest.”

The great oak rustled softly.

“Willing little policeman! You shall house in our hollow limbs and drink of our sap whenever your stout beak pierces our bark.”

“But it were not justice that the faithless messenger should go unpunished!” exclaimed the King. “So, little woodpecker, although you toil for the good of the trees, you shall constantly be misunderstood for a greedy young glutton intent upon feeding.”

Solomon spoke. Then as the woodpecker’s crest and wings drooped sadly, the wise King smiled and said:

“But, if for one year you save all the trees from the wicked mites you shall be forgiven, and serve as my royal messenger again.”

“Tweet, tweet! Chirp, chirp!” was there ever such a flutter as other birds came crowding forward with promise to aid in the quest!

And so since that day, in the long ago, the woodpecker has kept constantly tapping, tap

tap! till his musical call has grown harsh and shrill. Crarr-rr, crarr-rr!

And still though the world has grown very old, the tree-mites continue to swarm, but the woodpecker keeps up that constant tap, tap, striving to save the trees for just one year, before the world grows so very old it cannot grow any older.

WHY THE OWL CAN'T SEE IN THE SUN

ONCE upon a time, in the long, long ago, when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the fruit trees were snowily laden with shell-tinted blossoms, fragrant and white.

The June breeze came carolling gaily along.

"Haste to the great King's court," he called, as he sped past bush, and tree, and shrub.

The little gray squirrel, the birds, and the bees, sped away to the grass-grown court ringed within pearl-white daisies, by the side of the silver swirling brook. Only the owl sulked as he lagged along. But the Serpent, defiant and evil, lurked in the shade of the woods.

Solomon sat on his golden throne, with his crown and his magic wand, and a shaft of light struck straight from the heart of the Sun to its rounded, golden ball.

"Welcome, my subjects," the wise King cried as they flocked from every side.

The birds trilled a greeting, the squirrel curled

his bushy tail up over his back, and a little rabbit scurried close to the King.

"The birds are ready to make their report," he announced.

The wise King waved his wand of gold till the sun-motes swam in a blaze of light.

"Begin!" spoke the King as the thrush fluttered down.

"Lord," she replied, "we have searched the earth from end to end as you bade."

"And garnered the pollen from every breeze that shook the blossoms and the trees," interrupted the linnet.

"We stored it well in the Sun, and scattered it wide over meadow and field," echoed the dove.

"We buried it deep in moss and brake," piped the reed-bird.

"And there's never a nook in the whole, wide world that we overlooked," said the jay with a positive air.

Solomon smiled at the eager birds.

"That is well," he exclaimed, "for, unless you sow the earth with the pollen in the spring the ground will be bare. Then the shrubs will not grow for your shelter, nor the berries ripen another year for your food."

And the wise King waved his wand of gold, whirling it round in the shaft of light. The sun rays fell on the owl's grim face, and he blinked as he glanced away.

"Lord," whispered the sun-motes, "the Owl has not made his report—And just look at his face!"

Solomon glanced at the sulky owl, who would not meet his gaze.

"Of a truth, he seems somewhat anxious to hide, and his looks are glum as if he had disobeyed, and feared my wrath," the wise King thought. Then aloud, he said: "Come, Master Owl. It is your turn to speak. Pray how fares the land of the farms and barns that I gave to your care?"

The owl glanced sullenly up, minded to fly away without answering, but the sun shaft fell full on his face, and the King's eyes were stern, so he dared not disobey.

"Lord," he replied, "I garnered the pollen and sowed the fields. But the wind came along and scattered it as it fell so that the ground remained bare."

"Oh," rustled the breeze, "my father, the Wind, loves the farms and fields, and the wav-

ing grain above all things. He must have known of some nook you had overlooked."

Solomon nodded gravely, and turned to the owl. "If that be so," he said, "you should have garnered a fresh store, and left the Wind to work his will."

"I am a philosopher not a farmer, Lord," grumbled the owl.

"Philosophers must eat, friend," reproved Solomon.

"I sit in my nest and the feathered tribes come to me for sage advice. They can well do my work in return," retorted the owl.

Solomon glanced down with a heavy frown. "I very much doubt," he exclaimed, "that you're telling the truth. You were lazy and greedy I see. You ate up the seeds. For your sins you shall go from my court without companions or friends. Alone you will remain until all the land that I gave to your care shall bloom from the pollen you sow. Now go!" And the wise King waved his wand angrily to and fro.

The owl flew away in disgrace, by meadow and field to a moss-grown dell in a woody glade where he housed in a hollow stump.

"How could the King guess what I had

done?" he repeated again and again. "Hoo-oo! I wish I knew."

A rustling of twigs and the shiver of moss beneath slim gliding coils sounded at the foot of the tree.

"The Sun travels swiftly around the earth," hissed a voice, and the Serpent's great head reared close by the hollowed stump.

"Hoo-oo! Hoo-oo!" mocked the owl in his sullen mood, "I knew that before."

"But you did not know that the sun-motes, dancing in the shaft of light that falls from the King's ball-tipped wand, were the ones to tell of your craft," the Serpent hissed swiftly back.

"Hoo-oo! Hoo-oo!" repeated the owl derisively, "what a silly tale!"

The Serpent reared, swaying angrily back forth as though he meant to strike. Then he suddenly smiled at a thought he had, and paused and said instead:

"Not so silly if you but understood, oh Bird of Wisdom."

"If it's anything more than silly, why not explain," retorted the owl. "Hoo-oo! Hoo-ooo! I'm waiting to be convinced."

"Know then," the Serpent replied, "that the



"HOO-OO! WHAT A SILLY TALE!"

Sun and the motes are the slaves of the ball. By them Solomon learns all that happens in the world, so that none may deceive him so long as he holds that wand in his hand."

"If they are the slaves of the ball," thoughtfully murmured the owl, "I suppose they must obey whoever possesses it." And he twisted his head round and round, till it almost fell off, when he twisted it back again.

The Serpent coiled low where the owl could no longer see his eyes that gleamed with a mocking light.

"Ho-ho! Ho-ho!" he laughed to himself, "he's caught at the bait. We'll see if he'll mock me again. Then, too, he will serve to aid in the war that I wage on the King. Ho-ho!"

"If I had the ball—" the owl remarked, then stopped and scratched his head.

"Yes," replied the Serpent to the bird's thought, "then you could command the world and the King as well. He'd never dare send you off in disgrace because you prefer to think rather than work."

"Hoo-oo! I must find a way to get at the ball," the owl exclaimed.

The Serpent's eyes glittered maliciously.

"The sun-rays follow the ball. I fear the King would soon find it again," he observed.

"Hoo-oo!" vainly commented the owl. "Don't you suppose I'd know enough to hide it where the Sun couldn't possibly follow it unless I wished?"

"The Sun in strong," craftily cautioned the Serpent, "Make sure your eyes are able to defy his dazzling rays, before you steal the ball."

The owl grew more stubborn with every word, as the Serpent expected.

"Hoo-oo!" he hooted, "I have no fear!"

But the Serpent was gone and the wise owl sat alone.

All day long the sun-rays danced through the quivering leaves threading the moss with a golden weave.

"Gather the pollen while you may, for summer will come, and 'twill be too late to sow meadow and field for the coming year," they urged.

But the owl gave no heed.

"Haste, haste, you've no time to waste!" called the breeze, while the light sped on.

But the owl said never a word. He sat all day in his old tree-trunk, thinking and plan-

ning and scheming how best he might steal that magic ball, till at last he found a way.

When the Sun sank low in the cloudless sky, the birds came twittering home to their nests in the trees and shrubs. The breeze sank to rest and all Nature slept, wrapped in her dark slumber robe.

Then silently forth from his nest came the owl, silently flew away, for anger had sharpened his eyes so well that he found it no task to pierce the gloom of the night.

Quickly he sped to the tall pomegranates that grew fragrant and scarlet around the golden palace of the King. There he paused on a window ledge.

“Let me see first where the wand lies hid,” thought the owl. “Then ’twill take me short time to accomplish my end.” And he peered attentively in.

Solomon lay on his slumber couch, with his crown and his wand at his side, but the Sun had set and their light was gone. Only a faint blur in the darkness betrayed them to the owl’s keen eyes.

For one instant longer he paused, then swooped suddenly down. He seized the ball in

one strong claw and his huge, sharp beak closed on the wand. A harsh grating sound, like the buzz of a file, and the beak went through, snapping the shaft from the golden ball just as the King stirred, rousing from his slumber.

