



What The Birds Said



Boy Who Knew What The Birds Said, by Padraic Colum

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WHO KNEW ***

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[Illustration]

The Boy Who Knew What The Birds Said

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TORONTO

[Illustration: Round and round the Castle they went and the Giant with
his strength was wearing out Feet-in-the-Ashes.]

The Boy Who Knew What The Birds Said

By Padraic Colum

Illustrated by Dugald Stewart Walker

[Illustration]

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[Illustration]

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For The Boy In The Brocken

[Illustration]

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How He Came to Know What the Birds Said

[Illustration]

There is one thing that all the Birds are afraid of, and that is the thing that will happen when the Bird That Follows the Cuckoo flies into the Cuckoo's mouth.

And what will happen then, asks my kind foster-child.

When the Bird that Follows the Cuckoo flies into the Cuckoo's mouth the World will come to an end.

All the Birds know that, but not all the People know it.

Well, one day the Cuckoo was sitting on a bush and her Mouth was open. The Bird That Follows the Cuckoo flew straight at it. And into it he must have flown only for the Boy....

The Boy was in the tree and he flung his cap at the Cuckoo and he covered the Cuckoo and the Cuckoo's open mouth.

The Bird That Follows the Cuckoo flew into the Crow's mouth instead, and the Crow gave that bird a squeeze, I can tell you. The Cuckoo pushed off the Boy's cap with her wings and flew into the forest.

All the Birds of the King's Garden were there at the time. There were--

The Crow, the Woodpecker, The Wren and the Eagle, The Blackbird and Swallow, The Jackdaw and Starling, And the wonderful Peacock; The Lapwing and Peewit, The bold Yellowhammer, The bad Willy-wagtail, The Raven so awful, And the Cock with his Hens; Stone-checker, Hedge-sparrow, And Lint-white and Lark, The Tom-tit and Linnet, And brisk little Sparrow, The King-fisher too, And my own little Goldfinch.

All the Birds in the King's Garden were overjoyed that the Bird that Follows the Cuckoo did not get into the Cuckoo's Mouth.

"What shall we do for the Boy who prevented the World from coming to an End?" asked the good-natured Corncrake. She was there too, but I forgot to mention her.

"Nothing," said the Willy-wagtail. "The Boy who would throw a cap would throw a stone. Do nothing at all for him."

"I'll sing for him," said the Goldfinch.

"I'll teach him what the Birds say," said the Crow.

"If he knew the Language of the Birds he would be like King Solomon," said the Raven.

"Let us make him like King Solomon," said the Goldfinch.

"Yes, yes, yes," said all the Birds in the King's Garden.

The Boy had not gone far when the Crow flew after him and lighted on his shoulder. The Crow spoke to him in the Boy's own language. The Boy was surprised. The Crow flew to a standing stone and went on speaking plain words to him.

"O," said the Boy, "I didn't know you could speak."

"Why shouldn't I know how to speak," said the Crow, "haven't I, for a hundred years and more, been watching men and listening to their words? Why shouldn't I be able to speak?"

"And you can speak well, ma'am," said the Boy, not forgetting his manners.

"You know one language, but I know many languages," said the Crow, "for I know what People say, and I know what all the Birds say."

The old Crow sat there looking so wise and so friendly that the Boy began to talk to her at his ease. And after a while the Boy said, "Ma'am, do you think I could ever learn what the Birds say?"

"You would, if you had me to teach you," said the Crow.

"And will you teach me, ma'am?" said the Boy.

"I will," said the Crow.

Then every day after that the Crow would sit upon the Standing Stone and the Boy would stand beside it. When the Crow had eaten the boiled potato that the Boy always brought she would tell him about the languages of the different Birds. The two were teaching and learning from day to day, and indeed you might say that the Boy went to school to the Crow. He learnt the language of this Bird and that Bird, and as he learnt their languages, many's and many's the good story he heard them tell each other.

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The Stone of Victory]

The Stone of Victory

AND HOW FEET-IN-THE-ASHES, THE SWINEHERD'S SON,
CAME TO FIND IT

[Illustration]

"If we went there, if we went there, maybe we'd find it," said the Cock-grouse to the Hen-grouse as they went together, clucking through the heather.

"And if we found it, if we found it, what good would the Stone of Victory do us?" said the Hen-grouse to the Cock-grouse, answering him back.

"And what good did the Stone of Victory do to the youth who was called Feet-in-the-Ashes, and who was only the Swineherd's Son?" said the Cock-grouse to the Hen-grouse.

"Tell me, tell me, and then I shall know," said the Hen-grouse to the Cock-grouse, answering him back. They went together, clucking through the heather and the Boy who knew what the Birds said followed them.

He lay upon a rock and the Cock-grouse and the Hen-grouse discoursed below him, the Cock-grouse always lifting his voice above the hen's. The Boy heard what they said and he remembered every word of it. And, by the tongue in my mouth, here is the story he heard:-

"Cluck-ee, Cluck-ee, cluck-ee, cloo, cloo, cloo." The King of Ireland stood outside the gate of his Castle and his powerful captains and his strong-armed guards were all around him. And one of his captains went to the mound before him and he gave a shout to the East and a shout to the West, and a shout to the North and a shout to the South. When the King asked him why he did it the Captain said "I want the four quarters of the World to know that the King of Ireland stands here with his powerful Captains and his strong armed guards that no one dare come from the East or West, the North or the South and lay the weight of a finger upon him." And when he said this the other captains flashed their swords and the guards clashed their shields and the King of Ireland said, "Well and faithfully am I guarded indeed and luckier am I than any other King on the earth for no one can come from the East or the West, the North or the South and lay the weight of their finger upon me."

But no sooner did he say that than they saw a Giant coming across the hill and towards the place where they were standing. And when the Giant came to them he lifted up his hand and he doubled his hand into a fist and he struck the King of Ireland full in the mouth and he knocked out three of his teeth. He picked the King's teeth up, put them in his pouch, and without one word walked past them and went down to the sea.

"Who will avenge the insult put upon me?" said the King of Ireland, "and which of my captains will go and win back for me the three best teeth I had?" But not one of his captains made a step after the Giant.

"I know now," said the King, "How well you serve and how well you guard me. Well, if none of you will help me and if none of you will avenge me, I'll find those who will. And now I'll make a proclamation and I'll solemnly declare that whoever avenges the insult offered to me, and, in addition brings back to me the three that were the best teeth in my head, even though he be a servant or the son of a servant, I'll give him my daughter in marriage and a quarter of my kingdom, and, more than that," said he, "I'll make him full captain over all my guards."

The proclamation was sent all over the Castle and in the end it came to the ears of the Swineherd's Son who was called Feet-in-the-Ashes. And when he heard it he rubbed the ashes out of his hair and he said to his grandmother—"If there is anything in the world I want it is the King's daughter in marriage and a quarter of the Kingdom. I'll want provision for my journey," said he, "so, grandmother, bake a cake for me." "I'll do better than that for you, honey, if you are going to win back the King's teeth and marry the King's daughter," said his grandmother. "I have a few things of my own that no one knows anything about, and I'll give them to you with your cake. Here," said she, "is my crutch. Follow the Giant's tracks until you come to the sea,

throw the crutch into the sea and it will become a boat, step into the boat and in it you can sail over to the Green Island that the Giant rules. And here's this pot of balsam. No matter how deep or deadly the sword-cut or the spear-thrust wound is, if you rub this balsam over it, it will be cured. Here's your cake too. Leave good-luck behind you and take good-luck with you, and be off now on your journey."

"And why was the youth called Feet-in-the-Ashes?" said the Hen-grouse to the Cock-grouse.

He was called Feet-in-the-Ashes because he had sat in the chimney-corner from the time he could stand upon two legs. And everybody who called him Feet-in-the-Ashes thought he was too lazy to do anything else. Well, he left good-luck behind him and he took good-luck with him and he started off on his journey with the cake, the crutch and the cure. He followed the Giant's tracks until they came down to the sea. Into the sea he flung his grandmother's crutch. It became a boat with masts and sails. He jumped into the boat, and the things that had to be done in a boat were done by him--

He hoisted the sails--the red sail, the black sail and the speckled sail, He gave her prow to the sea and her stern to the land, The blue sea was flashing, The green sea was lashing, But on they went with a breeze that he himself would have chosen, And the little creatures of the sea sat up on their tails to watch his going.

and so he went until he came near the Green Island where Shamble-shanks the Giant who had carried off the three teeth of the King of Ireland had his Castle and his stronghold.

He fastened his boat where a boat should be fastened and he went through the Island until he came to a high grey Castle. No one was about it and he went through it, gate, court and hall. He found a chamber where a fire burned on the hearth-stone. He went to the fire

gladly. He looked around the chamber and he saw three beds. "There's room to rest myself here, at all events," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

Night came on and he left the fire and got into a bed. He pulled one of the soft skins over him. Just as he was going to turn on his side to sleep three youths came into the chamber. Feet-in-the-Ashes sat up on the bed to look at them.

When they saw him they began to moan and groan and when he looked them over he saw they were all covered with wounds--with spear-thrusts and with sword-cuts. The sight of him in the bed, more than their wounds, made them moan and groan, and when he asked them why this was so the first of the three youths said:--

"We came here, the three of us, to fight the Giant Shamble-shanks and to take from this Island the Stone of Victory. We came to this Castle yesterday and we made three beds in this chamber so that after the combat we might rest ourselves and be healed so that we might be able to fight the Giant again to-morrow or the day after, for we know that we cannot win victory over him until many combats. Now we come back from our first fight and we find you in one of the beds we had made. We are not able to put you out of it. One of us must stay out of bed and the one that stays out will die to-night. Then we shall be only two against the Giant and he will kill us when we come to combat again." And when the first one had said all this the three youths began to moan and groan again.

Feet-in-the-Ashes got out of bed. "You can have your rest, the three of you," said he. "And as for me I can sit by the fire with my feet in the ashes as often as I did before." The three youths got into the three beds and when they were in them Feet-in-the-Ashes took the pot of balsam that his grandmother had given him and rubbed some of it on each one of them. In a while their pain and their weariness left them

and their wounds closed up. Then the three youths sat up in their beds and they told Feet-in-the-Ashes their story.

[Illustration]

"Cluck-ee, cluck-ee, cluck-ee, cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse, "and what was the story they told?"

"Cluck, cluck," said the Cock-grouse, "wait until you hear, cluck, cluck."

Said the first of these youths, "On this island there is a moor, and on that moor there is a stone, and that stone is not known from other stones, but it is the Stone of Victory. The Giant Shamble-shanks has not been able to find it himself, but he fights with all who come here to find it. To-day we went to the moor. As soon as we got there the Giant came out of the Grey Castle and fought with us. We fought and we fought, but he wounded us so sorely that we were like to die of our wounds. We came back to rest here. Thanks to your balsam we are cured of our wounds. We'll go to fight the Giant to-morrow, and with the surprise he'll get at seeing us before him so soon we may be able to overcome him."

"And along with the surprise, there's another thing that will help you," said Feet-in-the-Ashes, "and that is myself. I have to fight the same Giant Shamble-shanks and I may as well fight him in company as alone."

"Your help will be welcome if you have not come here to win the Stone of Victory."

"Not for the Stone of Victory I have come, but to win back the three teeth that were knocked out of the King of Ireland's head and to avenge the insult that was offered to him."

"Then we'll be glad of your help, good comrade." The three youths got out of their beds and they sat with Feet-in-the-Ashes round the fire and the four spent a third of the night in pleasant story-telling, and slumber nor weariness did come near them at all.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse.

"Say no more," said the Cock-grouse, "for now I'm coming to what's wonderful in my story--"

The four youths were seated round the fire when a little man came into the Chamber. He carried a harp in his hands. He bowed low to each of the four of them. "I am MacDraoi, the Giant's Harper," he said, "and I have come to play music for you." "Not one tune do we want to hear from you," said Feet-in-the-Ashes. "Whether you want it or not, one you will hear," said the Harper, "and that tune is the Slumber Tune. I shall play it for you now. And if the whole world was before me when I play it, and if every one in it had the pains of deep wounds, the playing on my harp would make each and every one of them fall into a slumber." "That tune we must not hear," said the first of the three youths, "for if we fall into a slumber the Giant will see to it that we shall never awaken."

