

The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus

by

L. Frank Baum

Contents

YOUTH

1. Burzee

2. The Child of the Forest

3. The Adoption

4. Claus

5. The Master Woodsman

6. Claus Discovers Humanity

7. Claus Leaves the Forest

MANHOOD

1. The Laughing Valley

2. How Claus Made the First Toy

3. How the Ryls Colored the Toys

4. How Little Mayrie Became Frightened

5. How Bessie Blithesome Came to the Laughing Valley

6. The Wickedness of the Awgwas

7. The Great Battle Between Good and Evil

8. The First Journey with the Reindeer

9. "Santa Claus!"

10. Christmas Eve

11. How the First Stockings Were Hung by the Chimneys

12. The First Christmas Tree

OLD AGE

1. The Mantle of Immortality

2. When the World Grew Old

3. The Deputies of Santa Claus

YOUTH

1. Burzee

Have you heard of the great Forest of Burzee? Nurse used to sing of it

when I was a child. She sang of the big tree-trunks, standing close

together, with their roots intertwining below the earth and their

branches intertwining above it; of their rough coating of bark and

queer, gnarled limbs; of the bushy foliage that roofed the entire

forest, save where the sunbeams found a path through which to touch the

ground in little spots and to cast weird and curious shadows over the

mosses, the lichens and the drifts of dried leaves.

The Forest of Burzee is mighty and grand and awesome to those who steal

beneath its shade. Coming from the sunlit meadows into its mazes it

seems at first gloomy, then pleasant, and afterward filled with

never-ending delights.

For hundreds of years it has flourished in all its magnificence, the

silence of its inclosure unbroken save by the chirp of busy chipmunks,

the growl of wild beasts and the songs of birds.

Yet Burzee has its inhabitants--for all this. Nature peopled it in the

beginning with Fairies, Knooks, Ryls and Nymphs. As long as the Forest

stands it will be a home, a refuge and a playground to these sweet

immortals, who revel undisturbed in its depths.

Civilization has never yet reached Burzee. Will it ever, I wonder?

2. The Child of the Forest

Once, so long ago our great-grandfathers could scarcely have heard it

mentioned, there lived within the great Forest of Burzee a wood-nymph

named Necile. She was closely related to the mighty Queen Zurline, and

her home was beneath the shade of a widespreading oak. Once every

year, on Budding Day, when the trees put forth their new buds, Necile

held the Golden Chalice of Ak to the lips of the Queen, who drank

therefrom to the prosperity of the Forest. So you see she was a nymph

of some importance, and, moreover, it is said she was highly regarded

because of her beauty and grace.

When she was created she could not have told; Queen Zurline could not

have told; the great Ak himself could not have told. It was long ago

when the world was new and nymphs were needed to guard the forests and

to minister to the wants of the young trees. Then, on some day not

remembered, Necile sprang into being; radiant, lovely, straight and

slim as the sapling she was created to guard.

Her hair was the color that lines a chestnut-bur; her eyes were blue in

the sunlight and purple in the shade; her cheeks bloomed with the faint

pink that edges the clouds at sunset; her lips were full red, pouting

and sweet. For costume she adopted oak-leaf green; all the wood-nymphs

dress in that color and know no other so desirable. Her dainty feet

were sandal-clad, while her head remained bare of covering other than

her silken tresses.

Necile's duties were few and simple. She kept hurtful weeds from

growing beneath her trees and sapping the earth-food required by her

charges. She frightened away the Gadgols, who took evil delight in

flying against the tree-trunks and wounding them so that they drooped

and died from the poisonous contact. In dry seasons she carried water

from the brooks and pools and moistened the roots of her thirsty

dependents.

That was in the beginning. The weeds had now learned to avoid the

forests where wood-nymphs dwelt; the loathsome Gadgols no longer dared

come nigh; the trees had become old and sturdy and could bear the

drought better than when fresh-sprouted. So Necile's duties were

lessened, and time grew laggard, while succeeding years became more

tiresome and uneventful than the nymph's joyous spirit loved.

Truly the forest-dwellers did not lack amusement. Each full moon they

danced in the Royal Circle of the Queen. There were also the Feast of

Nuts, the Jubilee of Autumn Tintings, the solemn ceremony of Leaf

Shedding and the revelry of Budding Day. But these periods of

enjoyment were far apart, and left many weary hours between.

That a wood-nymph should grow discontented was not thought of by

Necile's sisters. It came upon her only after many years of brooding.