But the owl flew away, a blur in the night, to the hollow tree where he housed.

In a soft tuft of moss stored well in the bark of his nest, he hid that pilfered ball and gripped it well in his two strong claws; then he peacefully went to sleep.

The sun-shaft called in the early dawn, striking straight to the hidden magic ball. Wide, wide, the owl's eyes opened, and wider yet to the gleaming golden light.

A rustling of twigs and the shiver of moss stirred the morning breeze.

"Oh, ho!" laughed a voice, "what strong eyes you have!" and the Serpent glided past.

"Hoo-oo! I'm not afraid of the Sun," retorted the owl, though he blinked a bit in the dazzling glare that streamed more and more brightly in his eyes.

Solomon waked in the early morn and found that the magic golden ball was gone from his wand. He thought of that snapping, grating

sound that had broken his dreams the night before.

"I'll soon find the thief," he mused, "for the sun-shaft will lead straight to the ball."

When the Sun rose high in the cloudless sky the wise King came from his palace of gold. Past the tall pomegranates and clustering roses he went, through the forest depths to the grass-grown court by the silver brook. Then he paused to look full at the Sun. Its shimmering gleams streamed down on a grove that stretched far away beyond the swirling brook and the green meadow grass.

"Ah," thought the King, "the thief has hidden my ball within its shade," and he hastened away to the mossy glade close to the old tree trunk, where the owl sat defying the Sun.

"Hoo-oo, hoo-oo!" he mocked as the King drew near. "Old Sun I can stare you in the face now without blinking, for I've grown quite used to your glare."

The wise King waited where the tall fronds of the giant ferns edged the mossy glade, watching as the owl sat staring on. He saw the dark eyes grow suddenly golden and bright in the yellow blaze of the Sun. The motes came dancing

down the shaft that stretched from the cloudless sky to the old tree trunk.

“Oh, oh!” they cried. “You cannot keep us from finding the ball, though you hide it with moss and grasp it in both claws.”

The wise King smiled with delight, for he knew the ball of his golden wand lay hidden beneath the owl, as he sat there staring with golden eyes up at the golden Sun.

Solomon stepped from behind the ferns and crossed the mossy glade where he paused in front of the hollow stump.

“Master owl, come forth!” he commanded in his most kindly voice.

The owl turned swiftly at the words, but the bright, strong Sun had dazzled his eyes and blinded his sight until he could not see another thing.

In a dreadful fright at his terrible plight he flew out of the hollow tree, but he bumped his head on a drooping bough and dropped the ball in his pain.

Solomon caught up that golden ball before it could touch the ground and carefully fitted it on his wand.

“You mischievous bird!” he cried in wrath.

“you are punished for your prank.” And the wise King turned his back on him.

The owl had never a word to say as Solomon walked away. Well he knew there was no boon in store for him to avert his doom.

“I bade you gather the pollen while you might,” rustled the breeze. “Now how will you sow the fields? I very much fear you’ll forever be friendless and alone.”

“Ho, ho! and you live in gloom, unless you keep watching the Sun,” mocked the Serpent as he coiled by the old tree trunk.

All day long the poor owl sat on a twisting root, turning toward that shaft of light, the only thing he could see. He dare not venture back to his nest for his head was still sore from that terrible bump, but when night stole through the trees his eyes gleamed golden in the gloom. He found he could see very well in the dark, for all he was blind by day—though it cannot be said it greatly consoled him.

’Twas a lonely life that he led at best, cooped up in a hollow stump by day, while the birds were abroad in the sweet Springtide. And when he winged his flight from his nest in the gathering dusk the songsters were gone.

And ever since that day his mournful hoot is heard only by night, as he wanders through woodland and grove, friendless and alone among all the birds of the earth.

WHY THE PEACOCK WEARS EYES ON HIS TAIL

ONCE upon a time, in the long, long ago, when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the ring-dove sped to the great King's court in a passion of woe.

Past the swaying pearl-petalled daisies she fluttered, plaintively drooping in sad-colored garb to the grass-grown court ringed by their gleaming hearts.

Solomon bent from his throne of gold and smiled at the mourning dove.

"What grieves you so, oh Bird of Life?" he asked in a pitying tone.

"Bird of Life am I no longer," sighed the dove, "for my love is dead." And her feathered wings drooped low on the emerald grass.

"Whence sped the shaft of death to wound your tender heart?" questioned the wise King.

The ring-dove drooped lower yet on the velvet grass, and her voice could scarce be heard.

"Lord, last night as my mate was tenderly

telling his love, a flash of silver and polished black coiled on the bough, an angry hiss stirred the breeze, and, struck to the heart, he fell," she said.

"The Serpent!" frowned Solomon angrily.

"Aye," murmured the dove, "his great head hung swaying mockingly over the nest. 'Prater of love,' he hissed, 'you, too, shall go the way of hate, for dainty eggs are more tempting fare than King Solomon's frog.'"

The wise King stared in amaze. "Yet you are safe," he said in wonder, "but by what ruse?"

"Lord," cooed the dove, "as the Serpent poised to strike, a harsh cry sounded beneath the tree, with a curious rustling of rattling quills. For an instant he paused in alarm, then noiselessly glided away."

As she spoke, the same rustling of quills was heard, and a dull brown bird with a tail of short straight feathers that were perfectly bare, excitedly strutted within the gleaming circle of the court.

"I must have startled the Serpent," he boastfully said. "Last night while scratching for insects among the bushes I stepped on a thorn.

In pain I cried out and rattled the quills in my tail, for I thought it some venomous worm. Then a gleam of silver shot swiftly past and fled in the dusk."

"Bravo, Sir Peacock!" praised the wise King. "The Serpent dreaded the night alarm of your strident cry, for he only preys in solitude."

"But he will return when he thinks I'm alone," sobbed the dove. "Lord, grant me a protector, that I may hatch out my nestlings undisturbed by his wiles."

Solomon gazed at the little gray bird with a puzzled smile.

"Your protector would probably share the fate of your mate," he mused aloud. "So who shall I send on the dangerous quest of guarding your nest, ah Bird of Love?"

The peacock ruffled his breast with pride.

"My long bare quills may not be pretty," he exclaimed, "and my call I grant is a trifle harsh, but both have their uses since they frightened the Serpent. That is more than the rest of the birds can say."

"True" nodded the King, "though you're rather too vain of your prowess for such a plain brown bird."

“Lord,” cooed the dove, “why blame him for pride when he offers his service in love?”

“Truly you are a wise little bird,” smiled the King. “Go then Sir Peacock on your mission of love. The trees and the sky and the brook and the breeze shall aid you in shielding the dove.”

The ring-dove paused by the throne of gold and softly cooed:

“Lord, if he succeeds, let the gifts they bestow to help in the quest be his for all time, in reward.”

The wise King waved his wand of gold, and gently smiled at the grateful bird.

“Go your way in peace, gray dove,” he spoke, “lest the dusk fall before you reach your nest and you find your eggs gone. Later we will talk of rewards.”

The dove and the peacock traveled away by shady glades and blossoming hedgerows and dells till they came to a rippling silver brook flowing quietly in a vale far away from the grass-grown court.

The way had been long, and the birds paused wearily on the moss-grown bank, for the summer sun had heated the scented breeze. Below

them the limpid stream flowed cool and tempting.

"Come bathe in my breast, poor tired birds," it crooned as it rippled along.

But the gray dove mourned in reply: "Never again will I bathe or drink in clear water, lest my reflection revive the image of my lost mate." And she sighed, for great was her thirst.

"Poor little Dove," the peacock said. "See, yonder, where the low-hanging willows dim the stream with their shading green, is a shallow pool. I'll ruffle its surface with beak and breast so you may drink without fear of grief."

The peacock stepped in the shady pool, plunging and dipping his crest till the water quivered with dancing ripples of blue and green shot with a wondrous silver.

The weary dove sank in the ruffled pool and quenched her thirst in the cooling flow.

Just as she stepped on the mossy bank, a sun-rift parted the willow boughs, staining the peacock's feathers with the water's changing sheen. Proudly he paused beside the dove, and stared at his mirrored gold-green crest, and the shimmering blue of his breast.

"That is my gift for your service of love,"

rippled the brook. And the gray dove cooed joyfully, forgetting her woe in the peacock's delight.

Then on they journeyed till the Sun sank in the bright-hued West. But grief and her flight to the great King's court had robbed the dove of her strength. She faltered wearily on the brink of a lake just across from the apple tree where she housed.