MacDraoi, the Giant's Harper put his harp to his chest and he began to play. Slumber came on the eyelids of the four who were at the fire. Three sprang up, but one stayed on his bench dead-sound-fast asleep. One yawned and fell down on the floor. One of the two that remained went towards the Harper, but on his way he fell across a bed and he remained on it. Then, out of the four, only one, Feet-in-the-Ashes, was left awake.

The Harper played on. Feet-in-the-Ashes put his fingers in his mouth and commenced to gnaw them. He gnawed the first two fingers down to their joints. But still his mouth kept open in a yawn and still the

slumber kept heavy on his eyelids. He gnawed his third and his little finger. Then he put his right hand in his mouth and he bit at his thumb and he bit so sharply that his senses nearly all came back to him. With a kick he knocked the harp out of the Harper's hands. He caught MacDraoi then and turned him head below heels and left him hanging by his feet from a beam across the chamber. Then he went straight through the hall and out of the Castle.

A wet breeze was blowing and whatever sleep was on his eye it blew away. He walked on with the dark clouds of the night going behind him and the bright light of the day growing before him. "I'll turn back," said he, "when I hear a cock crowing, and whatever I find beside me then I'll take with me to remind myself of where I have been."

He found himself on a moor and he walked on until he was far on it. A cock crew. "Time to turn back," said Feet-in-the-Ashes. He looked round to see what he might bring with him and he saw on the ground a round stone.

"A round stone?" said the Hen-grouse.

"Yes," said the Cock-grouse, "a round black stone. He took it up, that round black stone, and he went back to the Castle, hungry for his breakfast."

In the Castle Chamber the three youths were still slumbering, one on the bench, one on the floor and one in a bed and MacDraoi the Harper was still hanging by his feet from the beam across the Chamber. "Lift me down from this, good lad," said the Giant's Harper.

"I will," said Feet-in-the-Ashes, "when my three companions awaken."

"They won't awaken," said MacDraoi the Harper.

"Then you can hang there," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"They won't awaken," said MacDraoi, "until I cause them to awaken, and I shall cause them to awaken if you lift me down from this."

"Will you promise by your head," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"By my head I promise," said the Giant's Harper.

Then Feet-in-the-Ashes lifted the Harper down from the rafters and set him upon his legs. MacDraoi took up the harp and he pulled the strings back-ways. The notes he drew out were so piercing that first one and then another and then a third of the three youths awakened up. Then, when they were on their feet MacDraoi, the Giant's Harper, slipped out of the house and went away. What happened to the Harper after that no one knows.

"Cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse, "and what did they do after that?"

"The next thing they had to do," said the Cock-grouse, drawing himself up, "was to fight. Yes, my lady, to fight." The Hen-grouse drooped her head and said no more, and the Cock-grouse went on valiantly--

Swords they drew out--the three youths who were with Feet-in-the-Ashes. They sharpened these swords. They marched off towards the moor with the swords in their hands. Feet-in-the-Ashes had no sword. All he had in his hand was a holly-stick.

When they came in sight of the Grey Castle they saw the Giant come rushing out of the gate. He was clad all in iron and he had a sword in one hand and a spear in the other. The four youths spread themselves out so that they might be able to close round the Giant. But for all his bigness the Giant was quick enough. He struck one of them with his spear and brought him down on his knees. He struck the other with

his sword and brought him down on his side. He struck the other with his iron-covered hand and brought him down on his back. And all that was left now was Feet-in-the-Ashes with his holly-stick.

What could a youth with a holly-stick in his hand do against a Giant that had a spear and a sword in his hands and was besides that all covered with iron? Feet-in-the-Ashes turned and ran. He ran towards the Castle and went round it. And when he was at the east side the Giant was at the North and when he was at the south the Giant was at the East. Round and round the Castle they went and the Giant with his strength and his quickness was wearing out Feet-in-the-Ashes.

Feet-in-the-Ashes wanted something to fling at him. He took the stone out of his pocket--the round black stone. He held it in his hand. He made three circles in the air with it. He flung the stone. It struck the Giant on the breast and the iron rang as the stone struck it. Down fell the Giant. Feet-in-the-Ashes ran off to where his companions lay. Many times he looked back but he did not see the Giant following him. The three youths were lying in their wounds and in their pain. Feet-in-the-Ashes took out his pot of balsam and rubbed them all over. Their wounds healed. First one stood up and then the second stood up and then the third stood up and the three were whole and well. "Where is the Giant?" each of them asked.

"Lying where he fell," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"And who threw him down?" said the first of the youths.

"I threw him down with a cast of a stone," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"Let us go and see," said the second of the youths. They went towards the west side of the Grey Castle like men following a bear who might turn on them. The Giant was lying still. "He is dead," said one, "He is dead indeed," said another. "He is dead forever," said a

third. "He is dead by the cast of my stone," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

They went up to where the Giant was and looked all over him. "There is the stone that overthrew him," said one of the youths, "that round black stone. Where did you get it?"

"On the moor," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"On the moor," said the others looking at him.

"Yes," said Feet-in-the-Ashes, "Picked it up this morning on the moor just as the cock crew."

One of the three youths took the round black stone in his hand. "I'll bring the stone with me," said he. "We'll go into the Castle now and see what our finding there will be."

They went into the Castle. The three youths told Feet-in-the-Ashes they would help him to find what he had come to seek--the three teeth out of the head of the King of Ireland. They searched and they searched all over the Castle. At last one of them opened an iron press and there on a shelf was a silver cup and in the cup were three teeth. Feet-in-the-Ashes knew they were what he had come for. He left the cup beside him.

They took provisions from the Giant's store, put them on the table and began to eat. But first one and then another and then the third of the three youths made an excuse and left the table. Feet-in-the-Ashes went on with his breakfast. Then he left the Castle to look for the three youths that had been his companions. He did not find them. He went down to the sea-shore. He saw his boat and the sails were raised on it. In the boat were the three youths and they were making ready to put out to sea. Feet-in-the-Ashes shouted to them. Then one of the youths came to the side of the deck and spoke back to him.

"You found the Stone of Victory without knowing it," said he, "and you let us take it in our hands. Now we cannot give it back to you for our lives depend on our keeping it and bringing it away. And," said he, "we fear to stay on the land with you because you have such luck that you could take the Stone from us. The boat we came in is gone. We take your boat and we think that you have such luck that you will find another way of getting off the island. Remember that what you came for was not the Stone of Victory but the King's teeth, and we helped to find them for you."

They had hoisted the sails and now a wind came and the boat that was from his grandmother's crutch was blown out of the harbour and Feet-in-the-Ashes was left without any companion on the Island.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse, "he found the Stone of Victory, but what good were his findings to him when he didn't know what he had found and he let it be taken from him?"

[Illustration]

"But if he hadn't to find it he couldn't have slain the Giant and taken the cup out of the iron cupboard--that much good the Stone of Victory did him," said the Cock-grouse.

"I'm sorry to think that that's all he got from the Stone of Victory," said the Hen-grouse.

"Well, that's all he got from it, and be quiet now till I tell you the rest of the story," said the Cock-grouse.

He went into the courtyard of the Grey Castle and he found there a great eagle that was chained to a great rock. The eagle came towards him as far as the chain would let him. "Feed me," said the eagle.

"Will you carry me to Ireland's ground if I feed you?" said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

"If you feed me every time I open my mouth, I will," said the eagle.

"That I'll try to do, good eagle," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

He went through courtyard and pen-fold but not a sheep nor a pig nor a bullock could he find. It seemed as if he would not be able to find meat for the eagle after all. He went down to the sea-shore and he came upon a pool filled with thin bony fish called skates. He took a basket of these and put it on his back. He came back to the courtyard and he unlocked the chain that held the eagle.

"Feed me," said the eagle, and he opened his mouth.

"Close your eyes and I'll fill you mouth," said Feet-in-the-Ashes.

The eagle closed his eyes. Feet-in-the-Ashes flung a score of skates into his mouth. "Hard meat, hard meat," said the eagle, but he gulped them down. Feet-in-the-Ashes, holding the cup in his hands and carrying the basket of skates on his back, put himself between the wings of the eagle. The eagle flew up and over the Grey Castle and faced for the plain of the sea.

They travelled from the morning light until the full noontide. The eagle opened his mouth again. Feet-in-the-Ashes put nothing into it. The eagle finding nothing in his mouth dropped down to the sea.

"Close you eyes," said Feet-in-the-Ashes, "and I'll fill your mouth." The eagle closed his eyes and Feet-in-the-Ashes put another score of skates into his mouth. The eagle gulped them all down. "Whenever I open my mouth you will have to feed me," he said. Feet-in-the-Ashes did not like to hear this, for a score more of skates were all that was

left.

The eagle rose up again and on and on he flew until the night was coming over the water. He opened his mouth again. Feet-in-the-Ashes put in five more skates. The eagle kept his mouth open and said "Feed me."

There was nothing to be done then but to put in the rest of the skates. Feet-in-the-Ashes flung them all in, and the eagle rose up and flew and they travelled while there was darkness on the water, and when the sun rose again Feet-in-the-Ashes saw they were flying over the land of Ireland. The eagle opened his mouth. Feet-in-the-Ashes had nothing to put into it. "Fly on, good eagle," said he, "and leave me down at the King's Castle." "Feed me," said the eagle. "I will give you what you never had before--a whole bullock--when we come to the King's Castle." "Cows far off have long horns," said the eagle mocking him. With that he flung Feet-in-the-Ashes off his back.

Sore would his fall have been if it had been on any other place but a soft bog. On the softest of soft bogs he fell. He made a hole in the ground, but no bone in his body was broken and he still held the cup in his hands. He rose up covered with the mud of the bog, and he started off for the King's Castle.

"Cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse, "and did he not go to see his grandmother at all?"

[Illustration]

"If he did it's not in the story," said the Cock-grouse. "That very day, as I would have you know, the King was standing outside the gate of his Castle with his powerful captains and his strong-armed guards around him. 'A year it is to-day,' said the King, 'since the Giant came and struck me in the mouth, knocking out and taking away three of my

teeth, and since that day I have had neither health nor prosperity. And you know,' said he, 'that my daughter and a quarter of my Kingdom is to go to the one who will avenge the insult and bring back my three teeth.' 'Such and such a thing prevented me from going,' said one of his Captains, 'but now that so and so is done, I can go and avenge the insult offered to you.' 'So and so kept me from going,' said another of the Captains, 'but now that such and such a thing is done I can go to-morrow and bring you back your three teeth.' 'I am tired of hearing you all talk,' said the King, 'and it's my belief that my teeth will be lost and my daughter unwedded till the day of doom.'"

It was then that Feet-in-the-Ashes appeared before them, "Good health to you, King," said he.

"Good health to you, good man," said the King, "and what, may I ask, have you come here for?"

He was covered with the feathers of the eagle and the mud of the bog, and, as you may be sure, the King and the captains and the guards looked sourly at him.

"I have come first of all, King," said he, "to give you advice."

"And what is your advice?" asked the King.

"My advice to you is that you send away all these you have around you--your captains and your guards--and that you turn them into dog-boys or horse-boys or anything else in which they would give useful service, for as they are here, they can neither serve nor guard you."

"All that may be true," said the King, "but what right have you to say it?"

Feet-in-the-Ashes said nothing but he held the cup up to the King and the King saw three teeth in it and he took them out and placed them in

his mouth and the teeth went into their places and there firmly they stayed.

Then Feet-in-the-Ashes told how he had gone to the Green Island and how he had avenged the insult offered to the king and how he had got what he had gone to search for. Then he demanded the King's daughter in marriage and a quarter of the Kingdom, and both were made over to him on the spot. As for the powerful captains and the strong-armed guards, some of them were made horse-boys and some were made dog-boys and Feet-in-the-Ashes was made Captain over the new guards. When he came to rule a quarter of the Kingdom he was given a horse and made a duke and he was called by a better name than Feet-in-the-Ashes. But what that name was I don't remember now.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck," said the Hen-grouse, "and did he go to visit the grandmother at all?"

