

The Fox



FT MEADE
GenColl

PZ 10
.3
.N334
F
Copy 1

That Wanted Nine Golden Tails

Kathleen Gray Nelson

THE DEVIN-ADAIR CO. New York



Class PZ10

Book .3 N334F

Copyright N^o _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

**THE FOX THAT WANTED
NINE GOLDEN TAILS**



“The most beautiful girl he had ever seen stood before him.”

The Fox That Wanted Nine Golden Tails

BY
Kathleen Gray Nelson



THE DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY
NEW YORK

PZ 10
3
N 334
F

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY
THE DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY
All rights reserved



81.25

OCT -7 1915

© Cl. A 410923
101.

THE FOX THAT WANTED NINE GOLDEN TAILS

CHAPTER I

HE WAS a Japanese fox, and although he looked just like any other fox, he knew a few things that his American brothers have never heard about even to this day. One of these things was that if he lived to be one hundred years old without ever being chased by a dog, he could become a beautiful woman; if he lived for five hundred years and never a dog pursued him, he could be changed into a mighty wizard who would know more than any man on earth; but, better than all, after a thousand years of peace he

THE FOX THAT WANTED

would turn into a celestial fox and have nine golden tails.

Now a beautiful woman does very well in her place and it is a great honor to be a wise man, but a fox with nine golden tails is the most wonderful thing in all the world. For that reason when the fox was very young, only about sixty or seventy-five, he thought he would refuse to be changed into either a woman or a wizard and would wait for his thousandth birthday.

“There are enough pretty women and wise men in the world now,” he explained to his friends of the forest. “The pretty women make the trouble and the wise men try to straighten it out, and they are both kept busy. They don’t have half as much fun as a fox.” But as the years went by he grew so tired of skulking and hiding

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

about, and being nothing but a common, every-day, bushy-tailed gray fox that he almost decided to compromise the matter.

“After all, there are worse things in the world than pretty women,” he said, scratching his ear, “and wise men have their uses.”

What settled the question quite suddenly was a most exciting adventure he had just when he had begun to think he was cunning enough to outwit all the dogs on the Island of Japan. Now, he had had a great deal of experience in this line, and it was no wonder he flattered himself his dodging tactics were perfect. His ear was so trained he could hear a dog barking miles away, and he could smell a pack of hounds even further than he could hear them. Besides, when he looked at their tracks he knew exactly how long it had

THE FOX THAT WANTED

been since they passed that way, and as he had many acquaintances among the birds and bees and butterflies, they, too, often gave him timely warning.

He had also traveled extensively and knew all the safe places for a fox to stop. At last, after enduring many hardships and sleeping in swamps and on beds of nettles, and sometimes having to run all night and not sleep at all, and being forced to move so many times that he never had any home feeling, he had discovered the most delightful spot imaginable.

It was a beautiful wood toward the north of the island, where the gnarled old trees were so thick and crooked and the weeds so tall that the sun never touched the ground, and it was so dark and gloomy there men said it was the home of gnomes

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

and goblins and no one could be induced to pass through it. Even the little streams gurgled hoarsely and their waters were black, and the great owls couldn't tell when it was night and so hooted throughout the day, and bats were always flying about with shrill screams.

As many wild creatures looking for peace found their way here and never again went out of the forest, he had much good company. There were foxes, bears, birds, deer, monkeys, rabbits, squirrels, pigeons, ducks, and a host of tiny things like worms, beetles, scorpions, mice, ants, lizards, centipedes, frogs, grasshoppers, eels, snails, crabs and caterpillars, and also a wild hen and her mate, who had a very hard time ever raising a family, a pouyou brought all the way from South America with the initials of a sailor who would

THE FOX THAT WANTED

never see it again cut on its brown shell armor, crickets that the Japanese call grass larks and that sing more sweetly there than any place in the world, a tortoise so many hundreds of years old he didn't remember when he was born, a rusty old crocodile who called himself Luxuriant-Thick-Mud-Master and a parrot that had known the misery of living in a cage until once the door was left open. Then he went away without saying good-bye and flew straight over the hills and rivers and rice fields until he lit on a tree in this wood. How he chuckled when he knew he had reached the land he had so often heard about, the land the birds call Napatantutu, which in their language means Stay Here Always. And at first he thought it a great joke to scream "Look out," and a few other human words not

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

so polite, and throw all the animals in a panic. But after he had been there a while he either reformed or forgot how men talked and so bothered them no more.

The tortoise having lived longer than any of the others, had had time to find out more, and he said there was a huge monster in a far-distant part of the wood that was neither man nor beast, but more dangerous than either.

