FABLES AND FOLK TALES.

FATHER ‘LIME-STICK’ AND THE FLOWER-PECKER.

Old Father Lime-stick once limed a tree for birds and caught a Flower-pecker (a small bird about as big as one’s thumb). He was just about to kill and eat it when the bird cried out, “O Grandfather, surely you are not going to eat me? Why, flesh, feathers and all, I am no bigger than your thumb!” “What?” said the old man, “do you expect me then to let you go?” “Yes,” said the bird, “only let me go, and I will fetch you such a talisman as never was—a Bezoar-stone as big as a coconut and worth at least a thousand.” Said the old man, “Do you really mean it?” “Really, I do,” replied the bird. “Just let me go, and I’ll bring it to you.” Then (on being released) he
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flew off and perched on a tree, and began to preen his feathers, to get rid of the bird-lime. And presently the old man said, “Where has that bird got to? Bird, where is the Bezoar-stone you promised to bring me, the one that was worth at least a thousand?” “Out-on-you,” was the reply, “this is really too ridiculous. Just think of me, with my body as big as your thumb, carrying a Bezoar-stone as big as a coconut! It really is too absurd. Why, have I even got the strength to lift it?” At this the old man held his peace. “Well,” continued the bird, “you will gain nothing by repenting that you set me free. Only remember in future not to undertake an affair quite out of keeping with your own powers. Neither try to get your arms round a tree too big for your embrace, nor attempt to climb one higher than your strength permits you.”
from an Eastern Forest

THE KING OF THE TIGERS IS SICK.

WHEN the Great King of All the Tigers was sick, the Tiger-Crown-Prince made obeisance and said, “If my Lord will taste of the flesh of every beast of the field peradventure my Lord may recover.” So the Great King commanded the Crown-Prince to summon every kind of beast into his presence, and as they appeared the King ate of them. Only the Mouse-deer, who was likewise summoned, refused to appear.

Therefore the great King’s wrath was kindled against the Mouse-deer and in the end he too was fain to appear. And when he appeared he was questioned by the King. “Why did you not attend at the first when we had summoned hither every kind of beast that lives in the field?” The Mouse-deer replied, “Your slave could not approach your Majesty because of a dream of certain medicine
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that would make your Majesty well.” The King replied, “What medicine was this of which you dreamed?” “Your slave dreamed that the only remedy for your Majesty’s sickness was for your Majesty to seize and devour That which is Nearest your Majesty.”

Immediately on hearing this the Great King of the Tigers seized the Prince of the Tigers and devoured him also. And straightway the King was cured, and the Mouse-deer himself became Crown-Prince in turn.
from an Eastern Forest

THE MOUSE-DEER'S SHIPWRECK.

"COME," said the Mouse-deer to the Stump-tailed Heron, "come and sail with me to Java." So they set sail, and Friend Mouse-deer held the tiller and Friend Heron spread the sail. And the wind blew from the North. Soon however Friend Mouse-deer got drowsy, and let the boat fall out of the wind.

At this Friend Heron said, "Why does the boat fall off? How is your helm, Friend Mouse-deer?" "I was only taking a few winks," said he. "Bring her up to the wind again," said the Heron. And the Mouse-deer replied, "All right. I'm 'on the spot,'" (said he). Presently however he dozed again, and the Heron exclaimed, "Oh, if that's to be it, you may die and be done with. I'll peck a hole in this boat of ours and you'll go to the bottom."

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But the Mouse-deer said, "Please don't, I'm such a bad hand at swimming." So they sailed on. And the Mouse-deer dozed a third time. At this the Heron could contain himself no longer, and said, "Confound you, Friend Mouse-deer, for sleeping at the helm." And losing his temper he pecked a hole in the boat, and the boat let in the water and Friend Heron flew away. But the Mouse-deer swam struggling with his feet in the midst of the sea.

Presently there came up a young Shark who exclaimed, "I'll have a meal off you this time at all events." But the Mouse-deer answered, "What, Friend Shark, you'll make a meal off me? why, in place of the little flesh I've got, if you'll carry me ashore, I'll teach you some excellent Magic which will save you from ever having to hunt for your food again." To this the Shark replied, "Agreed. If you'll teach me your 'excellent Magic' I'll carry you ashore." So the Mouse-deer got upon Friend Shark's back, and was carried straight ashore.

And on their arrival the Mouse-deer said, "Wait here a bit, while I go and get the simples."
II. "But presently he dragged the Shark up on to the dry beach, and made butcher's-meat of him."
from an Eastern Forest

And going aland he hunted up a rattan (cane) creeper and took it back with him and said, “Now I’ll give you the simples I spoke of,” and bound it fast to Friend Shark’s tail. And presently the Shark said, “Why have you made the line fast to my tail?” But the Mouse-deer replied, “Keep quite quiet till I have tied you up properly, and then I’ll give you the simples.” But presently he dragged the Shark up on to the dry beach, and made butcher’s-meat of him. Just then however a Tiger came up, exclaiming, “Here’s really a good meal for Me, for once in a way!” To this, however, the Mouse-deer replied, “What is the use of eating me, when there’s already plenty of butcher’s-meat and to spare?” “Very well, I’ll share it with you,” said the Tiger. The Mouse-deer replied, “You may share it with me by all means, if you will only go and get some water to do the cooking.” So the Tiger went off to get water and presently came back with it.

“Wash the meat before you roast it,” said the Mouse-deer. The Tiger took the meat and washed it in the water. “Go and fetch fire and roast it,” said the Mouse-deer. The Tiger fetched
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fire and came back to do the cooking. And when the meat was done, “Now go and fetch some drinking water,” said the Mouse-deer, “and we’ll have our meal together.” So the Tiger went off again to fetch the drinking water. But the Mouse-deer in the meantime made off with the Shark’s meat and climbed up with it to the top of a She-oak Tree. And presently the Tiger came back and found both Mouse-deer and meat missing. At this he exclaimed, “For once in a way, Mr Mouse-deer, you’ve fairly cheated Me; if we don’t meet again no matter, but if we do, I’ll be the death of you.” And here the story ends.