"If he did," said the Cock-grouse, "that's another story, and if it was ever told I don't remember it. Pray go to the right, my lady, for I'm hungry for the sweet buds of the heather."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The King of the Birds]

The King of the Birds

[Illustration]

The thirteen little wrens sat on the Apple-yard wall in the King's Garden and their mother was there to teach them to fly. One called them the little wrens, but really each one was as big as their mother.

She had a tail, however, that was most cunningly cocked and they had no tails, and the consequence was that when they made their little flights they always went sideways. Moreover, their beaks were still yellow and wide and open and this is always a sign of the young bird.

"All I ask of you," said the mother, "is that when you go into the World you remember that you are the Children of the King of the Birds."

"Now why does our Mother call us the Children of the King of the Birds?" said one little wren to the other. "I think we're really very small. And I think our Mother is very small. And there's our Father behind that ivy-leaf and he's very small too."

[Illustration]

"And wherever you go, be sure to conduct yourselves like the Children of the King of the Birds," said the Mother.

"It's because we were reared in such a fine nest," said another little wren. "No other birds in the world had ever a finer nest than we have had. That's the reason we're called the Children of the King of the Birds."

"Men call the Wren the King of the Birds," said the Father Wren, as he flew up on a tree, "and surely men ought to know who is the King of the Birds."

"Why do men call the Wren the King of the Birds?" said the little wrens.

"I will tell you," said the Mother. "As we fly from the wall to the tree, and from the tree back to the wall, I will tell you why men honor the wren as the King of the Birds."

She spent a whole day telling the little wrens the story and the Boy

Who Knew What the Birds Said was there, and he heard the whole of it.--

* * * * *

The King of the Hither-side of the Mountain conquered the two villages of Half-a-Loaf and Windy-Gap, and the very day he conquered he ordered the two Headmen to come before him.

"You two Headmen are to see that your villages, Half-a-Loaf and Windy-Gap, send me my rightful tribute," said the King to them.

"There isn't much we can send...." said the Headman of Half-a-Loaf.

"A string of salmon," said the Headman of Windy-Gap.

"A basket of plover's eggs," said the Headman of Half-a-Loaf.

"No," said the King, "the tribute that each of your villages must send me is the King of the Birds."

The two Headmen went back to their villages, and that very day each told at the council what tribute the King had ordered them to send. "The King of the Birds," said the people of Half-a-Loaf, "that's the Eagle surely." "The King of the Birds," said the people of Windy-Gap. "What Bird might that be? We'll have to give thought to this."

The people of Windy-Gap thought about it and thought about it, but the people of Half-a-Loaf declared there was no doubt at all about it--the Eagle was the King of the Birds. And while the people of Windy-Gap were thinking and pondering the people of Half-a-Loaf were sending their young men off to catch an eagle.

But an eagle is a hard fowl to catch, and the people of Half-a-Loaf found they had to send all of their young men out and to send them out

every day. And the young men climbed high hills and stony ditches, and they searched the east and they hunted the west; they went out at sunrise and they came back at sunset, but never an eagle did they bring with them.

"It may be that the Eagle is the King of the Birds," said the people of Windy-Gap, "but we had better consider it."

They thought about it from sunrise to sunset; they thought about it while they plowed their fields and sowed them, while they spun their cloth and made their coats, while they mended their nets and mended their shoes, while they thatched their roofs and planted their apple-trees.

And in Half-a-Loaf there was few left to plow the fields and sow them, to spin cloth and to make coats, to mend nets and to mend shoes, to thatch roofs and to plant apple-trees--there was few left to do these things for all the young men were out on the mountain hunting for an eagle.

"The people of Windy-Gap will be ruined," said the people of Half-a-Loaf, "they have done nothing yet to catch the Eagle. When the King gets no tribute from them he'll come down and sell them and their village. Call the young men back that have gone into the fields to work and send them up the mountain again."

At last the people of Half-a-Loaf caught their Eagle--a great golden Eagle he was. They built for him a shed and they fed him on what lambs they had that year.

"We're safe anyway," said the people of Half-a-Loaf, "but the unfortunate folk in Windy-Gap have lost their chance. They'll not have time to catch an eagle now."

The time was coming near when the two villages would have to send their tribute to the King.

"We have our Eagle," said the people of Half-a-Loaf, "But O, Bad Fortune! we have hardly a crop growing. This will be a hard year for us—we haven't lambs to grow into sheep even."

"We have our crops," said the people of Windy-Gap, "but, Bad Cess to it! What are we to do about paying our tribute to the King?"

And still they couldn't decide whether it was the Eagle or the Cuckoo or the Woodpecker that was King of the Birds. They were still considering it when the King's Messenger came to bid them come with their tribute to the King's Castle.

What were the people of Windy-Gap to do? They searched round and about but no bird at all could they find. And then as he was being marched off the Headman put his hand under the thatch of his house and took out a Wren that was sheltering there. He put the Wren under his hat and went off with the King's Messenger.

And there, before him on the way to the King's Castle was the Headman of Half-a-Loaf. The riders of the village were with him and they bore their golden Eagle most triumphantly.

"Give to my Falconer the King of the Birds," said the King.

The Headman of Half-a-Loaf presented the Eagle.

"It is well," said the King, "and where have you," said he to the Headman of Windy-Gap, "bestowed the King of the Birds?"

The Headman put his hand under his hat and handed over the Wren to the King's Falconer.

"Tush," said the King, "Why do you call this the King of the Birds?"

The Headman of Windy-Gap was going to say "Because his family is great," but he said instead "Because he flies the highest, my lord."

"If it be truth it's unknown to me," said the King, "but it shall be tried out."

Then said he to the Royal Falconer, "Let the Eagle and the Wren soar together. And when the Eagle outsoars the Wren it shall be proved that the Headman of Windy-Gap is a catiff, and his village and everyone in it will be sold to the Saracens. But if it so happens that the Wren outsoars the Eagle, the tribute sent from the village of Windy-Gap must be accepted."

The Eagle and the Wren rose from the same perch and soared up together. Up and up the Eagle went. "So far my father went, but I shall go farther," said the Eagle. Higher and higher he rose. "So far my grandfather went but I shall go farther." Farther and farther he soared. "So far went my great-grandfather, and no eagle again will fly so high." His wings were stiff and tired. "No bird will ever out-soar this flight of mine," said the Eagle.

He went to close his wings so that he might rest them as he went down. But as he did the Wren came from under his wings.

Up went the Wren, down went the Eagle. Up and up went the Wren. He had been resting while the Eagle had been flying, and now he was able to soar past the point the Eagle had reached at his dead-best.

The Eagle flew down and lighted on the Falconer's perch. "Has he flown high, Falconer?" asked the King. "No bird has flown so high," said the Falconer. "By the rime on his wings he has gone into the line of frost."

"The Eagle is King of the Birds and no one can deny it," said the King. "The village of Windy-Gap has not sent me my tribute."

"Mercy," said the Headman of Windy-Gap.

"The village and all in it shall be sold to the Saracens," said the King.

Just then the Wren came down and lighted on the perch beside the Eagle. "Where did the Wren fly to?" said the King. "By my glove," said the Falconer "he soared past the line of frost, and went into the line of snow, for what's on his feathers is a drop of snow."

"The Wren is King of the Birds," said the Headman of Windy-Gap.

"Yes, King of the Birds," said the King, "and, therefore, my lawful tribute."

[Illustration: "No bird will ever out-soar this flight of mine," said the Eagle.]

And so, for ever after the villages sent to the King, not an Eagle, but a Wren as tribute. And in no village ever after were the lands unplowed and the fields unsown, the cloth unspun and the coats not made, the roofs unthatched and the apple-trees unplanted. And in every village in the hollow and on the height the people shouted for the Wren—"The Wren, the Wren, the King of all Birds."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: Bloom-of-Youth and the Witch of the Elders]

Bloom-of-Youth and the Witch of the Elders

[Illustration]

Bloom-of-youth was a young, young girl. But, young as she was, she would have to be married, her step-mother said. Then married she was while she was still little enough to walk through the doorway of her step-mother's hut without stooping her head.

Her husband was a hunter and he took her to live in a hut at the edge of a wood. He was out hunting the whole of the day. Now what did Bloom-of-Youth do while she had the house to herself? Little enough indeed. She swept the floor and she washed the dishes and she laid them back on their shelf. Then she went to the well for pails of water. When she went out she stayed long, for first she would look into the well at her own image and then she would make a wreath of flowers and put it on her head and look at herself again. After that, maybe, she would delay to pick berries and eat them. Then she would go without hurrying along the path, singing to herself.--

'Said when he saw Me all in blue, "Who is the maid The sky must woo?"

'Said when he saw Me all in green, "Who is the maid The grass calls queen?"'

When she would have got back to the hut the fire on the hearth would have gone out and she would have to light it again and then sweep the floor clear of the ashes that had blown upon it. After that she would have little time to do anything else except prepare a meal against the time when her husband would be back from his hunting.

One morning her husband left his coat down on the bench. "My coat is torn; sew it for me," he said. Bloom-of-Youth said she would do that. But she did no more to the coat than take it up and leave it down again on the bench.

The next day her husband said "My vest is torn too; have it and the

coat sewn for me." He left the vest beside the coat and went out to his hunting.

Bloom-of-Youth did nothing to the coat and nothing to the vest, and every day for a week her husband went out without coat or vest upon him.

One day he put on his torn coat and his torn vest and went out to his hunting. When he came home that evening he had a bundle of wool with him.

"Your step-mother," said he, "sends you this bundle of wool and she bids you spin it that there may be cloth for new clothes for me." "I will spin it," said Bloom-of-Youth.

But the next day when her husband went away she did what she had always done before. She went to the well and she looked for long at her image; she put a wreath of flowers on her head and she looked at her image again; she picked berries and ate them; she went along the path without hurrying, singing to herself.--

'Said when he saw Me all in blue "Who is the maid The sky must woo?"

'Said when he saw Me all in green "Who is the maid The grass calls queen?"'

She had to light the fire again when she came in and sweep away the ashes that had gathered on the floor and after she had done all that it was time to prepare the meal for the evening. But before her husband came home she took the spinning wheel out of the corner and put it near the light of the doorway.

"I see," said her husband, "that you are going to spin the wool for my

clothes."

"I am when to-morrow comes," said Bloom-of-Youth.

But the next day she did as she done every day and no wool was spun. The day after she put wool on the wheel and gave it a few turns. In a week from that evening she had one ball of thread spun.

"Your step-mother bids me ask you how much of the wool have you spun?" said her husband to her one evening. Bloom-of-Youth was so much afraid that her husband would send her to her step-mother through the dark, dark wood, that she said "I have spun many balls."

"Your step-mother bade me count the balls you have spun," said her husband.

"I will go up to the loft and throw them down to you and then you will throw them back to me and we will count them that way," said Bloom-of-Youth.

She went up to the loft and she flung down the ball she had spun.

"One," said her husband, and he threw it back to her.

She flung him the ball again.

"Two," said her husband, and he flung it back to her. Then he said "three," and then "four," and then "five," and so on until he had counted twelve. "You have done well," said he, "and now before the week is out take the twelve balls to your step-mother's house and she will weave the thread into cloth for clothes for me."

[Illustration]

Bloom-of-Youth was greatly frightened. To her step-mother's house

she would have to go with a dozen balls of thread in a few days. The next day she hurried back from the well and she sat at her wheel before the door spinning and spinning. But, do her best, she could not get a good thread spun in the long length of the day.

And while she was spinning and spinning and getting her thread knotted and broken a black and crooked woman came and stood before the door. "You're spinning hard I see," said she to Bloom-of-Youth.

Bloom-of-Youth gave her no answer but put her head against the wheel and cried and cried.

"And what would you say," said the black and crooked woman, "if I took the bundle of wool from you now and brought it back to you tomorrow spun into a dozen balls of thread?"

"It is not what I would say; it is what I should give you," said Bloom-of-Youth.