"I can never fly over," she sighed, "and while it's not deep, 'tis too deep for such a small bird as I to wade across. Oh dear, I fear for my nestlings, for it will soon be dark."

The peacock pondered awhile, then firm and straight he lifted his featherless quills.

"Perch on my back," he bade the dove, "I'll bear you safely across."

The gray dove nestled among the quills, and the peacock bravely breasted the little lake. But when he reached the opposite shore his quills, weighted with silvery drops, caught in a brown sedge that frothed near the bank.

He pulled and pulled till every quill strained longer and longer, held fast in the sedge.

The gray dove stood waiting on the bank.

"Poor little dove," sighed the peacock at last

in despair, "I fear I shall not be able to help you after all."

"Oh, ho!" laughed the sedge, "The Serpent loves our slimy depths; and you're fast in our toils."

"You wicked sedge!" cried the peacock in a rage, freeing himself with a mighty tug.

The sinking Sun shot a shaft of light that dried the sedge on his quills in a caking gold-tinged film.

"Step up on the bank," the sun-motes called, "for that is the gift of the Sun."

The peacock gazed at the gleaming shaft in dismay. Surely a weight of sedge on his aching quills was hardly a gift to please! But he raised them up like a spreading fan to ease his tired back.

The evening breeze stirred gently among the sedge-brown quills breathing here, breathing there, till the caking film warmed to a feathery mass of plumes. Only the tips of the plumes clung web-like together, rounded and firm, for the warmth had fled with the setting Sun before the task was done.

"That is my gift," rustled the breeze, swaying among the trees.

The ring-dove perched in the apple tree and peered anxiously into her nest.

"Two, three, four! My eggs are safe," she cried joyfully; then fluttered down to warm them under her breast.

The peacock scratched among bush and shrub, and stored a feast on a blackberry leaf for the weary dove.

Then low in the sky shone a silvery rim. The peacock rustled his plumes in alarm, but the Serpent was hiding in his lair, and only the rounded disk of the Moon rose high in the star-bright sky.

"Oh Moon, how you frightened me!" cried the peacock, and told her the tale of his quest.

"Weary, indeed, I fear you will be if you watch all the time," gleamed the radiant silvery light. "Spread your feathery train over the nest, then you will feel the Serpent's coils before he can strike through to the dove if he steals on you unawares."

The peacock followed the Moon's advice, and warm and snug, the ring-dove slept beneath the sheltering plumes that covered her nest.

The Serpent came prowling around in the gloom when all was still, just before dawn.



THE PEACOCK FOLLOWED THE MOON'S ADVICE.

But he soon heard the rustling of rattling quills, and the watchful bird gave the strident cry that had frightened him off before.

But the second night the peacock could scarcely keep awake, and the silver Moon waned all too soon.

"Oh Eyes of the Night, have you no gift for the Peacock?" cried the radiant light to the stars as she sped away.

The dark blue night gleamed myriad-like with its golden dust. Then a shooting star flashed down to rest on the peacock's plumes. Another, another, and still they came, flashing gold-ringed on the shimmering brown plumes, till a thousand eyes gleamed watchfully on the burnished train.

"Sleep while we watch, for we are the gift of the Night," they chimed like a tinkling of far-off crystal bells.

Then lulled by the singing starry night the peacock drowsily sank to rest, and slept till the Sun-god rose in the East.

"What a wondrous charm," he cried to the fleeing night, "you have lent to that dull brown bird!"

Proudly the peacock preened his plumes and

mirrored himself in the little lake. But faithful still to his service of love, he guarded the nesting dove, till her nestlings' beaks chipped through their shells. And whenever the Serpent came prowling around, he fled in fear from the countless eyes that gleamed on the peacock's train.

When the fledglings grew strong for the flight to the great King's court, the dove and the peacock set forth.

Solomon greeted the gorgeous bird and the gentle ring-dove's brood with a wave of his golden wand. Then he stared at the peacock's glory.

"Such a beauteous bird will want to shine in a nobler sphere," spoke the King half mockingly, "you're quite too fine, I suppose, to be willing to watch in a sheltered grove away from the court."

But the peacock stepped boldly into the circle of emerald grass and raised his burnished train, fan-shaped in the Sun.

"Lord," he said, "my beauty I won in my service of love. Grant that I may forever serve the Dove."

The whole court applauded.

The ring-dove quickly fluttered to his side before the King could speak.

"But, Lord," she implored, "whether or not he remains by my side, leave him his shimmering crest and plumes, and those starry eyes on his train."

"Those gorgeous plumes do not match his strident cry," protested the King. "If I grant your request, I suppose I must change the Peacock's voice too."

And the wise King paused for the peacock's reply.

The beautiful bird ruffled his breast and his crest till they shimmered in the golden light like the sheen of sun-kissed pools.

"Nay, Lord," he exclaimed, "If you change my cry I might not be able to drive the Serpent away. I'd rather you gave me back the unlovely brown garb I used to wear."

"Wisely chosen," the great King cried with delight. Then he glanced from the gentle dove to the peacock at her side, and said: "But nevertheless as long as you choose to serve the dove you shall wear the gifts you have won by love, and keep your cry as well."

And ever since the long ago when the old,

old world was so very young, the peacock has flaunted his beautiful plumes and guarded the dove. The Serpent still flees from those countless eyes gleaming upon his train, gift of love and service.

WHY THE CROW'S FEATHERS ARE BLACK

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, in the early year a mantle of brown clad the trees and the shrubs, gem-studded with tiny green buds.

Softly the Sun blinked through a dimming haze of gray, quickening the pulse of the slumbrous earth.

Solomon sat on his throne of gold, but no lustre gleamed in his long fair curls, nor shone from his crown and his wand. Lazily the motes drifted in the shaft of light that fell on its rounded ball from the mist-clad sky.

The great King glanced at the hollowed stone, a stone of white, yet curiously black, then changing white again, that lay in the circle of sleeping grass and unseen daisies awaiting the call of the Spring.

"Lord," spoke the motes, "the Stone of Transformation is changing black and white.

Spring calls for release, and the grim frost belt that has gripped the earth yields to the warmth of the Sun."

"True," replied Solomon, "flower and leaf steal from its black hold. Soon the light will unseal the frozen Pool of Life." "

"And release the captive Water of Joy that wells from its depths when the Sun is high," sang the breeze.

"In the warm strong light the fruit will ripen on the Tree of Content that grows by the side of the Pool of Life," babbled the brook. "Without its shade the Pool could no longer bring delight to the heart of Man, and all living things."

"Until the Light-lord draws up the misty column of its magic drops, transforming Winter's black sway to Spring's white blossoming, the Stone will keep changing black and white," warned the notes.

"But swift is his course and the trees are tall that circle the Pool," rippled the brook, "and he may not linger in the fluted caves where the Water flows."

"Aye," spoke Solomon, "so the Stone must be filled and placed in the path of his golden heart

for one whole day when Spring first calls to the sleeping earth."

"But who may go to the hidden Pool?" sighed the breeze, "not even I have found the way."

"That none may know save the spotless Messenger of the Sun, lest some wanton hand pluck the Fruit and wither the Tree," whispered the notes.

"If that should happen, Content would flee from many a heart, and the Storm-king's clouds dispute Summer's sway," rustled the oak.

Solomon glanced up at the stately tree. High in its bare branches perched a snow-white crow.

"The Bird of the Sun," exclaimed the King. "The hour is come."

The crow swept down on wide spread wings, silver-gleaming in the shadowed light.

"Lord," he cried, "I have come for the Stone. Bid me set forth for the Pool of Life."

"Be secret and swift on the way," counselled the King, "for the Serpent is prowling by meadow and fen."

"Lord," proudly replied the crow, "my flight is straight with no waste of curves. How can

he find a path so sure in the undergrowth as mine through the air.”

Solomon gazed at the spotless crow. “Great is your pride, and with every right. But do not forget,” he said, “the Serpent is wise and black is his heart, oh, Bird of the Sun.”

“The Frost King’s mantle is blacker far than the Serpent’s heart or his coils,” replied the crow, “but even he must yield to the Sun.”

The wise King sighed as he glanced from the changing stone to the cloud-veiled sky.

“Not all the year,” he replied. “Only at noon in the early Spring does his heat suffice to drive the shadows from the Pool of Life.”