“Its eyes were bright as any glass,
Its scales were hard as any brass,”

he declared, and when it roared the whole earth grew dark with the smoke from its steaming nostrils, and when it laughed a flame came out of its mouth that lit up the sky, and this Terrible Thing was called a dragon. It goes without saying they were all very careful to keep away

THE FOX THAT WANTED

from the particular place where the dragon was said to live, and as none of them had ever seen it, they were not sure it was there.

The snail had been heard to stoutly declare he wouldn't run from it anyway, but as the orang-outang reminded him, it was very easy to be brave before you saw it coming, but he had heard of snails that got in such a hurry they left their houses behind them. The bear asked the very important question: "How many legs has a dragon?" And when the tortoise said it must have at least a million, since a centipede had a hundred, the bear was comforted, for as he wisely told the fox, one need not be afraid of anything if it has more than four legs.

Now there wasn't much difference between day and night in Napatantutu, for

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

both were happy times, and they could eat when they wished and sleep when they wished, and they didn't have to do anything unless they liked to do it. Sometimes they would eat and sleep all day, and at night, when the green eyes of the owls shone like lanterns and the fireflies lit up the wood with their little lamps, they would meet in a wonderful dell all lined with moss softer than velvet carpet, and there they would romp and play until morning.

The frogs would sit in a solemn circle on toadstools, the worms, because they wanted to see what was going on, would crawl up on the grand stand, which was the pouyou's back, the ants would hold wee pink and blue flowers over them for parasols because they tried to be fashionable, the monkey was always the clown, the

THE FOX THAT WANTED

quiet tortoise the judge and the fox was the mischief maker, but too sly to ever be caught in his tricks.

The frog liked to show how far he could jump, the deer always wanted to run a race, the monkey would put up a target for them to throw at, the bear would dance on his hind legs, while the crickets and the grasshoppers were the band, and when the circus was over the porcupine would invite them to a quill-ting party.

Or if they grew tired of fun and frolic the pouyou would tell them stories about a land far beyond the Sun's Nest, where the birds and butterflies, the parrots and lizards were redder than red and greener than green; and again of a wide world of water with houses that rocked all the time floating on it, but where these houses came from or where they went he had been too

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

sick to find out, although he had been in one for many sad months.

And when the thunder rumbled and flashes of lightning shot through the leaves, and the owls shut their eyes in terror and the poor little fireflies put out their lights, they would whisper to each other that the dragon was around, and scamper away and hide until morning.

And then when it was daylight they wouldn't be a bit frightened, and each one would say the other ran first, and he only ran because some one behind pushed him and he couldn't help it. And they would pooh! pooh! and declare in a chorus they didn't believe there was any such thing as a dragon. But the fox, who was usually a big talker, never had anything to say except once, when he told them quite seri-

THE FOX THAT WANTED

ously he hoped there was a real, true, live dragon. But no one believed him.

They did not know that when he was a baby fox, only about the size of a cat, and lived in the Fertile Plain of Sweet Flags, one cool and dewy night his mother made a bed of leaves behind a log, and as she cuddled him close to her warm bosom she told him how to know if the dogs were anywhere around.

She said when the wind brought him a hot breath out of a cold nose, a breath that smelt like it had a bark in it, he must listen with both ears, and after that if he heard a sound that was neither hungry nor angry, but came full tilt out of a throat just bursting with joy, he would know that the dogs were on his trail, for they only chased animals for the fun of catching them, and because a fox was so cun-

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

ning, it was great sport to run him down. And if he saw strange tracks, in which had lodged a caterpillar's hair or an ant's egg, the dogs had passed the day before, but if the tracks were bare, the feet that made them were not far away.

And she added if he were smart enough to never, never let the dogs get after him, when he was a thousand years old a dragon would give him nine golden tails. It was true no one had ever seen a fox with more than one tail, but in the *Kojiri*, or *Tails of Ancient Things*, which was written on the bark of the oldest trees, it had always been told that there would be one fox who would in this way become the hero of his race, and perhaps he would be that very one if he learned to be clever and careful. And as his mother was the wisest fox on earth, he knew that she knew what

THE FOX THAT WANTED

she was talking about, and he was glad now to hear there was a dragon handy.

In fact, Napatantutu was exactly the kind of a home the fox was looking for, dragon and all, and he was quite sure he could pass a thousand quiet years here without ever hearing the bark of a dog. He no longer jumped at the sound of every crackling twig or put his ear to the ground before he sat down to rest, and often he would lie for hours on some cool knoll licking his paws and thinking up some prank to play on his neighbors. And he grew fat and saucy and lazy, and whisked his one insignificant tail proudly as he walked.