"Give me!" said the black and crooked woman. "What could you give me?" But as she said it she gave Bloom-of-Youth a baleful look from under her leafy eyebrows. "No, no, you need give me nothing for spinning the wool for you. All that I'll ask from you is that you tell me my name within a week from this day."

"It will be easy to find out her name within a week," said Bloom-of-Youth to herself. She took the bundle of wool out of the basket and gave it to her. The black and crooked woman put the wool under her arm and then she lifted up her stick and shook it at Bloom-of-Youth.

"And if you don't find out my name within a week you will have to give me your heart's blood--a drop of heart's blood for every ball of wool I spin for you." The hag went away then. Bloom-of-Youth was greatly

frightened, but after a while she said to herself "I need not be afraid, for in a week I'll surely find out the name of the black and crooked woman who can't live far from this."

The next day the hag came to the door and left twelve balls of wool on the bench outside the house. "In a week, in a week," said she, "you'll have my name or I'll have twelve drops of your heart's blood to make the leaves of my Elder Tree fresh and fine."

Bloom-of-Youth went with the twelve balls of wool to her step-mother's house, and every person she met on the way she asked if he or she knew the name of the black and crooked woman. But no one could tell her the hag's real name. All they could tell was that she was the Witch of the Elders and that she lived beside the Big Stones that were at the other side of the wood.

Bloom-of-Youth was afraid: her face lost its color and her eyes grew wide and her heart would beat from one side of her body to the other. And every day the Witch of the Elders would come to the door and say "Have you my name yet, Bloom-of-Youth, have you my name yet? Two days gone, five to come on; three days gone, four to come on; four days gone, three to come on; five days gone, two to come on." Six days went by and on the seventh she would have to go to the Big Stones at the other side of the wood and let the Witch of the Elders take twelve drops of her heart's blood.

The night before the week's end her husband, when he sat down by the fire said "I saw something and I heard something very strange when I was at the other side of the wood this evening." "What was it you saw?" said Bloom-of-Youth. "Lights were all round the Big Stones and there was a noise of spinning inside the ring they make. That's what I saw." "And what was it you heard?" said Bloom-of-Youth. "Someone singing to the wheels," said her husband. "And this is what I heard sung.--

Spin, wheel, spin; sing, wheel, sing; Every stone in my yard, spin, spin, spin; The thread is hers, the wool is mine; Twelve drops from her heart will make my leaves shine! How little she knows, the foolish thing, That my name is Bolg and Curr and Carr, That my name is Lurr and Lappie.

"O sing that song again," said Bloom-of-Youth, "Sing that song again."

Her husband sang it again, and Bloom-of-Youth went to bed, singing to herself.--

My name is Bolg and Curr and Carr, My name is Lurr and Lappie.

The next day as soon as her husband had gone to his hunting Bloom-of-Youth went through the wood and towards the Big Stones that were at the other side of it. And as she went through the wood she sang.--

Spin, wheel, spin; sing, wheel, sing; Every branch on the tree, spin, spin, spin; The wool is hers, the thread is fine; For loss of my heart's blood I'll never dwine; Her name is Bolg and Curr and Carr, Her name is Lurr and Lappie.

She went singing until she was through the wood and near the Big Stones. She went within the circle. There, besides a flat stone that was on the ground, she saw the black and crooked old woman.

"You have come to me, Bloom-of-Youth," said she. "Do you see the hollow that is in this stone? It is into this hollow that the drops of your heart's blood will have to run."

"The drops of my heart's blood may remain my own."

"No, no, they won't remain your own any longer than when it is plain

you can't tell my name."

"Is it Bolg?" said Bloom-of-Youth.

"Bolg is one of my names," screamed the Witch of the Elders, "but one of my names won't let you go free."

"Is it Curr?"

"Curr is another of my names, but two of my names won't let you go free."

"Is it Carr?"

"Carr is another of my names, but three of my names will not let you go free."

"I know your other names too," said Bloom-of-Youth.

"Say them, say them," screamed the Witch of the Elders.

But when she tried to think of them Bloom-of-Youth found that the last two names had gone out of her mind. Not for all the drops that were in her heart could she remember them.

"No, no, you can't say them," said the Witch of the Elders. "And now bend your breast over the hollow in the stone. I'll let out twelve drops of your heart's blood with my pointed rod. Bend your breast over the hollow."

[Illustration: But just as the Witch was dragging her to the stone a robin began to sing.]

But just as the Witch was dragging her to the stone a robin began to sing on a branch outside the Stones. It was the same tune as Bloom-

of-Youth had sung her song to as she went through the wood. Now all the words in her song came back to her.--

Spin, wheel, spin; sing, wheel, sing; Every branch on the tree, spin, spin, spin; The wool is hers, the thread is mine; For loss of my heart's blood I'll never dwine! Her name is Bolg and Curr and Carr, Her name is Lurr and Lappie.

She said the last two names and as she did the Witch of the Elders screamed and ran behind the stones. Bloom-of-Youth saw no more of her.

That evening her husband brought home the web of cloth that her step-mother had woven. The next day Bloom-of-Youth began to make clothes for him out of it. Never again did she make delays at the well but she came straight home with her pails of water. The fire was always clear upon the hearth and she had never to light it the second time and then sweep away the ashes that had gathered on the floor. She made good clothes for her husband out of the web of cloth her step-mother had woven. And every evening she spun on her wheel and there was never a time afterwards when she had not a dozen balls of thread in the house.

The wool is hers and the thread is mine; For loss of my heart's blood I never will dwine, And I throw my ball over to you.

It was the Woodpecker that told this story to the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said.

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The Hen-wife's Son and the Princess Bright Brow]

The Hen-wife's Son and the Princess Bright Brow

[Illustration]

Everyone in and around the King's Castle despised Mell, the Hen-wife's Son, said the Stonechecker, the bird that built within the stones of the Tower. And it was not because there was anything mean about the lad himself: it was because his mother, the Hen-wife, had the lowest office about the King's Castle.

This is what a Hen-wife did: She had to mind the fowl and keep count of them, she had to gather the eggs and put them into a basket and send them to the King's Steward every day. And for doing this she had as wages the right to go to the back-door of the Steward's house and get from the under-servants two meals a day for herself and Mell, her son.

And everybody, as I said, despised this son of hers--horse-boys and dog-boys and the grooms around the Castle. But of course no one despised Mell more than did the King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow.

She used to go into a wood and whisper along the branch of a tree. And one day the Hen-wife's son whom she despised so much made answer to her. He was lying along the branch of the tree watching his mother's goat that grazed on the grass below. Now this is what Princess Bright Brow said to the tree and this is what she used to say to it every day.--

Oak-tree, oak-tree, above the rest, Which of the heroes loves me best?

Mell was lying along the Branch as I have said, and he made answer back to her.--

Princess, Princess, he's at your call, And the Hen-wife's son loves you best of all!

The King's daughter looked up and she saw the Hen-wife's son on the branch, and she went into a great rage. She gave orders to the grooms that the Hen-wife's son was to be whipped every time he looked at her. Many's the time after that Mell got the lash. But he loved Bright Brow so much that he could not forbear looking at her.

II

Now, one very early morning Mell took his mother's goat out to graze on the green. And as he went along he saw on the grass a beautiful mantle. He took it up and he thought to himself "How well it would look upon Princess Bright Brow!" And he thought again "if she would take this beautiful green mantle from me maybe she would let me look upon her when she is wearing it."

He put the mantle across his shoulders and sat down and thought and thought. And while he was thinking he felt the mantle being pulled from behind. He turned round and he saw a woman standing there. She had brighter colors in her dress and she wore more ornaments than any one he had ever seen in the King's Castle. He knew by such signs that she was a Fairy Woman out of the Green Rath.

[Illustration]

"Mell," said she, "Mell, the Hen-wife's son, give to me the mantle that the King of the Fairy Riders let fall from his shoulders last night."

"If it is his, and if you have come to bring it to him, why you must have it," said Mell, and he took the mantle off his shoulders and handed it to her.

"The King would wish that I should recompense you," said the Fairy Woman. She took a jewel that was on the collar of the mantle and gave it to Mell. "If you take this jewel in your hand," said she, "and wish to be in this place or that place you will be there in an instant, and anyone you take by the hand you can bring with you." And when Mell took the jewel from her, the Fairy Woman, carrying the green mantle, went into the green rath.

Then Mell took his goat by the horns and turned towards his hut. And there, outside the gate of the Castle he saw the King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow. She was watching the falconer training the young hawks and the grooms and the riders of the Castle were behind her. When she saw Mell with his hands on the goat's horns she grew high in rage and she turned to the grooms to give an order that he be beaten with the whips they held.

But Mell ran to her and he caught her hand and holding the jewel he said "I wish that I was in the Island of the Shadow of the Stars and that this young girl was with me." The hawk flew at him and the hound sprang at him and the whips struck at him and while he was still expecting the feel of teeth and claws and lash he was away and was in another country altogether. There was neither hawk nor hound nor hut nor castle nor groom nor falconer. Two beings only were there and they were Mell the Hen-wife's son and the King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow.

"In what country are we?" said Princess Bright Brow.

"Unless we are in the Island of the Shadow of the Stars I don't know where we are," said Mell, the Hen-wife's Son.

"You are the Hen-wife's son and you have brought me here by enchantment," said Bright Brow.

She wanted to go from him, but where was she to go to? All the country was strange to her. And so, if she made two steps away from him she soon made two steps back to him. And the end of this part of the story is that Bright Brow became friendly to the Hen-wife's Son.

He gathered fruits off trees and he snared birds and he took the fish out of rivers and he found sheltered places to sleep in. And often the Princess Bright Brow was good and kind to him. And Mell the Hen-wife's son was now as happy as anyone in the world. "Since we are so friendly to each other now," said Bright Brow to him one day, "will you not tell me how you were able to come here and bring me with you?"

"It was because of the jewel I wear at my breast," said Mell. And then he told how he had found the green mantle on the ground and how the Fairy Woman gave him the jewel and what power the jewel had.

If Mell was content to be on the Island, Bright Brow was not. And so one evening when he was asleep she lifted up the mantle and took the jewel that was on his breast. Then holding it in her hand she said "I wish I was back in my father's Castle." In an instant she was back there. Now all her maids were around her and all of them were crying "Where have you been, King's daughter, where have you been?" And Bright Brow told them that the King of the Fairy Riders had taken her away to show her all the great heroes of the world so that when the time came for her to choose a husband she could make her choice of the best amongst them.

As for Mell, the Hen-wife's son: when he wakened up and found that Bright Brow had gone and that the jewel was gone there was no one in the world more sad and lonely than he was. He thought that she might come back to him, but the moon came and the sun came and Bright Brow came not. He longed to be a bird that he might fly after her to her father's Castle.

He stayed on the Island of the Shadow of the Stars for a long time for, now that the jewel was gone from him, there was no way of getting from the Island. Then a King who had built a high tower went to the top of it one day and saw the Island of the Shadow of the Stars. He sent out his long ships and his leathern-jerkined men to it. They found Mell and they brought him to the King. Then Mell became one of the King's men and he went into battle and he learnt the use of all arms.

III

The Hen-wife's son went through the Eastern and the Western Worlds and he came back to where his mother's hut was. He rode round the walls of the King's Castle. Everything that he thought was magnificent before seemed small to him now. The trees that grew within the walls seemed not much bigger than the bushes the old women put clothes to dry on.

Sitting on his black horse he looked across the wall that he once thought was so high and he saw the Hen-wife's hut. His mother came out to feed the hens and to count them and to gather up the eggs and put them in a basket. "She's alive and I'll see her again," said Mell. He rode round the wall to the King's Garden to try to get sight of the Princess Bright Brow. He saw no sight of her. He rode on and he came to the gate at the other side and he saw outside the Cook-house the horse-boys and dog-boys and grooms that he used to know.

He saw them and he knew them, but they did not know him. He was surprised to see that they had not learnt to straighten up their shoulders nor to walk as if there was a fine thought in their heads. They were all around the Cook-house, and a great noise of rattling was coming from within it.

"What noise is that in the Cook-house?" Mell asked a groom.