But when once she had settled in her mind that life was irksome she had

no patience with her condition, and longed to do something of real

interest and to pass her days in ways hitherto undreamed of by forest

nymphs. The Law of the Forest alone restrained her from going forth in

search of adventure.

While this mood lay heavy upon pretty Necile it chanced that the great

Ak visited the Forest of Burzee and allowed the wood-nymphs as was

their wont--to lie at his feet and listen to the words of wisdom that

fell from his lips. Ak is the Master Woodsman of the world; he sees

everything, and knows more than the sons of men.

That night he held the Queen's hand, for he loved the nymphs as a

father loves his children; and Necile lay at his feet with many of her

sisters and earnestly harkened as he spoke.

"We live so happily, my fair ones, in our forest glades," said Ak,

stroking his grizzled beard thoughtfully, "that we know nothing of the

sorrow and misery that fall to the lot of those poor mortals who

inhabit the open spaces of the earth. They are not of our race, it is

true, yet compassion well befits beings so fairly favored as ourselves.

Often as I pass by the dwelling of some suffering mortal I am tempted

to stop and banish the poor thing's misery. Yet suffering, in

moderation, is the natural lot of mortals, and it is not our place to

interfere with the laws of Nature."

"Nevertheless," said the fair Queen, nodding her golden head at the

Master Woodsman, "it would not be a vain guess that Ak has often

assisted these hapless mortals."

Ak smiled.

"Sometimes," he replied, "when they are very young--'children,' the

mortals call them--I have stopped to rescue them from misery. The men

and women I dare not interfere with; they must bear the burdens Nature

has imposed upon them. But the helpless infants, the innocent children

of men, have a right to be happy until they become full-grown and able

to bear the trials of humanity. So I feel I am justified in assisting

them. Not long ago--a year, maybe--I found four poor children huddled

in a wooden hut, slowly freezing to death. Their parents had gone to a

neighboring village for food, and had left a fire to warm their little

ones while they were absent. But a storm arose and drifted the snow in

their path, so they were long on the road. Meantime the fire went out

and the frost crept into the bones of the waiting children."

"Poor things!" murmured the Queen softly. "What did you do?"

"I called Nelko, bidding him fetch wood from my forests and breathe

upon it until the fire blazed again and warmed the little room where

the children lay. Then they ceased shivering and fell asleep until

their parents came."

"I am glad you did thus," said the good Queen, beaming upon the Master;

and Necile, who had eagerly listened to every word, echoed in a

whisper: "I, too, am glad!"

"And this very night," continued Ak, "as I came to the edge of Burzee I

heard a feeble cry, which I judged came from a human infant. I looked

about me and found, close to the forest, a helpless babe, lying quite

naked upon the grasses and wailing piteously. Not far away, screened

by the forest, crouched Shiegra, the lioness, intent upon devouring the

infant for her evening meal."

"And what did you do, Ak?" asked the Queen, breathlessly.

"Not much, being in a hurry to greet my nymphs. But I commanded

Shiegra to lie close to the babe, and to give it her milk to quiet its

hunger. And I told her to send word throughout the forest, to all

beasts and reptiles, that the child should not be harmed."

"I am glad you did thus," said the good Queen again, in a tone of

relief; but this time Necile did not echo her words, for the nymph,

filled with a strange resolve, had suddenly stolen away from the group.

Swiftly her lithe form darted through the forest paths until she

reached the edge of mighty Burzee, when she paused to gaze curiously

about her. Never until now had she ventured so far, for the Law of the

Forest had placed the nymphs in its inmost depths.

Necile knew she was breaking the Law, but the thought did not give

pause to her dainty feet. She had decided to see with her own eyes

this infant Ak had told of, for she had never yet beheld a child of

man. All the immortals are full-grown; there are no children among

them. Peering through the trees Necile saw the child lying on the

grass. But now it was sweetly sleeping, having been comforted by the

milk drawn from Shiegra. It was not old enough to know what peril

means; if it did not feel hunger it was content.

Softly the nymph stole to the side of the babe and knelt upon the

sward, her long robe of rose leaf color spreading about her like a

gossamer cloud. Her lovely countenance expressed curiosity and

surprise, but, most of all, a tender, womanly pity. The babe was

newborn, chubby and pink. It was entirely helpless. While the nymph

gazed the infant opened its eyes, smiled upon her, and stretched out

two dimpled arms. In another instant Necile had caught it to her

breast and was hurrying with it through the forest paths.