But, alas! there came an end to these delightful days. Late in the afternoon of his hundredth birthday, as he stood watching two ants wage a fierce battle over a

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

grain of rice, close behind him he heard a sound that made his very blood run cold. He raised his head and sniffed the air, then stood trembling.

“The dogs!” he groaned, as a second time, and nearer now, came the awful noise, and he darted like an arrow through the forest.

CHAPTER II

NOW Nio Kuro, a Prince and the most famous hunter in the kingdom, had come in his boat down the river that ran through the haunted wood. With him he had brought many servants and his pack of trained leopards, with which he hunted, and which were swifter and had keener scent than any dogs. Possibly Nio Kuro had never heard of this forest, or it may have been that he became so excited when the leopards started on their wild chase that he forgot to be afraid of goblins. At any rate, he dashed headlong into the wood, encouraging his leopards with loud shouts, and his servants, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

The fox was crashing through the

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

underbrush just ahead of his pursuers, now tearing his way through hanging vines and again leaping over rocks and streams. The leopards came closer and closer behind him. On they flew through swamps and thickets, into thorn bushes and bramble patches and across deep ravines, and not even the wind could keep up with them. At last the poor fox was tired out. His legs were torn and bleeding, he had left bunches of his fur on many a bush and thorn, his feet were bruised and lame and his breath almost gone.

Too late he found that he had slept too much and eaten too much during the long, comfortable days he had spent in his new home, and that he could not run as once he did when he was thin and lithe and his legs were hard and his feet like rubber. Panting, gasping, his tongue hanging out,

THE FOX THAT WANTED

foam dripping from his mouth, he went blindly on in irregular leaps. The leopards were gaining on him every moment.

Already he could feel the hot breath of the spotted leader burn his flanks and he knew his time had come. Never, no, never, would he be a fox with nine golden tails! He would merely die a cruel death and his one poor bushy tail would be carried away as a trophy, his body torn to pieces by savage beasts. As this sad picture rose up before him he made one last long leap for liberty, and then his trembling legs could carry him no further. Driven to bay, he snarled angrily, and backing up against the trunk of a great hollow tree, turned to fight his last battle.

Then a strange thing happened.

At that very moment a huge and hor-

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

rible creature he knew at once must be the dragon rose between him and the maddened leopards. Its body was covered with shining silver scales that crackled like burning logs as it moved, its ears were big black wings that flapped like sails, its great claws had nails as long and sharp as knives, its double tongue was two red-hot flames, its glaring eyes seemed balls of fire and its long tail curled and writhed like a mighty snake.

“There has been a mistake,” the dragon breathed, and its words came out in smoke. “You were one hundred years old this morning, and as you have never in all your life had to run from a dog, you should have been given the chance to become a beautiful woman if you wished.”

“Give me the chance now,” panted the fox. “There is nothing I want so much

THE FOX THAT WANTED

as to be a woman, even an ugly one will do.”

When the Prince, who could not keep up with the chase, appeared on the scene, he found the leopards with their tails tucked between their legs and their heads hanging down. There was no fox anywhere, but the most beautiful girl he had ever seen stood before him. For a time Nio Kuro could only look at her, for he was dumb with astonishment. She blushed and drew her long black hair over her face until he could barely see the tip of her nose and her little red mouth. Then she knelt before him.

His attendants now came running up, for he had outstripped them all, and they too stopped speechless with their mouths open. The Prince did not heed them. He bent down over the mysterious maiden

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

and so far forgot his manners that he took both her small hands in his and raised her to her feet, for he wanted to see her face again, and the more he looked at her the lovelier she seemed to him.

“Who are you, O fairest one?” he asked rapturously. “Who is your illustrious father and what is your honored name?” But she gazed about her in a puzzled way and shook her head.

“I do not know,” she answered.

The Prince frowned at her strange reply, for he could scarcely believe his ears, and he even pinched himself under his silken tunic to be sure he was not dreaming. But she was so pretty he could not be angry with her, and as he looked into her soft brown eyes his frown changed into a smile, and he said in a very gentle voice:

“Are you lost? Are there other hunters

THE FOX THAT WANTED

here who have brought you with them and now you wait for them to return?"

"I am all alone," she told him.

He was so surprised he did not know what to say. At last he stammered:

"Perhaps you are only teasing me—or it may be that you are afraid of me because I am a stranger. But no harm shall come to you through me—that I promise you. I am Nio Kuro, a Prince of Hi-nomoto, the Land Where the Day Begins. Forgive my rudeness in speaking to you, but will you not let me guard you and take you back to your friends?"