"The Cook's son is going out to fight," said the groom, "and he is striking the pot-lids with the ladles to let everyone in the Cook-house know how fierce he is."

"And who is the Cook's son going to fight?" asked Mell the Hen-wife's son.

"He is going to fight a great Champion that has come up from the sea in a boat that moves itself. This Champion demands that the King pay tribute to him. And the King has offered his daughter and half his kingdom to the youth who will go down to the sea-shore and defeat this Champion. And to-day the Cook's son is going out to make trial."

And while the groom was saying all this the Cook's son came out of the Cook-house. His big face was all gray. His knees were knocking each other. The breastplate of iron he had on was slipping to one side and the big sword he had put in his belt was trailing on the ground.

"I would like to see what sort of a fight this Champion will make," said Mell, the Hen-wife's son. He followed the Cook's son to the sea-shore. But the Cook's son, when he had come to the shore, looked round and found a little cave in the face of the rock and climbed into it.

Then a boat that moved of itself came in from the sea, and a Champion all in red sprang out of it. And when he had touched the shingles he struck his sword on his shield and he shouted "If the King of this Land has a Champion equal to the fray let him forth against me. And if the King of the Land has no such Champion, let him pay me tribute from his Kingdom."

Mell looked to the cave where the Cook's son had hidden himself and

all he saw there was a bush being pulled towards the opening to hide it.

Then Mell the Hen-wife's son drew his sword and went down the beach towards the Red Champion. They fought for half the day. At the end of that time the Red Champion said "Good is the champion that the King of this Land has sent against me. I did not know he had such a good champion."

They fought all over the strand making the places that were stony, wet, and the places that were wet, stony, and then, when the sun was going down, the Red Champion was not able to do anything more than guard himself from the strokes of Mell's sword while he drew towards his boat.

"You will have the honors of the fight to-day," said he to Mell.

[Illustration: The Red Champion said, "Good is the Champion that the King of this Land has sent against me."]

"I shall have the honors and something else beside," said Mell. Then he struck at the red plume that was on his enemy's cap. He cut it off as the Red Champion sprang into the boat that moved of itself. As the sun was sinking the Champion in the boat went over the sea.

Now the Cook's son had been watching the whole fight from the cave. When he saw the Red Champion going off in his boat he came running down to the shore. The Hen wife's son was lying with his hands and his face in the water trying to cool himself after the combat and the red plume that he had struck off the Champion's cap was lying near him. The Cook's son took up the plume.

"Let me keep this as a remembrance of your fight, brave warrior," said he to the Hen-wife's son.

"You may keep it," said Mell. Then with the red plume in his hands the Cook's son ran back towards the Castle.

IV

Mell the Hen-wife's son put on his best garments and he went to the Castle that evening and he was received by the King as a champion from foreign parts. And the King invited him to supper for three nights.

Princess Bright Brow was at the supper and Mell watched and watched her. He saw that she was pale and that she kept sighing. And of the damsel who came to sit beside him at the table Mell asked "Why is the King's daughter so sad and troubled-looking?"

"She has reason for being sad and troubled," said the damsel who was called Sea Swan, "for she thinks she may have to marry one whom she thinks little of."

"Why should that be?" said Mell.

"Because her father has promised to give her and half his Kingdom to the one who will defeat the Red Champion who has come from across the sea and who demands that the King give him tribute from the land. And the only one who has gone forth against the Champion is the Cook's son--a gray-faced fellow that only a kitchen-maid would marry. And if it happens that the Cook's son overcomes the Red Champion, well then Princess Bright Brow will have to marry him."

And later on Sea Swan said to Mell "The King's daughter is so troubled that she would go away to the Island of the Shadow of the Stars if she had the jewel that would bring her there. She had it once, but a Fairy Woman came out of the green rath and made Bright Brow give it to her."

When the feast was at its height the King stood up and bade the Cook's son come near the High Chair and tell how he had fought with the Red Champion that day. And the Cook's son came up holding the red plume in his hand. He told a story of how he had fought with the Red Champion all the day and how he had beaten him to his boat and how he had made him take his boat out to sea, and how, as the Champion had sprung into the boat, he had struck at him and had cut the red plume from his cap. "And I shall go down the sea-shore to-morrow," said the Cook's son very bravely, "and if the Red Champion dares come back I shall take off his head instead of his plume." Then he left the red plume beside the King's daughter and her father made Bright Brow hold up her forehead for the Cook's son to kiss. And all in the supper-room clapped their hands for the Cook's son.

The next day Mell the Hen-wife's son stood outside the Cook-house and he heard a tremendous rattling within. "That is the Cook's son preparing to go out to battle," said one of the grooms. "He is striking the ladles upon the pot-lids to show how fierce he is." Just as that was being said the Cook's son walked out of the Cook-house. He looked around him very haughtily. Then he walked away with his big sword trailing behind him and his breast-plate all to one side. Mell the Hen-wife's son followed him.

When he came to the sea-shore he stood for a while looking out to sea with his knees knocking together. Then he went where he had gone the day before. He climbed into a cave in the face of the cliff and he drew the bush to the entrance of it so that it was quite hidden.

Mell the Hen-wife's son looked out to sea and he saw the boat that moved of itself come towards the shore. The Red Champion was in it. He sprang out on the strand, struck his sword on his shield and made proclamation: Unless the King of the Land sent a champion who could overthrow him he would make him pay tribute for his Kingdom.

Then down to meet him came Mell the Hen-wife's son, his sword in his hand. He and the Red Champion saluted each other and then they fought together trampling over the beach, making the soft places hard and the hard places soft with the dint of their trampling. "A good champion, by my faith you are," said the Red Champion to Mell, when three-quarters of the day had been spent in fighting. And after that the Red Champion tried only to guard himself from the thrusts and the strokes of Mell's sword. He drew away from Mell and towards his boat. He put his two feet in it and pushed away. "You have the honors of the day's fight, champion," said he. "I shall have something beside the honors," said Mell and he struck at the Red Champion's belt. Down on the shingles fell the silver-studded belt and the Red Champion pushed off in his boat.

When the Cook's son saw from his cave that the Red Champion had gone he came down to the water's edge where Mell was lying with his face and hands in the water to cool himself after the combat. The silver-studded belt was lying beside Mell. The Cook's son took it up without saying a word and he went off towards the Castle.

That night Mell the Hen-wife's son sat by himself in the supper room of the King's Castle. He watched and watched the face of the Princess Bright Brow. She looked more pale and troubled than on the night before. And after the harpers had played the King called upon the Cook's son to come up to the High Chair and tell how he had battled with the Red Champion. He came up with the silver-studded belt in his hand and he told a story of how he had beaten the Red Champion back into the sea. And when the story was told the King bade Bright Brow go over to him and kiss the Cook's son on his heavy gray cheek.

V

The next day when he stood before the Cook-house, Mell the Hen-

wife's son heard a greater rattling than before. The Cook's son struck the pot-lids with the ladles more fiercely than before and he cried out in a high voice "This is the last time that I shall ever stand amongst the pots and the pans, the lids and the ladles, for I go to fight the Red Champion for the last time, and after this I will sit beside the King's Chair and the King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow, will sit upon my knee."

He marched down to the sea-shore, his long sword trailing behind him. He walked through the street with his head high, but when he drew near the sea-shore his gait became less grand. His knees began to knock together. He looked out to the sea and when he saw the boat that moved of itself coming towards the shore he clambered into the cave and he drew the bushes round to cover up the entrance.

The boat that moved of itself came to the strand. The Red Champion sprang out on the shingles. He made his proclamation. Then up to him came Mell the Hen-wife's son. "I will strive with you," said he, "as I strove with you yesterday and the day before. And how shall we fight? Shall it be with swords or by wrestling?" "By wrestling let it be to-day," said the Red Champion.

They laid hands on each other and began to wrestle. And in their bout of wrestling they made holes in the ground and they made hillocks on the ground, and when the day was about to close Mell overthrew the Red Champion. He left him stark on the ground. Then he took the cord he had round his waist and he bound the Red Champion--hands and feet, waist and chest he bound him.

The Cook's son came up to them then. "As you took the red plume and as you took the silver-studded belt, take the Champion too," said Mell. Then the Cook's son took the Red Champion, all bound as he was, and putting him across his shoulders went staggering up the beach and towards the King's Castle.

Mell the Hen-wife's son sat in the supper-room of the Castle again that night. The King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow, was there and she was as white as white rose-leaves and tears were falling down her cheeks. And when the wine had been drunk out of the cups the King stood up and called upon the Cook's son to come up to the High Chair and tell all how he had overthrown and had bound the Red Champion who would have put a tribute upon the Kingdom. The Cook's son came up to the High Chair and he told them a story that was wonderful indeed. And when the story was told the King said "Loose the Red Champion whom you bound, and when he has knelt here and prayed to us for forgiveness the King's daughter will take your hands and will marry you." "Look," said the damsel Sea Swan to Mell the Hen Wife's son, "how the Princess Bright Brow is pulling the hairs from her head in her grief."

The Red Champion was brought in bound and the Cook's son began to try to unbind him. But not one knot could he loosen. He tried and he tried and he broke his nails trying. "This is strange indeed," said the King, "for it used to be said that whoever bound one could loosen one."

He tried again and he tried again and not one cord could he loosen from another. Then the King's daughter Princess Bright Brow looked up. "How strange it would be," said she, "if it was not the Cook's son who bound the Red Champion."

Then up the Hall came Mell the Hen-wife's son. He stood over the Red Champion and he pulled a cord here and he pulled a cord there and in a minute he was unbound. All in the hall began to murmur "Surely the one who unloosed him bound him," said many people.

"He is the one who bound me," said the Red Champion, pointing out Mell the Hen-wife's son, "and besides it was he who cut the red plume off my cap and who took the silver-studded belt from me."

"Speak up and deny what he says," said the King to the Cook's son.

But when the Cook's son tried to speak he stuttered and stammered and his knees began to knock together and his hands went shaking. And when the company looked at him there was not one there who believed he had fought the Red Champion. And when the Cook's son looked round and saw there was not one there who believed in him he gathered the supper-things of the table like an attendant and went out of the room.

"And now," said the King to Mell, the Hen-wife's son, "since there is no doubt but it was you who conquered the champion to you I give my daughter's hand. Take her now for your wife and take half of my kingdom with her."

Then Bright Brow lifted her face to him and she put her hands in his hands.

"Mell," said she, "Mell the Hen-wife's son, I knew for long that you would come to me like this. Forgive me and love me," said she, "and I will love you from this night."

And so Mell the Hen-wife's son and the King's daughter, Princess Bright Brow, came together again. He married her and came to rule over half her father's kingdom. They lived happy ever afterwards, of course. And Mell brought his mother out of the hut beside the poultry-coop and he took her to live in the Castle. And in the end his mother married the Steward who had become a widower and she became the most respected dame in and about the King's Castle. And as for the Cook's son he is still in the Cook-house amongst the pots and the

pans, the lids and the ladles.

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The Giant and the Birds]

The Giant and the Birds

[Illustration]

The Cock scraped and the Hens scraped and when the Hens went away the Cock scraped by himself. He called the Hens back, and they all scraped deeper and deeper. Then something was shown; it was bright and round, and the Cock and the three Hens scraped until the whole of it was to be seen. It was a great ring of brass.

"Tell us how you knew the bright thing was there, Hero-son of my heart?" said the Little Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother.

"Do, do," said the Feather-legged Hen.

"Tell us, Top of Wisdom," said the Blue Hen.

"You all know," said the Cock, "that the earth rocks underneath the place where I crow in the morning."

"We know, O Unvanquishable," said the three Hens.

"The earth never rocked here," said the Cock, "hence I knew that something powerful was under the ground at this place. It was the ring of brass. Now it will be found and brought into the house. And when I stand here and crow in the morning the earth will rock as it does in every other place in the world."

"It will, it will," said the Feather-legged Hen.

"It must, O Top of Valor," said the Blue Hen.

"And you will tell us how the ring of brass came to be there, Hero-son of my heart," said the Little Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother.