3. The Adoption

The Master Woodsman suddenly rose, with knitted brows. "There is a

strange presence in the Forest," he declared. Then the Queen and her

nymphs turned and saw standing before them Necile, with the sleeping

infant clasped tightly in her arms and a defiant look in her deep blue

eyes.

And thus for a moment they remained, the nymphs filled with surprise

and consternation, but the brow of the Master Woodsman gradually

clearing as he gazed intently upon the beautiful immortal who had

wilfully broken the Law. Then the great Ak, to the wonder of all, laid

his hand softly on Necile's flowing locks and kissed her on her fair

forehead.

"For the first time within my knowledge," said he, gently, "a nymph has

defied me and my laws; yet in my heart can I find no word of chiding.

What is your desire, Necile?"

"Let me keep the child!" she answered, beginning to tremble and falling

on her knees in supplication.

"Here, in the Forest of Burzee, where the human race has never yet

penetrated?" questioned Ak.

"Here, in the Forest of Burzee," replied the nymph, boldly. "It is my

home, and I am weary for lack of occupation. Let me care for the babe!

See how weak and helpless it is. Surely it can not harm Burzee nor the

Master Woodsman of the World!"

"But the Law, child, the Law!" cried Ak, sternly.

"The Law is made by the Master Woodsman," returned Necile; "if he bids

me care for the babe he himself has saved from death, who in all the

world dare oppose me?" Queen Zurline, who had listened intently to

this conversation, clapped her pretty hands gleefully at the nymph's

answer.

"You are fairly trapped, O Ak!" she exclaimed, laughing. "Now, I pray

you, give heed to Necile's petition."

The Woodsman, as was his habit when in thought, stroked his grizzled

beard slowly. Then he said:

"She shall keep the babe, and I will give it my protection. But I warn

you all that as this is the first time I have relaxed the Law, so shall

it be the last time. Never more, to the end of the World, shall a

mortal be adopted by an immortal. Otherwise would we abandon our happy

existence for one of trouble and anxiety. Good night, my nymphs!"

Then Ak was gone from their midst, and Necile hurried away to her bower

to rejoice over her new-found treasure.

4. Claus

Another day found Necile's bower the most popular place in the Forest.

The nymphs clustered around her and the child that lay asleep in her

lap, with expressions of curiosity and delight. Nor were they wanting

in praises for the great Ak's kindness in allowing Necile to keep the

babe and to care for it. Even the Queen came to peer into the innocent

childish face and to hold a helpless, chubby fist in her own fair hand.

"What shall we call him, Necile?" she asked, smiling. "He must have a

name, you know."

"Let him be called Claus," answered Necile, "for that means 'a little

one.'"

"Rather let him be called Neclaus,"\*\* returned the Queen, "for that

will mean 'Necile's little one.'"

The nymphs clapped their hands in delight, and Neclaus became the

infant's name, although Necile loved best to call him Claus, and in

afterdays many of her sisters followed her example.

Necile gathered the softest moss in all the forest for Claus to lie

upon, and she made his bed in her own bower. Of food the infant had no

lack. The nymphs searched the forest for bell-udders, which grow upon

the goa-tree and when opened are found to be filled with sweet milk.

And the soft-eyed does willingly gave a share of their milk to support

the little stranger, while Shiegra, the lioness, often crept stealthily

into Necile's bower and purred softly as she lay beside the babe and

fed it.

So the little one flourished and grew big and sturdy day by day, while

Necile taught him to speak and to walk and to play.

His thoughts and words were sweet and gentle, for the nymphs knew no

evil and their hearts were pure and loving. He became the pet of the

forest, for Ak's decree had forbidden beast or reptile to molest him,

and he walked fearlessly wherever his will guided him.

Presently the news reached the other immortals that the nymphs of

Burzee had adopted a human infant, and that the act had been sanctioned

by the great Ak. Therefore many of them came to visit the little

stranger, looking upon him with much interest. First the Ryls, who are

first cousins to the wood-nymphs, although so differently formed. For

the Ryls are required to watch over the flowers and plants, as the

nymphs watch over the forest trees. They search the wide world for the

food required by the roots of the flowering plants, while the brilliant

colors possessed by the full-blown flowers are due to the dyes placed

in the soil by the Ryls, which are drawn through the little veins in

the roots and the body of the plants, as they reach maturity. The Ryls

are a busy people, for their flowers bloom and fade continually, but

they are merry and light-hearted and are very popular with the other

immortals.