“And beware!” cautioned the drifting motes, “for the Stone must be white as your spotless crest when you plunge in the Pool. If some passing shadow change it black, it will stain the Water of Joy.”

“The Sun rides high when he strikes through the circling trees and chases the clouds from the sky,” returned the crow.

“Yet you must take care,” interrupted the King. “The Pool will glow in the fierce noon glare. Seek the cooling depths by the Tree of Content lest you lose the Stone.”

"Lord, I will not forget," said the crow.

"Then speed away," smiled Solomon, "but guard well the precious drops that shall send the frost to its long repose, for you may not go twice in the Spring of the year to the Pool of Life."

With the stone in his beak the crow rose high in the ambered paleness of the sky.

Swiftly he flew all day and night, past tree-grown plains ribboned with blue rivers, and brown, down-rushing cataracts that seethed white in deep pools, to the far-off mountain lands.

He never paused till he heard the voices of the whispering cypresses and lace-fringed pines, sea-green, sewn with fragrant cones ringed crown-like on the tallest peak.

"Here wells the Pool of Life," they called in pleasant voices.

The crow poised high, flashing white against the dark sky, rose-shafted in the east with the coming dawn. Then his broad wings beat downward through the air with rushing strokes that dulled the sound of rattling twigs beneath slim gliding coils.

"Ho ho! Bird of the Sun," mocked the Ser-

pent's hiss, "you have shown me the path to the Pool of Life."

"Ah me!" rustled the Tree of Content, "ah me, I fear!"

"Wicked Crow," replied the shimmering spray, "I wish you had never come."

"You foolish bird to travel by night," echoed the voice of the fluted caves, "don't you know that only the day can outshine the gleam of your sun-kissed crest?"

"Ho ho! How it sparkled in the gloom!" mocked the Serpent again.

The weary crow ruffled his plumes indignantly.

"A fine greeting when I've traveled so far to serve the Sun!" he exclaimed. "I did my best. I came without rest. I'm not to blame if the Serpent's course is swift as my flight."

"You were so vain of your broad strong wings, you never thought of your flashing crest. Without its gleam the Serpent could never have found the way," reproached the whispering pines.

"The King and the Sun gave me no hint," sulked the crow. "Am I to be wiser than they?"

"Hush!" quivered all the voices in haste.

"The King bade you be secret as well as swift."

"Had your love been as great as your pride you need not have failed in your task," sighed the Tree of Content.

"Love!" retorted the crow in a rage. "You ungrateful things! Do you think I am pleased that the Serpent followed my trail? But even so, I have not failed."

"You'll soon find you have, if he blights the Tree," cried the spray.

"Set your own wits to foil him then, since you think me so stupid. I'm weary and mean to rest. Good night!" cried the crow; then flew up into a fragrant pine where the lacy fringe had tangled into a nest.

"Come back," called the voices. "You must guard the Tree. We may not stir from our places."

"Not I," sneered the crow, "you've been rather too critical if you meant to do nothing but wait while I work. Good night!" And he settled down in the nest.

The Serpent stole from the undergrowth, his black polished body coiling round and round the poor trembling Tree.

"Wake, Bird of the Sun!" cried the voices.

“Good night,” repeated the crow.

The voices called and begged and sighed, but the crow only tucked his head further under his wing and fell asleep.

Just as the gold-tipped shaft of dawn rose high in the sky, the Serpent’s great head shot forward, and he snatched the fruit from the spreading bough that hung low over the Pool.

“Oh!” wailed the Tree, “he has stolen my heart.”

The voices rose and fell on the breeze but the crow slept on. The Serpent still coiled round the stricken Tree with its withered bough when the noontide Sun fell on the troubled Pool.

“Ho ho! it is time,” he hissed as the crow fluttered out of the tangled nest

The sun-bird poised on the fragrant pine with the stone in his beak and prepared for his plunge.

“Wait!” cried the spray. “The Serpent has stolen the fruit from the Tree of Content!”

“You wouldn’t watch,” quivered the leaves, “so he blighted the bough that shaded the Pool.”

“Beware! Take care what you do,” echoed the voice of the fluted caves. “You have failed in your task this year.”



"JUST LOOK AT YOURSELF!"

The crow in his anger and pride gave no heed to their warning. Scornfully spreading his wings, he circled down. As he plunged in the Pool a shadow fell on the stone in his beak, where the Serpent's head hung swaying low upon the leafless bough.

The waters bubbled and seethed as the crow plunged in, scorching him with the fearful heat of the noontide Sun. In his pain he cried out, and dropped the stone as he struggled up into the air.

"Just look at yourself!" the Serpent hissed.

The crow perched at the water's edge on a spreading cypress bough.

"Why, what is this?" he cried in amaze, for the Pool and his feathers were black as night.

"My shadow fell on the changing Stone. Your downward rush stained the waters black, and your snow-white plumes as well," scoffed the Serpent as he glided away.

"The Stone will turn white in the golden light. 'Twill clear the Pool and change my color again," called the crow, but the Serpent was gone.

"You dropped the Stone in your fright," whispered the pines.

"I'll fetch it back," retorted the crow cheerily.

"You cannot dive into the waters now. The Tree of Content is withered, and without its shade they are too hot," said the voice of the fluted caves.

"I'll wait till dusk," suggested the crow, half dismayed.

"That is too late," replied the spray, "only the Water of Joy can find a way back from the depths where the Stone will sink with the falling light."

The golden rays shimmered angrily around the crow.

"How can the Sun gladden the earth with the magic drops?" they asked. "He must draw them up now in his hasty course from the tarnished Pool, and the clouds will steal them before they can reach his heart."

"Faithless messenger!" scolded the notes. "You will always be an emblem of woe, black as the evil you've wrought."

The frightened crow at these words flew straight up the shaft of golden light, close to the heart of the Sun.

"Lord of Light," he implored, "forgive me and turn my plumes white as they were before."

“That I cannot,” replied the Sun. “Without the Stone of Transformation white must ever be white, and black will always stay black, and the clouds will gather in summer skies.”

All day long the unhappy crow followed that shaft of light with his plea for help. But when the Sun sank in the western sky his feathers were still as black as jet. In a panic of fear as he thought of the great King's wrath, he fluttered down to the lace-fringed pines, but they bade him be off on his way.

And so in the days of the long ago when the old, old world was so very young, the crow flew mournfully down from the Sun. Black he was then as he sped with his tale of woe to the circle of emerald grass, and black he remains while the world grows steadily older.

HOW THE MOCKING BIRD GOT HIS NAME

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the languor of midsummer's heat stole deep in the honeysuckle's cream-gold heart. The scented breeze, fragrant with pale purple memories of the wistaria's vanished glory, fanned the trailing arbutus and scarlet trumpet vines; and full-petalled roses clustered in a joyous riot of color.

Solomon sat on his throne of gold alone in the circle of emerald grass ringed by the swaying daisies.

High in the trees the songbirds trilled their wonderful melodies. The sun-rays gleamed in a golden shaft that veined each leaf and lined its green with a shimmering sheaf. They showered down on the silver brook, and jeweled its ripples with a diamond net as they sparkled and danced past the moss-grown bank.

"To-day as I rushed from my mountain home

in the early dawn, the crescent Moon was climbing the starry ladder of the sky," sang the brook. "I caught her gleam in Night's deep cave from a snowy peak." . .

"The midsummer Moon," mused the wise King, and thoughtfully nodded his head in pleasant reverie.

Then he waved his wand from right to left and left to right again till its rounded ball blazed golden-red.

At the call of the light the birds came flocking from far and near to the great King's court.

The hawk, and the dove, and the chickadee waited without the daisy ring, with the robin, the redwing, and the whip-poor-will. The goldfinch was there and a certain brown bird with breast and tail of glistening white who had never been given a name.

"The Flowers of Speech will bloom to-night," spoke Solomon. "They unfold their petals once a year for a single night when the midsummer's Moon first shines."

"They fade with the morning light," called the brook.

"You must go to the glade in the silent wood

where the blossoms grow, and gather them all, each bird one," the wise King said.

"There is an emblem for every one, bird, squirrel, and bee, and all living creatures under the Sun in their flowery hearts," rustled the oak.

"Unless I weave them in a garland tonight I cannot work the magic spell," resumed the King. "I must sleep with them on my brow if I would understand the language of all in my realm."

"If a single Flower be missing, the meaning of some speech will be forever hidden," cautioned the drifting motes in the golden beam that shone on Solomon's ball-tipped wand.