"In the course of the evening I may do so," said the Cock condescendingly.

When they were beside the sunny wall, the Hens on the ground scattering dust over their feathers and their lord standing on one leg with his comb hanging over one eye the Cock said "No Cock of our breed ever told this story before. They would not frighten the hens with it. However, since you have persuaded me I will tell you the tale. My grandfather told it to my father who told it to me. It is the story of the Big Man who came to this place and who wore the ring of brass that we uncovered to-day."

He did not put it over his head as you might think from the size of the ring. No. He wore it on his arm. Never was a bigger man seen by anyone living. The whole countryside stood outside their houses to see him come over the hills. When he came to where the stones are he stooped down to take a drink and he drank the well dry. The people came out of the house to meet him, and he spoke to them, and out of what he said to them they drew his story.

As I am to a Bantam, the Big Man was to the other men of the country. And if they were surprised at his bigness, he was astonished at their smallness. For he came from a time when all were as big as he. A hundred and a hundred years before he had hunted with his companions, and he was then called, not Big Man, but Little Fawn.

And one day--a hundred and a hundred years ago it was--he had gone to chase a deer. The deer fled into a cave. He followed with his hounds and his sword, his trumpet and his missile-ball. He went astray and fell asleep in the Cave. And when he wakened up, his hounds were heaps of dust beside him. He went into the world, and he found that his companions were dead for a hundred and a hundred years and that the men of the earth had become smaller and smaller. In the Cave he left his sword and his trumpet and his missile-ball.

* * * * *

The Cock put his two feet on the ground and shook his red comb from over his left to over his right eye. Then said he, Everyone in the house was friendly to Little Fawn except one person--Murrish the Cook-woman. From the first day he came there were disputes between them. "Big men have big appetites," said she to him the day he came, "and so to-night I will give you two eggs for your supper." But when she handed him the eggs Little Fawn said "It was not the eggs of the hedge-sparrow we were wont to eat in my time." "Eggs of the hedge-sparrow!" said Murrish, "I have handed you the biggest eggs laid by the best hens in the country." "In my time there were bigger eggs in the nest of the hedge-sparrow," said Little Fawn.

[Illustration: All flew from the mountain except one bird and he was the greatest amongst them all.]

The next day she gave him a barley-cake for his breakfast. He ate it and then sent the boy--Ardan was his name--to ask what else she was going to give him.

"Give him!" said Murrish the Cook-woman, "I have given him a whole barley cake, and that is enough for two men's breakfasts."

"Tell her," said Little Fawn, "that I often saw an ivy-leaf that was as big

as her barley cake."

"Tell him," said Murrish the Cook-woman, "that I am not here to listen to old men's romances."

Now when he heard that his words were taken as old men's romances Little Fawn was an angry man. He was hungry, for the food he got did not stay his appetite, but what Murrish said in doubt of his word gave him more hurt than his hunger did. For in his day and amongst his companions a lie was never told and nothing a man said was ever doubted.

The next day he sent back the dish for more butter.

"Tell him," said Murrish the Cook-woman, "that I put a whole pat of butter on his dish--enough to do two men for two days."

"Tell her," said Little Fawn, "that often I saw a rowan berry that was bigger as her pat of butter."

"The child just out of the cradle would not believe that story," said Murrish the Cook-woman.

She sent him a quarter of mutton for his dinner. Little Fawn told Ardan to ask Murrish for more, as the dinner she gave him left him hungry still.

"Did he not get a whole quarter of mutton for his dinner?" said Murrish.

"A whole quarter of mutton, did she say?" said Little Fawn. "Often I saw a quarter of a blackbird that was bigger than her quarter of mutton."

"A quarter of a blackbird bigger than my quarter of mutton! Tell him

that if he never lied before, he lies now," said Murrish.

"Does she say that?" said Little Fawn. "Then I swear I shall never rest in the house nor be easy in my mind until I bring her an ivy leaf that is as big as her barley loaf, and a rowan berry that is as big as her pat of butter, and if I bring these," said he, "it may not be needful for me to get her the blackbird that is as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton that she gave me for my dinner."

There and then he went from the house and Ardan the boy went with him. They went east and they went west, they went towards the north and towards the south, but no ivy leaf did they find that was as big as a barley loaf, and no rowan berry did they see that was as big as a pat of butter. Little Fawn was troubled and downcast. They came back to the house, and Murrish the Cook-woman was pleased when she heard from Ardan that they found no ivy leaf and saw no rowan berry that was as big as her barley loaf or her pat of butter. "There is only one thing I can do now," said Little Fawn, "and that is to bring her the blackbird that is as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton she gave me for my dinner. And that," said he to Ardan, "will take time and trouble and the meeting of danger to bring about."

* * * * *

"Time and trouble," said the Feather-legged Hen, "time and trouble!"

"Why did he say time and trouble, O Top of Wisdom?" said the Blue Hen.

"Hush now," said the Little Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother. "Hush now, and let the Hero-son of my heart tell what's best in the story...."

* * * * *

"Little Fawn was an old man, white-haired and feeble when he came to the house," said the Cock, and now he was nearly blind. His mind would not be at rest, he told Ardan, until he brought to Murrish and showed her a blackbird that was as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton she gave him for his dinner. "But before I can take that blackbird," said he, "I must have a hound. There is a hound in the yard, but I have tried her and found she is weak and fearful. She will have puppies, and one of her puppies, maybe, will do." And he told Ardan to tell him when the puppies came to the hound that was in the yard.

Then one day Ardan came and told him that there was a litter of puppies with the hound. "That is well," said Little Fawn, "and in a while we will try if one has the strength and courage enough to help us to take the blackbird."

He told Ardan what to do. He was to take the skin that had been stripped off a dead horse and he was to nail this skin upon a door in the yard. Then he was to do a curious thing. He was to take up each puppy and fling it against the door.

Ardan did all this and Little Fawn stood by and heard the puppies yowling as they fell on the ground. They scampered away. Then he heard nothing except Ardan's laugh.

"Why are you laughing, my boy?" said Little Fawn.

"I laugh to see what the last puppy is doing," said Ardan.

"And what is he doing?" said Little Fawn.

"He has not fallen to the ground like the others. He has caught hold of the horseskin with his teeth and he is holding on to it."

"That puppy will do," said Little Fawn. "He has strength and courage. Take him and rear him away from the others, and when he comes to his full strength you and I will take him to hunt the blackbird that is as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton Murrish the Cook-woman gave me for my dinner. We must make our word good this time, good lad." Ardan took away the puppy (Conbeg they called him) from the others and reared him up. Little Fawn tested his strength and courage in many ways. At length he was satisfied. One day he put a leash on Conbeg and he told the boy to come with him. Little Fawn and Ardan and Conbeg the young hound went away from the house.

"'Tis the best part of the story," said the Little Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother.

* * * * *

"It is, it is," said the Feather-legged Hen.

"And how well he tells it, the Top of Wisdom," said the Blue Hen.

"I tell it as my father told me and as his father told him," said the Cock changing legs. "The first place they went was into the Cave where the Big Man had lain for a hundred and a hundred years. They found there the heap of dust that was his two hounds, and they found too the missile-ball of brass and the trumpet and the great sword. They left the Cave and they turned south, and they went on and on till they came to the mountain that is called Slieve-na-Mon. The boy and the man and the hound rested themselves for a while on the level on the top of the mountain.

Then Little Fawn told Ardan to take the trumpet and put it to his mouth. He blew on the trumpet. O louder than ever I crowed was the noise he made on that trumpet. The trees that were growing on the mountain top shook at the sound.

"Blow again," said Little Fawn.

And Ardan blew again and he blew louder.

"Now look into the sky," said Little Fawn, "and tell me what you see coming towards us."

Ardan looked for a long time, and at last he saw what he thought was a cloud coming towards the mountain-top. And then he saw that the cloud was a flock of birds. They came to the mountain-top and lighted on the ground--Peewits, Blackbirds, Starlings, Finches, Linnets--and each was bigger than any bird he had ever seen. The birds were hardly afraid of the hound, but Conbeg went amongst them and drove them away.

And then another cloud was seen coming across the sky, and this cloud came to be a flock of birds too, and they came to the mountain-top and lighted on the ground--Linnets, Finches, Starlings, Blackbirds, Peewits--and each bird was bigger than the birds in the first flock. "Loose the hound on them," said Little Fawn. Ardan unslipped Conbeg and the hound went amongst the birds. But they were not afraid and they attacked the hound, and only his strength and courage was so great they would have driven him off the mountain-top.

They rose up and they flew away, and as they did another flock of birds came towards the mountain-top. They lighted on the ground--Peewits, Blackbirds, Starlings, Finches, Linnets--tremendous birds. Ardan loosed Conbeg on them. Then with beaks open and claws outstretched they flew at Ardan and Little Fawn. Little Fawn took his great sword in hand and he attacked them with such strength that the great birds flew off.

All flew from the mountain except one bird. He was a Blackbird and the greatest amongst them all. When Ardan told Little Fawn that this

bird was left alone on a rock the Big Man told him to unloose Conbeg.

The hound dashed at the Blackbird but the blackbird flew at him and attacked him with beak and claws. With a sweep of his wing he threw Conbeg on the ground. Then he rose up in the air and flew towards Ardan and Little Fawn.

"You will escape him," said Ardan, "but me he will kill as he has killed Conbeg." "Put the missile-ball into my hand and guide my aim," said Little Fawn. Ardan put the missile-ball of brass into the Big Man's hand and guided his aim. Little Fawn threw the missile-ball and the Blackbird fell down on the ground. But the bird was not killed.

"A frightening tale, a frightening tale," said the Blue Hen.

"So it is, so it is," said the Feather-legged Hen.

"But you have done well to tell the Hens the story, Hero-son of my heart," said the Little Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother.

* * * * *

"More has to be told," said the Cock, "and it is needful that it should be told now. Murrish the Cook-woman was in the kitchen. In dashed Conbeg the hound, his eyes blazing with the fierceness of the chase. Murrish was so frightened that she ran to the door. And coming to the door she saw Little Fawn with a net on his shoulder. He came into the house and he put the net on the floor, and he showed Murrish what was in the net--a tremendous bird--a Blackbird that was as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton she had on the table. And when the net was laid down on the ground the Blackbird flew up and he carried the middle of the roof away with him as he flew through it and he tumbled beams and rafters down upon Murrish. My grandfather saw the Blackbird flying towards the mountain that is called Slieve-na-

Mon, and my grandfather told my father who told me." "You spoke the truth when you said that you saw a blackbird as big in one quarter as the quarter of mutton I gave you for your dinner," said Murrish the Cook-woman to Little Fawn. "And I believe you when you say you saw an ivy leaf as big as my barley loaf and a rowan berry as big as my pat of butter." "I would only show you," said Little Fawn "that the men I lived amongst had truth on their lips as they had strength in their hands and courage in their hearts."

And from that day Little Fawn and Murrish the Cook-woman lived in peace and good fellowship, and Ardan and Conbeg grew up together and became famous, one and the other. They lived happy for long, but as the books say--

The end of every ship is drowning, The end of every kiln is burning,
The end of every feast is wasting, The end of every laugh is sighing.

And if they were here once, they are here no more.

"And if they are not, we are," said the Slate-colored Hen that was the Cock's mother. "We're here," said she, "and the earth, I promise you, will shake under your feet to-morrow, no matter where you crow, Hero-son of my heart."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The Sea-Maiden who became a Sea-Swan]

The Sea-Maiden who became a Sea-Swan

[Illustration]

The Sea-Swan told the story to the pigeons of the rock, and the Boy Who Knew What the Birds said heard every word of it. I was once a

Sea-Maiden, she said, and my name was Eevil, and I was known through all the Kingdoms that are Under-Wave for my beautiful hair--my long, beautiful, green hair. Something was in me that made me want to dance, and I used to rise up through the water, and dance on the shore of the island that is called Hathony.

Mananaun, as you, creatures, know, is Lord of the Sea, and what he commands in the Kingdoms-Under-Wave has to be. Now Mananaun made a promise to a King of an Earth-Kingdom, and the promise was that he would give this King whatever he asked for. The King died according to the ways of men, and his son, whose name was Branduv, came to rule him.