Next came the Knooks, whose duty it is to watch over the beasts of the

world, both gentle and wild. The Knooks have a hard time of it, since

many of the beasts are ungovernable and rebel against restraint. But

they know how to manage them, after all, and you will find that certain

laws of the Knooks are obeyed by even the most ferocious animals.

Their anxieties make the Knooks look old and worn and crooked, and

their natures are a bit rough from associating with wild creatures

continually; yet they are most useful to humanity and to the world in

general, as their laws are the only laws the forest beasts recognize

except those of the Master Woodsman.

Then there were the Fairies, the guardians of mankind, who were much

interested in the adoption of Claus because their own laws forbade them

to become familiar with their human charges. There are instances on

record where the Fairies have shown themselves to human beings, and

have even conversed with them; but they are supposed to guard the lives

of mankind unseen and unknown, and if they favor some people more than

others it is because these have won such distinction fairly, as the

Fairies are very just and impartial. But the idea of adopting a child

of men had never occurred to them because it was in every way opposed

to their laws; so their curiosity was intense to behold the little

stranger adopted by Necile and her sister nymphs.

Claus looked upon the immortals who thronged around him with fearless

eyes and smiling lips. He rode laughingly upon the shoulders of the

merry Ryls; he mischievously pulled the gray beards of the low-browed

Knooks; he rested his curly head confidently upon the dainty bosom of

the Fairy Queen herself. And the Ryls loved the sound of his laughter;

the Knooks loved his courage; the Fairies loved his innocence.

The boy made friends of them all, and learned to know their laws

intimately. No forest flower was trampled beneath his feet, lest the

friendly Ryls should be grieved. He never interfered with the beasts

of the forest, lest his friends the Knooks should become angry. The

Fairies he loved dearly, but, knowing nothing of mankind, he could not

understand that he was the only one of his race admitted to friendly

intercourse with them.

Indeed, Claus came to consider that he alone, of all the forest people,

had no like nor fellow. To him the forest was the world. He had no

idea that millions of toiling, striving human creatures existed.

And he was happy and content.

\*\* Some people have spelled this name Nicklaus and others Nicolas,

which is the reason that Santa Claus is still known in some lands

as St. Nicolas. But, of course, Neclaus is his right name, and

Claus the nickname given him by his adopted mother, the fair nymph

Necile.

5. The Master Woodsman

Years pass swiftly in Burzee, for the nymphs have no need to regard

time in any way. Even centuries make no change in the dainty

creatures; ever and ever they remain the same, immortal and unchanging.

Claus, however, being mortal, grew to manhood day by day. Necile was

disturbed, presently, to find him too big to lie in her lap, and he had

a desire for other food than milk. His stout legs carried him far into

Burzee's heart, where he gathered supplies of nuts and berries, as well

as several sweet and wholesome roots, which suited his stomach better

than the belludders. He sought Necile's bower less frequently, till

finally it became his custom to return thither only to sleep.

The nymph, who had come to love him dearly, was puzzled to comprehend

the changed nature of her charge, and unconsciously altered her own

mode of life to conform to his whims. She followed him readily through

the forest paths, as did many of her sister nymphs, explaining as they

walked all the mysteries of the gigantic wood and the habits and nature

of the living things which dwelt beneath its shade.

The language of the beasts became clear to little Claus; but he never

could understand their sulky and morose tempers. Only the squirrels,

the mice and the rabbits seemed to possess cheerful and merry natures;

yet would the boy laugh when the panther growled, and stroke the bear's

glossy coat while the creature snarled and bared its teeth menacingly.

The growls and snarls were not for Claus, he well knew, so what did

they matter?

He could sing the songs of the bees, recite the poetry of the

wood-flowers and relate the history of every blinking owl in Burzee.

He helped the Ryls to feed their plants and the Knooks to keep order

among the animals. The little immortals regarded him as a privileged

person, being especially protected by Queen Zurline and her nymphs and

favored by the great Ak himself.

One day the Master Woodsman came back to the forest of Burzee. He had

visited, in turn, all his forests throughout the world, and they were

many and broad.

Not until he entered the glade where the Queen and her nymphs were

assembled to greet him did Ak remember the child he had permitted

Necile to adopt. Then he found, sitting familiarly in the circle of

lovely immortals, a broad-shouldered, stalwart youth, who, when erect,

stood fully as high as the shoulder of the Master himself.