"The blossoms are every one alike, with their secret emblem hidden from sight. You cannot tell which is which," nodded the daisies.

"If you should lose one it might be your own," said Solomon, "so beware, for I never again could understand a word you said."

And he waved his wand again, from right to left and left to right, for the birds to set off on their quest.

"Killie," cried the hawk, "follow me. I know the path through the silent woods."

The trees grew tall in the silent woods, vine-

clad with trailing tendrils. The ivy circled the oak-tree trunks with its glossy leaves, and rust-red pools gleamed ruddily in the wonderland of varying green. A thicket of shrubs tangled the edge so that none might pass save by the path. No sound was heard in the silent wood if one went astray to speed him through its maze.

Vague, cool, and strange, the path led straight to the hidden glade. Narrow and low it was, with no way to the sky through its lattice of dancing leaves that twined shadowy chains in the summer breeze.

But the birds flew merrily along with no thought of harm. They had not seen the slim, polished, black coils of the Serpent swiftly gliding among the ferns, keeping silent pace with their progress.

The crescent Moon was threading the sky with her slender hoop when the hawk led the birds to the open glade.

"Welcome," rippled a silvery voice, and a truent spring sent a shiver of crystal over the moss.

"Cherolee," cried the redwing, "the dew is scattering pearls on the roses and eglantine."

And he settled close to a rose and drank from its scented cup.

“Killic,” cried the hawk, “this is the hour when the Flowers bloom.”

“Kill-deer! Kill-deer!” called his cousin the sparrow-hawk. “See those waxen buds by the spring.”

Ivory-tinted, with rosy veins, they spread their petals one by one till full-blossomed and star-shaped they glistened with a sheen like that of the Moon on a fretwork of cobwebs. The birds fluttered around them.

“They are the Flowers of Speech,” chirped the robin.

The nameless brown bird fluttered gaily around the waxen cups.

“There’s a bird too many and a Flower too few,” he said, “one of us will have nothing to carry back to the king.”

“Killic! that will be you,” decided the hawk, “since you have no name you cannot expect to share honors with us.”

“If I have no name it is only because I can mimic all your calls with my wonderful throat,” retorted the brown bird, “the King could never decide just what to call me.”

“Cherolee! say no more,” called the redwing.
“You can carry my Flower.”

“Ho ho! What matters a Flower more or less when you’ll all be missing at Solomon’s court?” hissed a voice. And two wicked eyes shone in the gloom of the path where the Serpent lay coiled.

“We’ll fly high over your head,” cried the hawk. “While you are climbing the trees to reach us we’ll be safely past.”

“Here where the trees arch high you may,” replied the Serpent, “but the branches droop low at the edge of the wood.”

“If Sir Serpent coils there he can strike each bird as you pass,” warned the spring, “so beware!”

“We’ll beat through the thicket on either side of the path,” cooed the dove.

“’Twill take you too long. The Flowers would be faded before you came to the great King’s court. Ho ho! You’ll find me waiting,” mocked the Serpent as he glided away.

The birds fluttered close to the crystal spring at the Serpent’s words.

“The King will not weave his garland tonight, I fear,” sighed the dove.

"It's quite as bad to be dumb as dead," exclaimed the chickadee. "We must all rush down together and force our way past him. There's always a chance that some may escape, and save the right Flower at that."

"Cherolee!" cried the redwing, "I wish we were out of the woods!"

The nameless brown bird had listened in silence, still hurt at the hawk's slighting words. But he was a generous, friendly little soul, and the redwing's plaint reminded him of the little bird's friendly offer.

"Leave it to me, I have a plan. We'll outwit Sir Serpent with his mocking laugh by a clever trick," he said, and whispered softly to each bird in turn.

"It's well there is a Flower too few," chuckled that nameless brown bird. "Come, let us be off."

The birds plucked the blossoms, each bird one, then, flying high, they entered the path. Once in its gloom they stole along close to the leafy arch overhead.

Just as they came to the edge of the wood the moonlight fell on the Serpent's silver-ringed coils.

Silently the birds perched in the trees where the path opened towards the meadows beyond the woods.

"Kill-deer! Kill-deer!" shrieked the sparrowhawk from the thicket to the right.

Then "Killic!" and "Cherolee!" echoed on from the woods. The Serpent reared his great head angrily.

"I'll trap you all," he cried, then paused in amaze. Not a bird was in sight.

"Cherolee!" repeated a voice a little way off, and "Phoebe!" answered the chickadee.

"You're trying the thicket," hissed the Serpent, "you'll never get through—I shall see to that, at any rate."

"Killic! Killic!" faintly sounded the hawk.

"I can't get them all but I may trap a few," thought the Serpent.

"Coo, coo," whispered the dove from the leaves.

"There are none to be seen in the path, that's clear," hissed the Serpent, and glided into the thicket.

But swift as he sped towards the dove's sweet call, the birds fluttered down from the trees that arched the narrow path. One by one through

the opening they flew, and sped towards the great King's court.

At the rustling of wings the Serpent turned, but a chorus of calls sounded close in the thicket beside him.

"Cherolee! Whip-poor-will!"

The Serpent plunged into the undergrowth.

"Killic! Killic!" And he darted after the hawk.

"Chirp, chirp!" cried the robin. He climbed the tree but the bird had fled.

All night long the Serpent searched in the silent wood, led on by the calls.

When the day shot its quiver of gold and blue through the dancing leaves the Serpent came gliding down the path.

"I've cheated ye! I've cheated ye!" came the bullfinch's call high in the trees.

"Cheated *me!* You silly bird!" hissed the Serpent angrily. "The Flowers are faded by now, so the others may go. But you shall pay for that mocking cry."

The nameless brown bird flew out from the leaves, just as the Serpent's head shot high in the tree.

"Ho-ho! Ho-ho!" laughed the bird, "the



THE NAMELESS BROWN BIRD FLEW OUT FROM THE LEAVES.

others went free while the Moon was high! Don't you know all these calls were stored in my throat? Ho-ho! Ho-ho!"

And the little brown bird sped away through the opening boughs at the edge of the wood.

High in the oak that grew near the silver brook the nameless brown bird spied the hawk.

"Did you all come safely to Solomon's court?" he cried as he circled down from the sky.

"Killic!" replied the hawk. "You wonderful bird! The King slept in his garland, but I feared you were lost."

"Ho-ho! Ho-ho! Not I," mocked the little brown bird. "I left Sir Serpent ashamed in the woods for I've stolen his laugh. Ho-ho! Ho-ho!"

Solomon welcomed the nameless brown bird with a smile as he fluttered into the velvety circle of emerald grass.

"I've found you a name at last cried the King. "Mocking bird!"

"Oh joy!" carolled the little bird and in his delight launched into the air with a burst of trills.

His whole soul thrilled into melody. Quiver-

ing and fluttering in the golden light he floated in an ecstasy of delight, rising and falling with the delicious notes, then swept down at last on the scale of his song to the great King's feet.

"Mocking bird," spoke Solomon, "what wonderful trills! Henceforth, as a gift to match the name, you shall always be able to sing on the wing."

So when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the mocking bird won a name from the King. He is known by it now, though the world has grown old, and a mocking bird he'll always be till the world grows so old it cannot grow any older.

HOW THE PARROT CAME TO WEAR A HOOKED BEAK

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the Moon set the meadows and woods a-quiver with shimmering silver. The dancing beams laced the roses and pomegranates that circled the great King's palace with a fretwork of sheen, then stole through the casement of purest gold where Solomon sat.

"Lord," they cried, "why is the Nightingale silent? She has always sung to the first Spring Moon, but this year she has kept to her nest."

"Truly," spoke Solomon, "such nights as these her song should thrill with delight." Then forth from his palace went the wise King past the tall pomegranates and fragrant roses to the grove where the nightingale nested.

"Have you forgotten the trills I love so, Nightingale?" questioned the King.

"Lord," she replied, "only to-day my nestlings'

beaks chipped through the shell of my eggs. I have not been yet to the Tree-that-Sings."

A parrot housed in a near-by tree—the crimson-tailed grandfather of parrots of every hue—with a straight strong beak, as parrots had in the long ago, fetched his head from under his wing and fluttered out on a bough.

"Lord," he croaked as he settled himself in a pompous way, "if you would hear *trills*, just listen to mine!" And he straightway began to sing in a quivering strident voice, up and down, till his breath gave out.

"Ah ha! Oh ho!" laughed the evening breeze. "Oh ho! Ah ha!" rustled the leaves. And "Ha ha ha!" the King chimed in.