Branduv called Mananaun out of the sea, and he asked that he renew the promise he had made to his father. The Lord of the Sea did not want a promise to lapse because of the death of a man, and he renewed it to the man's son. Then Mananaun told him he would take him and show him the Kingdoms of the Sea and whatever he saw that he desired there would be given to him. He took him in his boat of glass "The Ocean Sweeper" to visit the Kingdoms of the Sea.

They came to Moy Mell, the Plain of Pleasure, and there Mananaun gave Branduv a branch of everlasting blossoms; they came to another Kingdom and there Mananaun gave him a sword that was the best wrought in the world; they came to a third Kingdom and there Mananaun gave him a pair of hounds that could run down the silver-antlered stag. But as yet Branduv the King had asked no gift from Mananaun.

They came to Mananaun's own Kingdom, Silver-Cloud Plain, and there Branduv was left alone while Mananaun drank the Ale of the Ever-Living Ones. The King saw from the shores of Silver-Cloud Plain "The Ocean Sweeper," and he directed that the boat bring him to the island. And the boat travelled as the one in it wished.

Only one thing had ever made me fearful of dancing on the shore of the Island of Hathony--that was the presence there of a pair of Ravens. These Ravens had once been Sea-maidens, but they had desired men for husbands, and they had gone to them. The men forsook them, and they had become first Witches and afterwards Ravens. Ever since their change they wished harm to the Maidens of the Sea. I had been frightened of them, but now I had seen them flapping about so often that I was no longer or I was only a little, afraid.

I came up through the sea and I danced upon the shore of the island, and the play of the waves was in my dance, and my long soft green hair fell over my foam-white, foam soft body. I danced on, O my listeners, and as no one had ever seen me looked upon, I thought no one looked upon me now.

But this King of the earthly Kingdom saw me. He saw me as I danced by the waves, and I was the fairest thing he had ever looked upon. At first he was all wonder and no robber's thoughts were in his mind. But the Ravens came to him. One perched on one shoulder and one perched on the other, and one said "If you carry Eevil off you will have the fairest wife in all the world," and the other said "If you leave her here you will never look on anything as fair again."

The Ravens flapped before him to guide him to a place in the dark rocks where he might hide and to which I might come. He followed where they led. But I saw his shadow on a rock. I drew back and the sea took me and drew me into its depths. "The sea has taken her," said Branduv to the Ravens.

"Mananaun is Lord of the Sea," said one of the Ravens.

"And Mananaun has promised you a gift, and he cannot refuse what you will ask," said the other Raven.

Then the Ravens flapped away and Mananaun came to where the King was standing. "You have asked me for a gift," said Mananaun, "think now of what you desire before I take you back to your own island." Then said Branduv, "What I ask is that you bestow upon me the Sea-maiden who was dancing here, Eevil."

[Illustration]

Mananaun in anger lifted his spear. But then he remembered he was bound by a promise to Branduv. He lowered the spear he had raised. "I will give you any other gift you ask," said he, "even my own boat 'The Ocean Sweeper.'"

"I hold you to your promise," said Branduv, "and I declare to you that I shall take no other gift unless it be the maiden who was here dancing by the sea."

"It must be then that I give her you," said Mananaun, and his face was dark.

[Illustration]

Down he went to the Kingdom-Under-Wave and he came to the black mansion where lived the Seven Spinning Women of the Sea. He spoke as speaks a King who has a hard thing to do. "A law has to be broken," said he. "What law, Lord?" said the Spinning Women. "The law that saves our Maidens from taking part in the stormy lives of men." "We would rather that anything else but this should happen, Lord," said the Seven Spinning Women. "This thing must happen," said Mananaun, "and the Maiden Eevil must go to Branduv the King." "She must be prepared for this," said the Seven Spinning Women.

They came to me and they told me that the man whose shadow I had seen on the rock now claimed me for his wife and that Mananaun

would not gainsay him. When I heard this, O my listeners, the life nearly left me.

This comfort the Seven Spinning Women gave me: I was to stay on his island so that I might become used to the earthly kingdom, but that I was not to see Branduv until the green had left my hair and the brown that the sun makes had come into my cheeks. So I came to Branduv's island. I lived by the sea-shore and the women of the island attended me.

How different was this earthly land from the Kingdom-Under-Wave. With us there was but the one mild season, the one mild light. Here there was glaring day and terrible darkness, bitter winds and hot beams of the sun. With us there were songs and tales, but the songs were about love or about the beautiful things we had seen. Here the tales and songs were about battles and forays and slaying with the sword. What they told of their loves was terrible, so much violence and unfaithfulness was in them.

The soft green tints were going out of my hair and the sun was putting brownness in my cheeks. Soon my hair would be wheaten-colored like the hair of the women of the islands and my cheeks would be brown like theirs. And then the day would come when I should have to be with the man whom I looked upon as my enemy.

I used to stay by the shore and speak with the birds that came in from the sea, for I knew their language. Never again could I go back to the Kingdom-Under-Wave. Green shade after green shade left my hair, brown tint after brown tint came into my cheeks, and what could I do but envy the birds that could make their flight from the islands of men. And when the green had nearly gone altogether from my hair I thought of a desperate thing I might do.

[Illustration: I put it to my lips, I drank it when he took a step towards

me.]

I sent a message to my sisters, and I sent it by many birds, so that if they did not get it by one they might get it by another. And I asked in my message that they send me a draft from the Well under the Sea, and that they send it in the cup that the Seven Spinning Women guarded. It would be terrible for any of my sisters to come to Branduv's island with the draft and the cup, but I begged that they would do it for me.

The days went by and the green color was now only a shade in my hair, and brownness was on my cheeks, and the women said "Before this old moon is gone our King will come here to wed you."

Then one day I found on the shore the cup that my sisters had brought and the draft from the Secret Well was in it. I took the cup in my hands and I brought it where I lived. "Come to us," said the women, "so that we may undo your hair and tell the King when he may come to wed you." They loosened my hair and then they said "there is no shade of green here at all. Bid the King come as early as he likes to-morrow."

I lay that night with the cup beside me. When I rose I knew that day I should drink from the cup my sisters had sent me--drink the draft that would change me into what I wished to be--a bird of the sea.

And while I sat with the cup beside me and my hair spread out, Branduv, the King of the Island, came to the door of the house. It may have been that I was becoming used to the sight of people of the earthly kingdoms, for, as I looked upon him he did not seem terrible to me. He looked noble, I thought, and eager to befriend me and love me. But the cup was in my hands when he came to the door. I put it to my lips when he entered the house. I drank it when he took a step towards me. And thereupon I became what I had wished to be--a Sea-Swan.

O my listeners! Maybe it would have been well for me if I had wed that King, and be now as the women of the islands. For now as I fly over the sea the King's look comes before me, and I think that he was eager to befriend me and eager to love me. So I am not content when I am flying over the sea. And I am lonely when I am on these islands, for I am now a Swan, and what has a Swan to do with the lives of men?

* * * * *

Such was the story that the Sea-Swan told the pigeons of the rock, and the Boy who knew what the Birds said heard it all, and remembered every word of it.

[Illustration]

[Illustration: What the Peacock and the Crow Told Each Other]

What The Peacock and the Crow Told Each Other When the Crow Came to Steal the Peacock's Feathers

[Illustration]

Said the Lapwing "Crow, I never have seen Such a one as you, Such a one as you For stealing eggs."

Said the Crow "Caw, caw, I never have seen Such a one myself, And I am, I am sure Longer in the world."

Then the Crow flew away and the Lapwing went on complaining.

The Crow flew away and he came to where the Peacock was walking in the King's Garden. He asked the Peacock did he ever listen to

stories.

"No," said the Peacock as he mounted the steps of the terrace. "No. Certainly not. I do not demean myself by listening to any of the stories they tell down below there." He spread out his tail, and, that he might view his own magnificence, he turned his blue, shining neck.

Hoodie the grey-headed Crow with the bright sharp eyes hopped after him.

"Jewels! Kings! Magicians! Palaces! Dragons! What do geese, grouse and farmyard fowl know of such things? And yet they presume to tell stories! Tell stories that have nothing in them of Jewels, Kings, Magicians, Palaces, or Dragons!"

"Nothing at all about such things," said Hoodie the Crow, as he plucked a feather out of the Peacock's tail.

"Yet they will not listen to me," said Purpururati the Peacock. "They affect even to scorn my voice! They pretend that it is less resonant than the cock in the farmyard and less musical than the bird's that sings at night."

"They'd say anything," said Hoodie the Crow, keeping behind the Peacock's tail.

Purpururati the Peacock mounted higher on the terrace. "I shall walk before the statue of the beautiful Queen yonder," he said, "and I shall tell you a story. The reason that I shall tell you is that the Queen always listens to me. But I would have her think that it is to you that I am telling the story."

"I'll listen to you," said Hoodie the Crow and he plucked another feather out of the Peacock's tail.

"When the Queen has been pleased with the sight of my tail, I shall begin," said Purpururati, and he spread out his tail. Hoodie the Crow plucked out three feathers.

"How pleased she looks," said he.

"Yes, she is always pleased by my appearance," the Peacock said, and he turned round and walked the other way.

"Did I ever tell you," said Hoodie, hiding the feathers behind a bush. "Did I ever tell you how the Pigeon went to the Crow to learn the art of nest-making?"

"I do not know about such things," said Purpururati the Peacock.

"I'll tell you and then you'll know," said Hoodie the Crow.

[Illustration]

The Crow is the Master-builder among the Birds and so it was to the Crow that the Pigeon went to learn the art of nest-making. "We begin with the sticks," said the Crow. "I know," said the Pigeon. "First we take one stick and lay it lengthwise." "I know," said the Pigeon. "Then we put a stick across it," said the Crow. "I know," said the Pigeon. "And then we put another stick lower down," said the Crow. "I know," said the Pigeon. "Then we put another stick lengthwise." "I know," said the Pigeon. "Musha," said the Crow, "If you know so much, why do you come here at all? Away with you! Fly home now and build the nest yourself." The Pigeon flew home, but of course he was not able to build his nest, for he knew nothing about the laying of sticks and the bringing of straws, and he was too young and foolish to learn when he got the chance. And that is why the Pigeon to this day cannot build a nest.

[Illustration]

"Why do you tell such foolish stories?" said Purpururati the Peacock when Hoodie had finished.

"We have no other stories in our family," said Hoodie the Crow. "We don't know about Jewels and Magicians and Palaces and Kings and Dragons."

"The Magician," said Purpururati the Peacock, "The Magician lived in a Palace of red marble that was all surrounded by a forest of black, black trees. I lived there too and I ate golden grains out of pails of silver. That was long ago and it was in far India.

"The Magician had precious stones of every kind and he would have me walk beside him to the Cavern where he kept his precious stones, and as he handled them over he would tell me of the virtues that each stone possessed. And one day the Magician looking upon me said 'This Peacock I will slay, for the beauty of his neck makes dull my turquoises and the crest on his head is more shapely than my Persian jewel-work.'"

"Dear me, dear me!" said Hoodie the Crow.

Hearing him say this, said the Peacock "I flew into the branches of a dark, dark tree. And as I rested there the fair lady who walked about the Garden--White-as-a-Pearl she was called and she was the Magician's daughter--walked under the dark, dark trees, and I saw that she was weeping.

"I knew why she wept. She wept for the young man whom her father had imprisoned in a tower. This young man was the son of a King, and the Magician was his father's brother. And if the young man died the Magician would become King in his brother's Kingdom. But the lady White-as-a-Pearl did not want the young man to die.

"A little snow-white dove flew down from the tower and spoke in words to White-as-a-Pearl and asked her what word she had to send to the young man.

"'You must tell him terrible news, my little snow white dove,' said White-as-a-Pearl. 'My father will have him go forth to fight with a dragon. And this is a terrible dragon. Every young man who has gone forth against him has been slain.'

[Illustration: O most beauteous of all the birds, do you know of any arms by which a hero can slay a dragon?]