Ak paused, silent and frowning, to bend his piercing gaze upon Claus.

The clear eyes met his own steadfastly, and the Woodsman gave a sigh of

relief as he marked their placid depths and read the youth's brave and

innocent heart. Nevertheless, as Ak sat beside the fair Queen, and the

golden chalice, filled with rare nectar, passed from lip to lip, the

Master Woodsman was strangely silent and reserved, and stroked his

beard many times with a thoughtful motion.

With morning he called Claus aside, in kindly fashion, saying:

"Bid good by, for a time, to Necile and her sisters; for you shall

accompany me on my journey through the world."

The venture pleased Claus, who knew well the honor of being companion

of the Master Woodsman of the world. But Necile wept for the first

time in her life, and clung to the boy's neck as if she could not bear

to let him go. The nymph who had mothered this sturdy youth was still

as dainty, as charming and beautiful as when she had dared to face Ak

with the babe clasped to her breast; nor was her love less great. Ak

beheld the two clinging together, seemingly as brother and sister to

one another, and again he wore his thoughtful look.

6. Claus Discovers Humanity

Taking Claus to a small clearing in the forest, the Master said: "Place

your hand upon my girdle and hold fast while we journey through the

air; for now shall we encircle the world and look upon many of the

haunts of those men from whom you are descended."

These words caused Claus to marvel, for until now he had thought

himself the only one of his kind upon the earth; yet in silence he

grasped firmly the girdle of the great Ak, his astonishment forbidding

speech.

Then the vast forest of Burzee seemed to fall away from their feet, and

the youth found himself passing swiftly through the air at a great

height.

Ere long there were spires beneath them, while buildings of many shapes

and colors met their downward view. It was a city of men, and Ak,

pausing to descend, led Claus to its inclosure. Said the Master:

"So long as you hold fast to my girdle you will remain unseen by all

mankind, though seeing clearly yourself. To release your grasp will be

to separate yourself forever from me and your home in Burzee."

One of the first laws of the Forest is obedience, and Claus had no

thought of disobeying the Master's wish. He clung fast to the girdle

and remained invisible.

Thereafter with each moment passed in the city the youth's wonder grew.

He, who had supposed himself created differently from all others, now

found the earth swarming with creatures of his own kind.

"Indeed," said Ak, "the immortals are few; but the mortals are many."

Claus looked earnestly upon his fellows. There were sad faces, gay and

reckless faces, pleasant faces, anxious faces and kindly faces, all

mingled in puzzling disorder. Some worked at tedious tasks; some

strutted in impudent conceit; some were thoughtful and grave while

others seemed happy and content. Men of many natures were there, as

everywhere, and Claus found much to please him and much to make him sad.

But especially he noted the children--first curiously, then eagerly,

then lovingly. Ragged little ones rolled in the dust of the streets,

playing with scraps and pebbles. Other children, gaily dressed, were

propped upon cushions and fed with sugar-plums. Yet the children of

the rich were not happier than those playing with the dust and pebbles,

it seemed to Claus.

"Childhood is the time of man's greatest content," said Ak, following

the youth's thoughts. "'Tis during these years of innocent pleasure

that the little ones are most free from care."

"Tell me," said Claus, "why do not all these babies fare alike?"

"Because they are born in both cottage and palace," returned the

Master. "The difference in the wealth of the parents determines the

lot of the child. Some are carefully tended and clothed in silks and

dainty linen; others are neglected and covered with rags."

"Yet all seem equally fair and sweet," said Claus, thoughtfully.

"While they are babes--yes;" agreed Ak. "Their joy is in being alive,

and they do not stop to think. In after years the doom of mankind

overtakes them, and they find they must struggle and worry, work and

fret, to gain the wealth that is so dear to the hearts of men. Such

things are unknown in the Forest where you were reared." Claus was

silent a moment. Then he asked:

"Why was I reared in the forest, among those who are not of my race?"

Then Ak, in gentle voice, told him the story of his babyhood: how he

had been abandoned at the forest's edge and left a prey to wild beasts,

and how the loving nymph Necile had rescued him and brought him to

manhood under the protection of the immortals.

"Yet I am not of them," said Claus, musingly.

"You are not of them," returned the Woodsman. "The nymph who cared for

you as a mother seems now like a sister to you; by and by, when you

grow old and gray, she will seem like a daughter. Yet another brief

span and you will be but a memory, while she remains Necile."