"Do you think that is anything like our bird of the thousand tongues?" asked the leaves. "Oh ho! Ah ha!"

The parrot ruffled his plumes with a very disdainful fluff. "I am wise with the wisdom of ages to come—" he began.

"'Tis wisdom to know what one has not," interrupted the King. "'Tis the magic voice makes melody, Friend Parrot. A musical marvel I fear you will never be."

The parrot cocked his head on the side with a

haughty stare, then contemptuously turned his back on the King.

"I could not trill as I do, if I did not go to the 'Tree-that-Sings,'" the nightingale soothingly said.

"I know the Tree," whispered the breeze. "It grows in a moss-spread glade where lilies and purple-tipped iris blossoms are massed in a scented tangle."

"But why must you go to the Tree, Nightingale?" asked the leaves.

"The soul of the Tree dwells in the hollow where the branches spread," answered the bird of moon-lit songs, "there the springtide sap bubbles up, but soon it cloyes in an amber gum, sealing the song within the bark for the rest of the year."

"Then how do you learn your exquisite song?" questioned the King, while the others awaited the answer.

"Each year I bathe in the gum while it's soft, filling my feathers with every drop, till none remain to harden over the Soul of the Tree," explained the nightingale.

"'Tis a piece of unparalleled luck I am here. I'll go at once to the Tree. Then we'll see!"

the parrot announced to himself—and missed the nightingale's last remark.

“The springtide sap is the voice of the Tree,” the nightingale said. “Only so long as the amber gum stains my feathers this reddish brown will the song of the Tree swell in my throat.”

A vibrant hiss stirred the evening breeze, and the silver rings of the Serpent's black polished coils slipped swiftly past.

“Beware!” cautioned Solomon, “keep your secret from the Serpent if you would continue to sing.”

“Else we must be content with the parrot's trills,” rustled the leaves.

“Ah ha! Oh ho! Ha ha ha!” laughed the breeze and the King as they thought of those trills.

“He laughs best who laughs last,” sagely commented the parrot as he clambered head-first down the trunk of his tree.

“What a pompous strut!” mocked a voice, and the silver rings of the Serpent flashed again in the gloom as the parrot stalked off.

“Wisdom, Friend Serpent, is seen in a slowness to speak. Know that my dignified walk is due to my toes. I've two straight before on each

claw, and two just behind, to conform to the law of duality—a thing that no other bird does," the parrot calmly retorted.

"Surely your tracks are like no other bird's," admitted the Serpent, then glided away.

"Where are you going, oh Bird of Wisdom?" asked Solomon.

"That's my secret," replied the parrot, "and my secrets I keep—something it takes a thousand years' practise to learn."

"Boaster! You're not so old, nor I, nor the world," laughed the King. "I prefer the wit the Nightingale shows in learning to trill."

"I know a trick worth two of that," the parrot cried. Then he strutted away through the moon-bright grove to the meadows beyond. High in the star-lit sky two crows were flying along in company.

"I'll join them," the parrot exclaimed. "They'll be glad of my wisdom to guide their flight."

Up through the air he shot, but the crows swept right and left, frightened by the flash of that crimson tail.

"No loss but it brings some gain," the parrot observed to himself. "Now I need not tell them

of the songs to be learned by a simple gum-bath."

When the Moon was still high the parrot came to the moss-spread glade. Beyond its broad clearing the lilies and purple-tipped iris blossoms drowsily nodded.

"Caution," the parrot informed the Moon, as he circled down to the ground, "is the kernel of Wisdom's nut. Affairs may be ruined by too long a flight. Some meddlesome bird might see my tail in the star-bright sky and tell the King. He'd be sure to send the Nightingale along before I've learned all the beautiful songs. I'll walk."

Then, his right claw pompously set in the moss, left toe next, carefully toeing in, he stepped across. But a sense of importance filled his soul, and with every step his weight came full on those two toes in front and the two behind.

The grass grew tall at the lilies edge—waving and inviting.

"The very thing for a nest," the parrot cried, and his straight strong beak went busily rooting and twisting and weaving.

"Haste," he observed as he settled down for the night in his grassy nest, "indicates a weak-

ness of purpose. I shall sleep before I go to the Tree."

Below as the parrot flew, slim black coils, silver-ringed, had followed swiftly through meadow and glade. The Serpent paused at the edge of the glade.

"Where is that crimson tail?" he hissed. "Alone I shall never find the Tree. I came too late to the Nightingale's nest to hear where it grows."

His great head reared thoughtfully swaying. The Moon, shining down, lighted a path of curious tracks in the moss.

"The Parrot!" he hissed. "I'll hide till he wakes among those ferns beyond the lilies. Then we shall see!"

Just as he passed the fragrant growth a wonderful melody stirred the night breeze.

"That must be the Tree-that-Sings," thought the Serpent. "Only the Nightingale knows such trills. Ho-ho! I'll silence the song that delights the King."

In the rose-grey dawn the parrot awoke and searched the sky with his goggled eyes.

"Not a bird in sight," he chuckled. "But I'd better be going. There's no telling how soon

the Nightingale may come, and I still have the Tree to find."

He strutted through the lilies and iris-blossoms to the ferns beyond, where he paused on one claw with his head on the side. The wonderful singing filled the early morn with its melody.

"My ear has been trained to distinguish the meaning of sound," the parrot wisely commented. "The Tree is found."

Led by the trills he set off briskly for the Tree. As he came close, a little grey squirrel hiding among the ferns beckoned with his bushy tail.

"Hush!" whispered the squirrel, "Sir Serpent came in the night. We will feed his hunger, I fear, if he finds we are here."

The parrot crept in beside the squirrel, then cautiously peeped from under the leaves. The Tree grew tall with great gnarled roots twisting free from the earth. Above, where the branches spread, the Serpent's great head poised ready to strike, with his slim coils circling the trunk half-way down to the ground.

"I certainly cannot fly down to the ground, and just see what I'll have to crawl over if I climb up," the parrot reflected, and thoughtfully

scratched his head with one sharp claw till he made the down fly.

"One of those roots reaches almost up to the hollow; perhaps you could climb over from there," the squirrel suggested. "Then you'll be safe, for where he is now the Serpent can only strike as you fly past him up the tree and into the gum."

"He's not obliged to stay there," scornfully replied the parrot. "If he sees me, don't you suppose he'll soon change his place?"

"If you could only eat of the Serpent's fat you'd know what to do," sighed the squirrel. "I've heard it said that if any one dared he would always possess the secret of tongues and his guile as well."

"The very thing!" the parrot exclaimed. "That root just comes to his middle and he has coiled so that to reach either the ground or the hollow he must drag his great length over the rough bark." And he executed a solemn dance, stopping at every step to stand on his head and laugh. "It helps the flow of ideas," he kindly explained to the squirrel, as he backed from under the ferns with his crimson tail turned carefully towards the Tree.

"Do come back and keep quiet," implored the terrified squirrel.

"Faint heart never won amber gum bath," sagely retorted the parrot.

The Serpent stirred lazily, glancing down in amusement.

"Ho ho!" he laughed, "Friend Parrot's turned tail. He's afraid." And he thought no more of that crimson tail that was steadily coming nearer.

With his tail going first, the parrot cautiously climbed the great gnarled root the squirrel had pointed out. Then like a lightning flash he whirled around, plunging his straight strong beak deep into those polished coils.

The Serpent struggled to free himself, but the parrot's claws were firmly gripped around the root. He could not move, and that straight strong beak, biting deeper and deeper, was the sharpest thing he had ever felt.

"Stop pinching!" hissed the Serpent, "I'll let you go free."

But the parrot never budged. The Serpent, writhing in pain, lashed out with his tail, suddenly jerking the parrot's claws from their hold. For an instant he clung to the silver-ringed coils,



"STOP PINCHING!" HISSED THE SERPENT.

then fell flat on his back on the ground with a bit of the Serpent's fat in his beak.

"Ouch! *Ouch!*" groaned the Serpent as he started down after the venturesome bird. "o-u-c-h!" For that bit of fat had left a great hole in his coils.

The parrot was up in a twinkling, and spreading his wings flew high in the Tree.

"You'll not drag that hole up over the bark again," the parrot jeered, as the Serpent stopped with a pitiful groan halfway down. And he darted into the hollow.