"The little snow white dove flew back to the tower and the Princess White-as-a-Pearl stood under the dark, dark trees and wept again. And when she saw me on my branch she said 'O most beauteous of all the birds, do you know of any arms by which a hero can slay a terrible dragon?'

[Illustration]

"Then I came down off my branch and I walked beside the Princess, and as I walked beside her I told her the wonderful secrets I knew."

"And what were the secrets," said Hoodie the Crow plucking a last feather from the peacock's tail. "What were the secrets anyway?"

"Can I tell them to a Crow?" said Purpururati the Peacock. "But I will tell them. I told her the secrets I had learnt from the Magician when he spoke of the virtues of his precious stones--a ruby in a man's helmet would make a dragon's eyes go blind. A turquoise on his arm would make a dragon's blood turn to water. A sapphire on his spear would make a dragon's heart burst within him.

"So the Princess White-as-a-Pearl went to her father's cavern and

took the precious stones I spoke of and gave them to the King's son. And he went forth the next day and when he came to him the dragon's eyes were blinded, and his blood turned to water and his heart burst within him. And the King's son cut off his head and brought it into the Palace. Then the Magician fled amongst the dark, dark trees and I was given the red marble palace to live in."

"I lived in Lapland," said Hoodie the Crow. "And who do you think I knew there?"

"No one of any dignity," said Purpururati the Peacock.

"I knew your White-as-a-Pearl. She had become an old ugly witch-woman."

"Base crow!" said Purpururati and he walked up the steps and went away.

Then Hoodie the Crow dressed himself in the feathers he had stolen from the Peacock and went away and walked across the field admiring himself. But a Fox that had promised to bring a Peacock to his Mother-in-law saw Hoodie the Crow and stole up beside him and caught him in his mouth and carried him away. And that was the end of Hoodie who was such a clever crow. "This Peacock is very tough," said the Fox's Mother-in-law as she ate Hoodie. "What would your Ladyship have?" said Rory the Fox. "Peacock is always tough."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: The Treasure of King Labraid Lorc]

The Treasure of King Labraid Lorc

[Illustration]

Kingfisher-all-Blue used to sit on the branch that went furthest across the stream with his head bent down and looking as if he were trying to think his head off. Only in the most lonesome places, far from where the hens cackled and the geese gabbled and the cocks crew, would the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said find him. And when he did find him Kingfisher-all-Blue would not open his beak to say one word--no, not even when the Boy would say "Where did you get your beautiful color?" and "Why is your beak so big, little Kingfisher-all-Blue?"

Now one day when he had left behind him the hens that cackled, the geese that gabbled and the cocks that crew, and had left behind him too the old raven that built in the lone tree he came where Kingfisher-all-Blue sat upon the slenderest branch that went farthest across the stream. And when Kingfisher-all-Blue saw him he lifted up his head and he fixed his eye upon him and he cried out the one word "Follow." Then he went flying down the stream as if he were not a bird at all but a streak of blue fire.

Kingfisher-all-Blue went flying along the stream and the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said was able to follow him. They went on until the stream they followed came out on the sand of the sea-shore. Then Kingfisher-all-Blue seated himself on a branch that was just above where the grains of sand and the blades of grass mixed with each other and he fixed his eye on a mound of sand and clay. And when the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said came beside him Kingfisher-all-Blue said the one word "Find."

Then the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said began to take the sand and clay from the mound. He worked all day at it and Kingfisher-all-Blue sat on the branch above and watched him. And at evening, when all the sand and clay had been taken away by him the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said came upon a stone that was as big and as round

as the wheel of a cart.

And when he had brushed away the grains of sand that was on the round stone he saw a writing. The writing was in OGHAM, but at that time even boys could read OGHAM. And the Ogham writing said
YOU HAVE LUCK TO HAVE SEEN THIS SIDE OF THE STONE
BUT YOU WILL HAVE MORE LUCK WHEN YOU SEE THE OTHER
SIDE.

When he read that he looked up to where the bird sat, but Kingfisher-all-Blue only said "I am done with you now," and then he flew back along the stream like a streak of blue fire.

The Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said stayed near the stone until the dark was coming on. Then he thought he would go home and in the morning he would speak to Pracaun the Crow and ask her about the stone that Kingfisher-all-Blue had brought him to and what good luck there was at the other side of it.

Pracaun the Crow came to the standing stone in the morning and ate the boiled potato that the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said brought her, and then the Boy spoke to her about the stone that Kingfisher-all-Blue had brought him to, and he asked what good luck there was at the other side of it.

"Kingfisher-all-Blue has brought you to good luck that none of the rest of us could have shown you," said Pracaun the Crow. "Under that round stone is the treasure of King Labraid Lorc."

"Who was King Labraid Lorc and what was his treasure?" said the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said.

"I will tell you first about King Labraid Lorc," said Pracaun the Crow. "He was King of this part of the country and of two lovely Islands that

are now sunken deep in the sea. Mananaun Mac Lir who is Lord of the Sea was his friend and Labraid Lorc would have been a happy King only for--well, I'll tell you in a while what troubles he had.

"No one knew where the King had come from. He was not born King of this part of the country nor of the lovely Islands that are now deep sunken under the sea. Mananaun who is Lord of the Sea had given him the Islands, or rather he had given him the two keys that had brought the Islands up from the bottom of the sea. Two silver keys they were, O lad. And when they were brought together they struck each other and rang like bells. And 'Labraid Lorc is King, King of the two Fair Islands' is what they chimed out. As long as he held the keys the Islands would remain above the water. But if he put the keys away the Islands would sink back into the sea.

"Once in every month the King had a man killed. This is how it was. He would have a man to shave his beard and to trim his hair. This man never came alive out of the King's Castle. As soon as the poor barber left the King's chamber and passed down the hall soldiers would fall upon him and kill him with their swords. Every time when the King's beard was shaved and his hair was trimmed a man was killed--twelve men in a year, a hundred and forty-four men in twelve years!

"Now a warning came to a woman that her son would be called upon to be the next barber to the King. She was a widow and the young man was her only son. She was wild with grief when she thought that he would be killed by the soldiers' swords as soon as he had shaved the King's beard and trimmed the King's hair.

"She went everywhere the King rode. She threw herself before him and asked for the life of her son. And at last the King promised that no harm would befall her son's life if he swore he would tell no person what he saw when he shaved the King's beard and trimmed the King's hair. After that he would be always the King's barber.

"The widow's son came before the King and he swore he would tell no person what he saw when he shaved his beard and trimmed his hair. Then he went into the King's Chamber. And when he came out from it the King's soldiers did not fall upon him and kill him with their swords. The widow's son went home out of the Castle.

"His mother cried over him with joy at seeing him back. The next day he went to work at his trade and his mother watched him and was contented in her mind. But the day after her son only worked by fits and starts, and the day after that he did no work at all but sat over the fire looking into the burning coals.

"And after that the widow's son became sick and lay on his bed and no one could tell what was the matter with him. He became more and more ill and at last his mother thought that he had only escaped the soldiers' swords to come home and die in his house. And when she thought of that she said to herself that she would go see the Druid who lived at the back of the hill and beg him to come to see her son and strive to cure him. The Druid came and he looked into the eyes of the young man and he said 'He has a secret upon his mind, and if he does not tell it he will die.'

"Then his mother told the Druid that he had sworn not to tell any person what he saw when he shaved the King's beard and trimmed the King's hair, and that what he saw was his secret. Said the Druid 'If he wants to live he will have to speak out his secret. But it need not be to any person. Let him go to the meeting of two roads, turn with the sun and tell his secret to the first tree on his right hand. And when he feels he has told his secret your son will get the better of his sickness.'

[Illustration]

"When this was told to the young man he got up off his bed and he

walked to where two roads met. He turned as the sun turns and he whispered into the branches of the first tree on his right hand. And the secret that he whispered was 'King Labraid Lorc has the ears of a horse.' Then he turned from the tree and he went home. He slept, and in the morning when he woke he was well and he went to his work and he was happy and cheerful.

"But the tree that he whispered his secret to was a willow, and, as you know, out of the branches of the willow the harp is made. As the widow's son went away a Harper seeking wood to make a new harp came that way. He saw the willow and he knew that its branches were just right for the making of his harp. He cut them and he bent them and he formed a harp from them. And when the harp was firmly fixed the Harper came with it to the King's Castle.

"The King gave a feast so that the first music that came from the harp should be honored. He made the Harper sit near his own High Chair. Then, when the feast was at its height he called upon the Harper to stand up and strike the first music from the new harp.

"'The first music from the new harp shall be praise of the King,' said the Harper when he stood up. He drew his fingers across the strings and all listened for the first music that would come. But the harp that was made out of the willow branches that the widow's son had whispered to murmured 'Labraid Lorc has the ears of a horse, Labraid Lorc has the ears of a horse.' The King started up from his High Chair. The Harper threw down the harp. Everyone was silent in the hall. Then one voice was heard saying 'It is true. The King Labraid Lorc has the ears of a horse.'

"The King had the man who said it taken by his soldiers and flung from the top of the Castle. No one else spoke. But the next day when he rode abroad the King heard the people behind the hedges saying 'Labraid Lorc has the ears of a horse.'

"After that, whenever he came near them, people went from him, and at last no one was left in his Castle. And there was no one to take him over to the fair Islands that Mananaun, Lord of the Sea, had given him for a possession. And there was no one to bring over the fruits that grew on the islands nor the cattle and sheep that pastured there.

"Then the King went to Mananaun, Lord of the Sea, and he offered him back the keys Mananaun had given him--the silver keys that struck each other when they were brought together and rang like bells, chiming out 'Labraid Lorc is King, is King of the two Fair Islands.' But no gift that Mananaun gives is ever taken back and the keys were still left with Labraid Lorc. Yet he thought he would let the keys go out of his possession so that the Fair Islands would sink back into the sea. But that they might not stay at the bottom of the sea for ever he took the keys and he put them in a pit at the sea-shore and he covered the pit with a round stone, and knowing that it would be only a lucky person who would come to that stone, he wrote in Ogham writing on it
YOU HAVE LUCK TO HAVE SEEN THIS SIDE OF THE STONE
BUT YOU WILL HAVE MORE LUCK WHEN YOU SEE THE OTHER
SIDE.

[Illustration: "Ernan is Lord, is Lord of the Fair Islands."]

"As he left the silver keys there the Fair Islands began to sink in the water. So slow were they in sinking that the cattle and sheep that pastured on the islands were taken off in boats and the people who lived in villages on the Islands came away with all they owned. But at last the Islands sank altogether out of sight. And after they went down into the sea King Labraid Lorc was seen no more.

"And you, O Boy, are the lucky one that the King hid the silver keys for. When you take them into your hands the Islands will begin to rise above the water and when they are altogether risen and are called the

Fair Islands again you will be Lord of them. And Kingfisher-all-Blue, the one we thought had no care but for himself, brought you to this good fortune."

* * * * *

Day after day the Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said went down to the sea-shore and worked to lift up the round stone that was over the pit in which King Labraid Lorc had put his silver keys. And one day he was able to raise up the stone. There lay the great keys, shining in their silver brightness. He took them up, and when he brought them near each other they struck together and they rang like bells. "Mananaun" was the the name they chimed out. And they chimed again "Ernan is Lord, is Lord of the Fair Islands."

Looking out to sea, the boy Ernan saw waters rising up as though whales were spouting fountains. And the next day, when he came to the sea-shore, he saw that Islands had risen and that they were already covered with green.

No longer he listened to what the Birds said but he watched the Islands every day and he saw trees and grass come upon them. And when the people came and said "Who can be Lord of these Islands?" he held up the silver keys and brought them together so that they struck each other and rang like bells. "Ernan is Lord, Lord of the Fair Islands" was what they chimed out. Each day the Islands grew fairer in the sight of the people, and Ernan was called, not "The Boy Who Knew What the Birds Said," but "Ernan, Lord of the Fair Islands."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: THE END]

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Transcriber's Notes

Minor punctuation and capitalization changes have been made for text consistency. Some illustrations have been moved to avoid breaking up paragraphs.

Page 125: Blue Ben has been changed to Blue Hen.

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