"Then why, if man must perish, is he born?" demanded the boy.

"Everything perishes except the world itself and its keepers," answered

Ak. "But while life lasts everything on earth has its use. The wise

seek ways to be helpful to the world, for the helpful ones are sure to

live again."

Much of this Claus failed to understand fully, but a longing seized him

to become helpful to his fellows, and he remained grave and thoughtful

while they resumed their journey.

They visited many dwellings of men in many parts of the world, watching

farmers toil in the fields, warriors dash into cruel fray, and

merchants exchange their goods for bits of white and yellow metal. And

everywhere the eyes of Claus sought out the children in love and pity,

for the thought of his own helpless babyhood was strong within him and

he yearned to give help to the innocent little ones of his race even as

he had been succored by the kindly nymph.

Day by day the Master Woodsman and his pupil traversed the earth, Ak

speaking but seldom to the youth who clung steadfastly to his girdle,

but guiding him into all places where he might become familiar with the

lives of human beings.

And at last they returned to the grand old Forest of Burzee, where the

Master set Claus down within the circle of nymphs, among whom the

pretty Necile anxiously awaited him.

The brow of the great Ak was now calm and peaceful; but the brow of

Claus had become lined with deep thought. Necile sighed at the change

in her foster-son, who until now had been ever joyous and smiling, and

the thought came to her that never again would the life of the boy be

the same as before this eventful journey with the Master.

7. Claus Leaves the Forest

When good Queen Zurline had touched the golden chalice with her fair

lips and it had passed around the circle in honor of the travelers'

return, the Master Woodsman of the World, who had not yet spoken,

turned his gaze frankly upon Claus and said:

"Well?"

The boy understood, and rose slowly to his feet beside Necile. Once

only his eyes passed around the familiar circle of nymphs, every one of

whom he remembered as a loving comrade; but tears came unbidden to dim

his sight, so he gazed thereafter steadfastly at the Master.

"I have been ignorant," said he, simply, "until the great Ak in his

kindness taught me who and what I am. You, who live so sweetly in your

forest bowers, ever fair and youthful and innocent, are no fit comrades

for a son of humanity. For I have looked upon man, finding him doomed

to live for a brief space upon earth, to toil for the things he needs,

to fade into old age, and then to pass away as the leaves in autumn.

Yet every man has his mission, which is to leave the world better, in

some way, than he found it. I am of the race of men, and man's lot is

my lot. For your tender care of the poor, forsaken babe you adopted,

as well as for your loving comradeship during my boyhood, my heart will

ever overflow with gratitude. My foster-mother," here he stopped and

kissed Necile's white forehead, "I shall love and cherish while life

lasts. But I must leave you, to take my part in the endless struggle

to which humanity is doomed, and to live my life in my own way."

"What will you do?" asked the Queen, gravely.

"I must devote myself to the care of the children of mankind, and try

to make them happy," he answered. "Since your own tender care of a

babe brought to me happiness and strength, it is just and right that I

devote my life to the pleasure of other babes. Thus will the memory of

the loving nymph Necile be planted within the hearts of thousands of my

race for many years to come, and her kindly act be recounted in song

and in story while the world shall last. Have I spoken well, O Master?"

"You have spoken well," returned Ak, and rising to his feet he

continued: "Yet one thing must not be forgotten. Having been adopted

as the child of the Forest, and the playfellow of the nymphs, you have

gained a distinction which forever separates you from your kind.

Therefore, when you go forth into the world of men you shall retain the

protection of the Forest, and the powers you now enjoy will remain with

you to assist you in your labors. In any need you may call upon the

Nymphs, the Ryls, the Knooks and the Fairies, and they will serve you

gladly. I, the Master Woodsman of the World, have said it, and my Word

is the Law!"

Claus looked upon Ak with grateful eyes.

"This will make me mighty among men," he replied. "Protected by these

kind friends I may be able to make thousands of little children happy.

I will try very hard to do my duty, and I know the Forest people will

give me their sympathy and help."

"We will!" said the Fairy Queen, earnestly.

"We will!" cried the merry Ryls, laughing.

"We will!" shouted the crooked Knooks, scowling.

"We will!" exclaimed the sweet nymphs, proudly. But Necile said

nothing. She only folded Claus in her arms and kissed him tenderly.

"The world is big," continued the boy, turning again to his loyal

friends, "but men are everywhere. I shall begin my work near my

friends, so that if I meet with misfortune I can come to the Forest for

counsel or help."