"Don't be too sure," hissed the Serpent. "Besides, I can reach you from here." And his great head reared, with the poison fangs ready to strike. Then "Ouch!" he moaned unable to stir for with every step he found that hole in his coils.

But his chill breath fell freezingly into the hollow. The parrot absorbed in the wonderful trills, gave no heed to the amber shell that was slowly closing around him. Again and again the Serpent breathed on the gum. Then painfully he crawled down the gnarled tree-trunk.

"See if your wisdom will save you now, Friend Parrot," he cried and crept away to his lair.

His words were lost on the parrot, for the singing had grown louder and louder, but through the clear gum he saw the Serpent vanish among the ferns.

“Now I can safely study these trills,” he cried.

He listened intently at first but soon he joined in with the singing Tree.

“Superb!” he exclaimed. “Really I am a genius, my first attempt’s a great success.” But whether it was his own voice or the Tree’s that pleased him so he never thought to discover.

“’Tis folly to waste any more time here. There’s not the least fear the Nightingale will ever outsing me again,” he continued with glee, and tried to climb out.

But he couldn’t break through that amber shell, though his straight strong beak plunged into it with a will. It simply caught fast in the sticky mass and made his plight worse than before. Down he pulled, then pushed up, wriggling from side to side, till at last with a mighty tug that curved his beak in an ugly hook and almost pulled out his upper jaw, he dragged down a bit of the gum. ’Twas no easy task with a broken jaw and a twisted beak to widen that tiny slit, but he worked away, till the Moon rode high

in the sky again. Then the troublesome gum suddenly split in half, and the parrot and shell clattered down to the ground.

The Soul of the Tree sang joyfully at its release, but little the parrot cared. He picked himself up with the squirrel's aid, and together they tried to set his beak straight. Alas! In spite of their efforts the ugly hook remained.

"It's no use," the parrot said at last, "I'll have to wait till my jaws stop aching. Then surely the King will help me out when he hears how beautifully I've learned to trill."

The squirrel pitied the suffering parrot, and dipping his bushy tail in the dew on the ferns, he bathed the sore jaw, and bound it up with a blade of grass which he tied on the side in a flowing knot.

"We'd better be going," the parrot observed, "Sir Serpent might return. I don't think it would be quite polite to remind him of that rip in his coils by remaining here."

"Wait till I clean your feathers; that sticky gum has stained them all brown," said the squirrel, and he brushed away till not a speck could be seen.

Then they stole through the lilies and purple-

tipped iris blossoms, crossed the moss-spread glade, and travelled away by meadow and wood to Solomon's court.

The sunbeams were dancing among the leaves when they came to the grove where the parrot housed. Gaily the motes swam in the shaft of light that fell from the magic wand of gold, for the King was abroad in the early morn.

Loud and long he laughed when the parrot appeared with his head bound up in a blade of grass, and that ugly hooked beak pointing out in front, and louder still when he heard his tale of woe.

"Just wait till you hear me sing," the parrot exclaimed, and opened his swollen jaws. But what with the pain and the curve of his beak his trills were worse than before.

"Ah ha! Oh ho!" rustled the breeze and the leaves. "And you've shown the Serpent the way to the Tree for that! Oh oh! Ah ha!"

The nightingale peeped from her nest in dire dismay.

"Why what have you done with the gum?" she asked. "Didn't you hear me say that the springtide sap was the voice of the Tree, and only so long as I wore it's brown stain would the

song swell in my throat? Oh dear! I wish you had stayed here. You've wasted the trills for a whole year."

"Ha ha ha!" laughed Solomon, "I fear you have only made trouble for all, but you really are such a comical sight I haven't the heart to punish you more, although I shall certainly miss the Nightingale's song this coming year."

The parrot greatly offended stole into his nest to nurse his pride and wounded jaw. When the beak was healed and the ache was gone he was somewhat relieved to find he could do what no other bird can, and that is to move his upper jaw.

The nip he had of the Serpent's fat taught him a knowledge of tongues which he always retained. But he certainly never was able to trill, though it always remained his ambition, for never again did the nightingale miss her early visit to the Tree-that-Sings. And the hooked beak he got in the long ago he has worn ever since.

WHY THE JACKDAW HIDES EVERY- THING BRIGHT

ONCE upon a time in the long, long ago when the old, old world was a very young world indeed, the Sun rose high through the perfumed mists of an August dawn.

The dancing beams slanted across broad meadows of buttercups hedged with fragrant thorn to the woodland depths, where they jewelled the leaves of the clustering roses, and the darker shadows of the tall pomegranate trees that flowered scarlet around the King's palace. Then through the opened casement they shot their shaft of radiance from the heart of the Sun to the clouded globe that lay by the side of the sleeping King.

"Wake, Lord!" called the drifting motes, "the Moon yields this month to the yellow glory of the Sun. Low hung in the sky, in the twilight hour, she dons a mantle of gold, and waits for the master touch to open her radiant gates."

"Wake, Lord!" echoed the shimmering beams,

“our work is done. The shell-tinted blooms of the snow-clad boughs of apple and plum trees have ripened the fruit. We have wrought the Wonder Key.”

Solomon rose from his slumber couch and took up the clouded globe. In the warm strong light it grew wondrously clear, flashing rainbow tints on a golden key prisoned within.

“Then I must go to the Moon’s magic realm to renew my power to rule over the earth and all living things,” spoke the wise King.

“Beware lest you wait till too late,” murmured the beams. “If by any mischance you fail to gather the milky sheen of the coming year for the Wonder Key you will not know the secrets of Life. Then you would lose your sway over the birds and the beasts and their brother, Man, and each would dwell apart.”

“You must make haste,” cautioned the motes, “you may unlock the radiant gates only so long as the Moon is full, and to-morrow’s dawn heralds the eve of her waning.”

“True,” replied Solomon, “it is time to prepare the gifts I bestow on my subjects when I return from the magic realm.”

The great King went to this treasure hall with

the crystal globe in his hand, and opened the alabaster chests that were ranged along the walls. One by one he chose the gifts, wrapping them round with a filmy web of woven golden threads, then bore them off to his grass-grown court, ringed by the nodding daisies.

On the opposite shore an elm tree grew. A mischievous jackdaw, nesting among its topmost branches, kept a curious watch as Solomon spread out the golden web and set the gifts upon it.

"Those numerous packets merit a closer peep," he exclaimed and, as curious as he could possibly be, flew straightway down from his nest and over the brook.

He never saw the jewel-bright eyes that gleamed between the elm's twisting roots, where the silver brook in its springtide rush had washed the moss from its clinging hold and left a secret lair.

The jackdaw strutted gravely forward till he stood beside the King.

"You need a helper, Lord, I see," he observed with droll dignity.

"Then it will not be you, little Jackdaw. I've heard it said you are rather too prone to play

pranks," the wise King laughed, and stooped to place the crystal globe upon the golden web.

"'Tis a pity, Lord," the jackdaw cried, with no malice for the rebuff, "to shut up that glittering key."

"I may not break the crystal sheaths," the wise King spoke, "lest the Key be lost before it is needed to open the radiant gates. It must bathe all night in the Moon's misty light, then the morrow's setting Sun will release it for me."

"Oh, joy!" sang the scented breeze, "when you go down the milky lane to the rising Moon to open the gates of the magic realm, all living things will join in the brotherhood of Love, and promise to aid each other till the harvest Moon hangs low in the sky again."

"Aye," spoke Solomon, "and these are the gifts that shall fit your needs when the Frost King reigns."

"Lord," repeated the jackaw, "truly you need a helper."

"Since you are so anxious to serve," the wise King said, "you may summon the birds and the bees and all my subjects to come to my court tomorrow."

But the jackdaw lingered on, standing first on

one claw and then on the other, and bent a bright eye on the crystal globe.

"Lord," he reflectively murmured, "someone must guard the gifts, if you would find none mislaid when you return from the magic realm."

Solomon laughed aloud. "No, no, Sir Jackdaw," he retorted as he mounted his golden throne. "I've too much care for the Wonder Key to risk any curious prying."

"Lord," the jackdaw insisted, "you cannot watch all day and night and go to the Moon as well."

"That I know well," assented the King. "So you must bring the Owl back to my court when you return to-night. His cries are so sharp in the dark, he'll be sure to see any prowler."

The jackdaw set forth on his mission with a discontented sigh, for his heart was bent on a closer peep at the crystal globe and the prisoned key.

When the twilight fell he came scurrying back with the owl as the King had bidden. The parrot came, too, for he lived far away and being of sociable habits he had no mind to journey alone.