"I have no friends and nowhere to go," she sighed.

"But whence do you come, O sweetest creature in all the kingdom?" cried the bewildered Prince. Again she shook her head.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

“I belong to the forest,” she said simply.

“Henceforth you shall belong to me,” the Prince declared, and so he took her back to his Bamboo Castle as his bride. There every one wondered at this fair maid of the forest, but no one could find out who were her parents or where her home had been or anything about her, and the Prince was so charmed with her grace and beauty he never bothered his head about these questions that so worried other people. She loved him and he loved her and that was all he cared to know about her, for the Prince was a very clever man.

He bought her the loveliest gowns of purple and yellow satin, all embroidered in roses and green leaves and jeweled butterflies, and she had servants to wait upon her and fan her and a red and gold jinricksha to ride in. He called her a

THE FOX THAT WANTED

queer Japanese word which means Wild Flower, for he said she grew and blossomed in the forest and he transplanted her and made her a Princess. But that was just his own pet name for her, and he ordered that throughout the Land Where the Day Begins she should be known as the Princess Hoshi, or the Star Princess.

And he gave a great supper and invited all the people of his kingdom to it, and in the center of the table was a cake so big it looked like a snow-covered mountain, and around it were blooming all the joyous and lucky flowers, while out in the court was a maple tree covered with what every one thought at first was autumn leaves, but these leaves turned out to be little cakes of every color under the sun, and each guest was given a red paper bag filled with them to carry home. No wonder

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

they were all glad the Prince had found a Princess Hoshi, and wished him and his Star Princess long life and much joy. It is true there were some who, as soon as they got away, nodded their heads knowingly as they munched their cakes, and said the Princess was an odd person and perhaps the Prince would one day wish he had left her in the forest.

Now, a Bamboo Castle is a charming place to live. There were wind bells hung all along the eaves and they tinkled with the whisper of every passing breeze, and the windows were of paper, so that when the Princess wanted to look out of doors all she had to do was to poke a hole in one of them with her finger and by putting one eye there she could see everything that was passing and no one could catch a glimpse of her, and there were hundreds of mats

THE FOX THAT WANTED

on the floor of every room, and these were soft and cool to walk upon even in Doyo, or the Period of Greatest Heat, and the Prince went all the way to the town of Hirosaki to get her a bronze mirror that she might see how pretty she was, and she often looked in it. He also brought her a long-haired, fluffy little dog, but she screamed and would have nothing to do with it, so in its place he gave her a red cat without any tail that purred pleasantly whenever she touched it.

At night she slept on a pillow of shining black wood, and on it were sprawling, straggling letters of gold that spelled the name of the Baku, for the Baku in Japan has the body of a horse, the face of a lion, the trunk and tusks of an elephant, the tail of a cow and the feet of a tiger, and it

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

eats up evil dreams. In fact, it never eats anything else, and yet it is always fat. So not only did the Princess have everything comfortable and agreeable while she was awake, but even in her sleep only sweet dreams could come to her.

And on summer evenings when there wasn't any moon the Prince would have many bright-colored paper lanterns lit and hung in the garden, and lamps that looked like flowers would be swung in the trees, and then he would have his servants, who had been busy all day catching them in nets, turn out thousands of fireflies with their little golden lights all glowing, and the garden would be changed into fairyland. The Princess would sit in an arbor fringed with wistaria blossoms and sip her tea, while some of her maidens would sing for her and others with much bowing and

THE FOX THAT WANTED

waving of fans would dance in a slow and solemn fashion.

And again when the moon was a big, soft, bright ball and the clouds were very blue, she and the Prince and her maidens would go to the pavilion in the center of the garden and climb the many steps to the top, where there was a room called the moon-viewing Place of Peace. And the Prince would tell his flower-wife in the lovely language of the land that the sun was a golden crow and the moon a jeweled hare, and of how Princess Splendor, the dear daughter of the moon, once ran away, and when her mother called her she climbed home on a moonbeam crying silver tears, and all her tears took wings and flew down to earth and turned into fireflies.

But the Princess would have thoughts

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

they could not understand and ask questions that would make even Nio Kuro smile. Once she said to him quite seriously:

“Did you ever see a dragon?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “There were many of these wriggling creatures made of red and yellow and pink and green paper, with lanterns for eyes, carried in the festival procession last year. They were very amusing.”

“Paper dragons,” she cried scornfully. “I mean live ones.”