With that he gave them all a loving look and turned away. There was no

need to say good by, by for him the sweet, wild life of the Forest was

over. He went forth bravely to meet his doom--the doom of the race of

man--the necessity to worry and work.

But Ak, who knew the boy's heart, was merciful and guided his steps.

Coming through Burzee to its eastern edge Claus reached the Laughing

Valley of Hohaho. On each side were rolling green hills, and a brook

wandered midway between them to wind afar off beyond the valley. At

his back was the grim Forest; at the far end of the valley a broad

plain. The eyes of the young man, which had until now reflected his

grave thoughts, became brighter as he stood silent, looking out upon

the Laughing Valley. Then on a sudden his eyes twinkled, as stars do

on a still night, and grew merry and wide.

For at his feet the cowslips and daisies smiled on him in friendly

regard; the breeze whistled gaily as it passed by and fluttered the

locks on his forehead; the brook laughed joyously as it leaped over the

pebbles and swept around the green curves of its banks; the bees sang

sweet songs as they flew from dandelion to daffodil; the beetles

chirruped happily in the long grass, and the sunbeams glinted

pleasantly over all the scene.

"Here," cried Claus, stretching out his arms as if to embrace the

Valley, "will I make my home!"

That was many, many years ago. It has been his home ever since. It is

his home now.

MANHOOD

1. The Laughing Valley

When Claus came the Valley was empty save for the grass, the brook, the

wildflowers, the bees and the butterflies. If he would make his home

here and live after the fashion of men he must have a house. This

puzzled him at first, but while he stood smiling in the sunshine he

suddenly found beside him old Nelko, the servant of the Master

Woodsman. Nelko bore an ax, strong and broad, with blade that gleamed

like burnished silver. This he placed in the young man's hand, then

disappeared without a word.

Claus understood, and turning to the Forest's edge he selected a number

of fallen tree-trunks, which he began to clear of their dead branches.

He would not cut into a living tree. His life among the nymphs who

guarded the Forest had taught him that a live tree is sacred, being a

created thing endowed with feeling. But with the dead and fallen trees

it was different. They had fulfilled their destiny, as active members

of the Forest community, and now it was fitting that their remains

should minister to the needs of man.

The ax bit deep into the logs at every stroke. It seemed to have a

force of its own, and Claus had but to swing and guide it.

When shadows began creeping over the green hills to lie in the Valley

overnight, the young man had chopped many logs into equal lengths and

proper shapes for building a house such as he had seen the poorer

classes of men inhabit. Then, resolving to await another day before he

tried to fit the logs together, Claus ate some of the sweet roots he

well knew how to find, drank deeply from the laughing brook, and lay

down to sleep on the grass, first seeking a spot where no flowers grew,

lest the weight of his body should crush them.

And while he slumbered and breathed in the perfume of the wondrous

Valley the Spirit of Happiness crept into his heart and drove out all

terror and care and misgivings. Never more would the face of Claus be

clouded with anxieties; never more would the trials of life weigh him

down as with a burden. The Laughing Valley had claimed him for its own.

Would that we all might live in that delightful place!--but then,

maybe, it would become overcrowded. For ages it had awaited a tenant.

Was it chance that led young Claus to make his home in this happy vale?

Or may we guess that his thoughtful friends, the immortals, had

directed his steps when he wandered away from Burzee to seek a home in

the great world?

Certain it is that while the moon peered over the hilltop and flooded

with its soft beams the body of the sleeping stranger, the Laughing

Valley was filled with the queer, crooked shapes of the friendly

Knooks. These people spoke no words, but worked with skill and

swiftness. The logs Claus had trimmed with his bright ax were carried

to a spot beside the brook and fitted one upon another, and during the

night a strong and roomy dwelling was built.

The birds came sweeping into the Valley at daybreak, and their songs,

so seldom heard in the deep wood, aroused the stranger. He rubbed the

web of sleep from his eyelids and looked around. The house met his

gaze.

"I must thank the Knooks for this," said he, gratefully. Then he

walked to his dwelling and entered at the doorway. A large room faced

him, having a fireplace at the end and a table and bench in the middle.

Beside the fireplace was a cupboard. Another doorway was beyond.

Claus entered here, also, and saw a smaller room with a bed against the

wall and a stool set near a small stand. On the bed were many layers

of dried moss brought from the Forest.