"Welcome, welcome!" the wise King ex-

claimed, "you have surely made haste to get here so soon."

"That," the parrot responded, "is due to my counsel. I helped the Jackdaw to guide the Owl here while it was still light."

"I, Lord," the jackdaw added, "was in a hurry because I thought you might wish to rest before it was dark."

"That was one for me, and two for yourself, I fear," smiled Solomon. "You're over-anxious to get me away while the Owl can't see."

The jackdaw glanced saucily up at the King. Then, seeing he'd nothing to gain, he flew away in disgust to the old elm tree on the other side of the brook.

The owl stood silently waiting, but the King gave no heed to his sullen mood.

"Guard these treasures well," he bade the sulky bird. "If any one enters the daisy circle give three sharp calls. I will be here before the thief can escape."

Solomon rose from his throne of gold with these words, went to his palace in the woodland depths, cast himself on his slumber couch, and fell asleep.

"Hoo-oo!" grumbled the owl. "I'm not al-

lowed to sleep by day and I'm set to watch by night."

"There's a hollow stump at the edge of the wood," tempted the parrot. "I'll take your place."

"That you will not! Solomon's wrath is worse by far than the lonely vigil," the owl refused at first.

"I'll wake you before he comes," the parrot cajolled, until the owl finally yielded and settled himself in the hollowed stump the parrot had pointed out.

"It is wisdom not to examine the gifts until I am sure there is no one near," the parrot remarked when the owl had gone. Then he perched himself on the golden throne and tucked his right claw carefully under his downy breast.

But his flight had been long and his watchful eyes were soon closed.

The jackdaw, unable to sleep because of the parrot's chatter, waited patiently with some sly notion that he might yet find a chance to inspect the crystal globe.

So he spied the Serpent's silver rings as he stole from the roots of the old elm tree and glided across the brook; saw the slim polished

coils slip past the pearl-petalled daisies and pause by the golden film.

For an instant Sir Serpent's great head hung swaying above the gifts, then the great fangs shot down and closed on the crystal sheath.

Back to the old elm tree he came and stowed the shattered globe with the golden key beneath the twisting roots.

"What a joke it would be to steal his loot," the jackdaw chuckled with glee.

Then cautiously down from his nest came the curious mischievous bird. He pryed and poked among the roots till a yellow gleam in the dark caught his eye.

"The Wonder Key!" he exclaimed. "Sir Serpent has broken the sheath."

He picked it up in his beak and made his way up the tree, just as the Serpent returned with one of the gifts in his mouth. And one by one he brought them all to his hidden lair in the twisting roots beside the rippling brook.

"The Serpent will surely come searching my nest when he misses the Key," the jackdaw thought. "I must hide it somewhere else."

When the Serpent again crossed the brook, the jackdaw flew off to the woods, where he dug

a hole in the ground. But in his delight at outwitting the thief he carelessly scratched the earth over the key, and never thought to mark the spot before he returned to his nest.

With the dawn's first shaft the parrot awoke, and saw with dismay that the gifts were gone. Only the golden film remained to show where Solomon had set them forth on the previous day.

He hastily summoned the faithless owl, and together they racked their brains to devise some scheme to soothe the King's wrath.

"I've found a way," the parrot exclaimed at last. "Friend Owl you must swear that you kept on watch all night."

"You persuaded me to sleep," objected the owl, "I'll not bear all the blame. You're the culprit."

"You'll very soon find that excuse won't serve with the King," the parrot scornfully sniffed. "He'll simply say you had no right to disobey."

"Hoo-oo! But we've got ourselves in a dreadful plight," wailed the owl.

"I've thought out a plan to lay all the blame on the King, if only you'll do what I say," the parrot returned.

Before the owl could refuse, Solomon came from his palace of gold. The jackdaw flew down from the old elm tree; the birds and the beasts and their brother, Man, gathered around the daisy ring. The Serpent too crept from his lair in the twisting roots and joined them there.

Solomon mounted his golden throne with a terrible frown when he saw the empty film. The owl quaked with fear, but the parrot stepped boldly forward.

"Lord," he spoke, "'tis your very own fault."

Solomon stared at the venturesome bird in angry amaze, but the parrot undaunted, continued:

"When you set the Owl to watch by night because he could see in the dark, you wholly forgot he cannot see well in the light. At this time of year the Moon sheds a light as bright as day, which you also forgot. How could he tell the rustling he heard was anything more than the summer breeze, if he could not see?"

"That is just," spoke the King, without thought of the parrot's guilt, "and just it is, too, that I humble my pride to pay for my error."

The wise King turned on his throne of gold and cast his eyes beyond the ring of nodding

daisies where the Serpent coiled, slim, polished and black.

“Sir Serpent, the war you have waged on my subjects and me,” he spoke, “I’ll freely forgive, if you will restore the Wonder Key.”

“Nay, Lord,” the Serpent replied, “it is ill to suspect me of theft. I came in all humility to ask pardon for past offences.”

“Your reward shall be great, if you’ll set your wisdom to avert this loss,” the King implored. “The birds and the beasts will suffer much if they can no longer make known their wants.”

“Long since I spent what wisdom I had in your service, Lord,” the Serpent meekly deplored.

The King sank back on his throne of gold with a sigh. Well he knew the Serpent’s duplicity, but what could he do? And just as he gave a second sigh, the jackdaw strutted past the swaying daisies into the heart of the circle of grass. His bright beady eyes twinkled mischievously, and he gave his head a toss.

“Lord, you’d have none of my help,” he chuckled saucily, “yet I alone know where to

find the Key which Sir Serpent thinks so cleverly hidden."

The Serpent hissed angrily, darting his great fangs forward. Solomon stayed the venomous shaft with his golden ball-tipped wand.

"Peace, Serpent!" he angrily commanded, and bade the jackdaw explain his meaning.

The Serpent's eyes gleamed angrily at the reproof, and he glided away to the secret lair while the jackdaw told of the midnight raid and the hidden gifts.

"'Twill be death to whoever comes near," he hissed as he coiled beneath the elm's twisting roots.

"In truth, your wisdom *is* spent," mocked the jackdaw, mischievously pirouetting along the edge of the silver brook. "I left you the shattered globe to guard when I filched the Wonder Key."

The Serpent, in baffled rage, fled away to the forest depths while the jackdaw continued his prancing.

"Stay your madcap whirl," the wise King said, "and be off for the Wonder Key. You must bring it here before the twilight hour."

The jackdaw obediently flew off, leaving the

birds and the beasts to search the hidden lair. One by one they brought forth the gifts and spread them out on the filmy web of woven golden threads.

Hour by hour the great King sat with his subjects, silently waiting. And hour by hour the Sun climbed higher, then lower and lower sank, till the Moon's pale disc gleamed dimly in the sky. But still no jackdaw came.

The last warm rays lighted the way for a very disconsolate wanderer.

"Lord," cried the jackdaw—for he it was with all his jauntiness gone—"I cannot find the hole I dug. The Wonder Key is lost."

"Then with the setting Sun the brotherhood of all living things must end," sighed Solomon. "The radiant gates will always stay closed till the Key is found again."

"But how shall I atone for my blunder?" mourned the crestfallen jackdaw.

"Stupid! By finding the Key of course," the parrot retorted contemptuously.

"But I have forgotten where I hid it," the jackdaw began.

"Then you must keep hiding everything bright you can find," interrupted the King, "until some

day when you're busy at that, you may remember where you stowed the Wonder Key."

"But they'll call me a thief," the jackdaw protested.

"He who meddles in the affairs of others, even with good intentions, will surely make good in the best way he can," spoke the wise King, "though he suffer himself for his prying."

As the great King spoke, the Sun sank into the black, crimson-shot vault that circled the earth. What more he said none save Man could understand. For he had not trod the milky path of the moonlight sheen to open the radiant gates of the magic realm. The birds twittered and chirped, the bees droned eagerly, the beasts joined in, but their meaning was lost to the King. So each was forced to go his way apart, into the world where once they had all been banded in Love's brotherhood under Solomon's magic sway.

And so since the days of the long, long ago when the old, old world was so very young, the jackdaw keeps taking and hiding everything bright he can find. And, though he has earned the name of thief by his actions, he is so anxious

to mend his mischievous prank that he continues his way of taking and hiding, in the hope that he may some day find the Wonder Key again, to open the radiant gates and restore the universal brotherhood of Beast and Bird and Man.