"Indeed, it is a palace!" exclaimed the smiling Claus. "I must thank

the good Knooks again, for their knowledge of man's needs as well as

for their labors in my behalf."

He left his new home with a glad feeling that he was not quite alone in

the world, although he had chosen to abandon his Forest life.

Friendships are not easily broken, and the immortals are everywhere.

Upon reaching the brook he drank of the pure water, and then sat down

on the bank to laugh at the mischievous gambols of the ripples as they

pushed one another against rocks or crowded desperately to see which

should first reach the turn beyond. And as they raced away he listened

to the song they sang:

"Rushing, pushing, on we go!

Not a wave may gently flow--

All are too excited.

Ev'ry drop, delighted,

Turns to spray in merry play

As we tumble on our way!"

Next Claus searched for roots to eat, while the daffodils turned their

little eyes up to him laughingly and lisped their dainty song:

"Blooming fairly, growing rarely,

Never flowerets were so gay!

Perfume breathing, joy bequeathing,

As our colors we display."

It made Claus laugh to hear the little things voice their happiness as

they nodded gracefully on their stems. But another strain caught his

ear as the sunbeams fell gently across his face and whispered:

"Here is gladness, that our rays

Warm the valley through the days;

Here is happiness, to give

Comfort unto all who live!"

"Yes!" cried Claus in answer, "there is happiness and joy in all things

here. The Laughing Valley is a valley of peace and good-will."

He passed the day talking with the ants and beetles and exchanging

jokes with the light-hearted butterflies. And at night he lay on his

bed of soft moss and slept soundly.

Then came the Fairies, merry but noiseless, bringing skillets and pots

and dishes and pans and all the tools necessary to prepare food and to

comfort a mortal. With these they filled cupboard and fireplace,

finally placing a stout suit of wool clothing on the stool by the

bedside.

When Claus awoke he rubbed his eyes again, and laughed, and spoke aloud

his thanks to the Fairies and the Master Woodsman who had sent them.

With eager joy he examined all his new possessions, wondering what some

might be used for. But, in the days when he had clung to the girdle of

the great Ak and visited the cities of men, his eyes had been quick to

note all the manners and customs of the race to which he belonged; so

he guessed from the gifts brought by the Fairies that the Master

expected him hereafter to live in the fashion of his fellow-creatures.

"Which means that I must plow the earth and plant corn," he reflected;

"so that when winter comes I shall have garnered food in plenty."

But, as he stood in the grassy Valley, he saw that to turn up the earth

in furrows would be to destroy hundreds of pretty, helpless flowers, as

well as thousands of the tender blades of grass. And this he could not

bear to do.

Therefore he stretched out his arms and uttered a peculiar whistle he

had learned in the Forest, afterward crying:

"Ryls of the Field Flowers--come to me!"

Instantly a dozen of the queer little Ryls were squatting upon the

ground before him, and they nodded to him in cheerful greeting.

Claus gazed upon them earnestly.

"Your brothers of the Forest," he said, "I have known and loved many

years. I shall love you, also, when we have become friends. To me the

laws of the Ryls, whether those of the Forest or of the field, are

sacred. I have never wilfully destroyed one of the flowers you tend so

carefully; but I must plant grain to use for food during the cold

winter, and how am I to do this without killing the little creatures

that sing to me so prettily of their fragrant blossoms?"

The Yellow Ryl, he who tends the buttercups, made answer:

"Fret not, friend Claus. The great Ak has spoken to us of you. There

is better work for you in life than to labor for food, and though, not

being of the Forest, Ak has no command over us, nevertheless are we

glad to favor one he loves. Live, therefore, to do the good work you

are resolved to undertake. We, the Field Ryls, will attend to your

food supplies."

After this speech the Ryls were no longer to be seen, and Claus drove

from his mind the thought of tilling the earth.

When next he wandered back to his dwelling a bowl of fresh milk stood

upon the table; bread was in the cupboard and sweet honey filled a dish

beside it. A pretty basket of rosy apples and new-plucked grapes was

also awaiting him. He called out "Thanks, my friends!" to the

invisible Ryls, and straightway began to eat of the food.

Thereafter, when hungry, he had but to look into the cupboard to find

goodly supplies brought by the kindly Ryls. And the Knooks cut and

stacked much wood for his fireplace. And the Fairies brought him warm

blankets and clothing.

So began his life in the Laughing Valley, with the favor and friendship

of the immortals to minister to his every want.