“I have read of them and seen many pictures of them,” he told her. “There was one called Riu Gu, the Dragon King of the World Under the Sea, and when he sneezed the waters would jump up and tumble over each other in mighty waves, and every time the dragon caught cold

THE FOX THAT WANTED

many a fishing boat went down. But that was years and years ago, and now all the dragons are dead.”

And she only laughed and said no more, but she knew better. Perhaps the trouble was she knew too much to be a Princess, and that was why she at last got dreadfully bored.

But for many months everything went on beautifully at Bamboo Castle and the Prince and Wild Flower were deliciously happy. It was very nice to have a magnificent home, and a lake full of gold fish, and a shady garden where fountains trickled drops of music, and little crystal streams rushed over the rocks and sang to the lilies on their banks. And it was pleasant to wear lovely clothes, and eat sharks' fins and birds' nest soup and bamboo shoots and lotus bulbs and other delicacies

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

that only very rich people can have in Japan. And she was glad to think she wasn't a fox, hiding out in brier patches, always listening for dogs and sometimes hungry. Surely it was much better to be a Princess than a fox.

Then gradually a change came over her, and although she had everything she wanted, she was no longer happy. Sometimes in the day when she lingered by the lake and watched the little gold fish dart about like flames in the clear water and jump up on the bank to get the lard cakes and rice balls she had brought them, she sighed, and for no reason at all scolded the mincing, bias-eyed lady who carried a gorgeous parasol over her.

And again in the starlit night, when she walked in the perfumed garden and listened to the musical drip, drip of the

THE FOX THAT WANTED

fountain, and heard the frogs calling to each other from the lotos pools, there came to her the memory of an enchanted land, where bats circled and shrieked, and great owls squatted solemnly on the knotty branches of the trees, winking and blinking and never sleeping, and a mighty dragon with glaring eyes and shining scales lived in a hollow tree. And strange to say, when she remembered this dark and lonely forest her own garden seemed to her but a stupid place.

After a while she grew tired of living in a house, even if it was a Bamboo Castle, and whenever she went out having men carry her about in a stuffy chair, and she longed for the shade of the far-away wood, the sound of the hoarsely gurgling streams, for a run in the early morning through the dew-laden grass, for the hum of the bees,

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

the smell of the dead leaves and a nap on a mossy bank.

So she fretted and grew so discontented that ugly lines crept in between her brows, the rose all went out of her cheeks, and she was so cross the Prince was once heard to say he had married a nettle in place of a wild flower. She slapped her servants, quarreled with her mother-in-law (which in Japan is an awful thing to do), and was altogether as disagreeable as a woman could be. The Prince was patient. He stood it for a long time without saying a word and tried in every way to please his royal lady. One day he asked:

“Is there nothing, Fair One, would make you kind and sweet again? If anything will make you happy, only say what it is and I will go even to the ends of the earth for it.”

THE FOX THAT WANTED

After thinking a moment the Princess answered:

“Take me back to the forest where you found me. If I could only see that dear place again I would be content ever after. But leave the cruel leopards behind,” she added quickly.

“There is much game there,” he said regretfully. But she frowned and stamped her little foot angrily.

“You shall not kill anything,” she declared. “If you do you will break my heart.”

“Perhaps it were best not to hunt there,” he acknowledged, thinking of the evil spirits that were said to roam this forest. “It is the Land of Roots and the Home of Darkness. Why do you want to go there? Now that you are out of it I

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

should think you would want to stay away.”

But she began to cry and got in such a temper that he was willing she should have her way, so he had his boat brought out and made ready. The next morning he and the Princess, with only the rowers to keep them company, started on their long journey. The Princess was silent, and whenever he spoke to her she answered him so angrily that he ceased to try to talk to her. So they sat on the deck, never saying a word, until the fifth morning, when they stopped at the very spot he had moored his boat the day he had found her and brought her away with him.

CHAPTER III

WHEN the Princess looked into the mysterious land, where not a sound was heard, she gathered up her rich silken skirt in both hands, and jumping ashore, ran as fast as her feet would carry her over the same ground where once the leopards had chased her when she was a fox. She lost one of her sandals, her hair, that was fastened high on her head with fans and golden pins, slipped down on her shoulders, and the jeweled clasp at her waist dropped off, but she never stopped or looked behind. The Prince followed as fast as he could, but so fleet of foot was she that she left him far behind, and when she reached the big tree with the hollow trunk she fell down before it, crying:

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

“Oh, most powerful dragon, make me a fox again, for now I know it is better to be a fox than a woman.”

Then out of the hollow tree came the same hideous creature she had seen before, and when it opened its yawning mouth its teeth shone like ivory spears, and she thought it was about to swallow her. But the dragon only looked at her and sniffed scornfully until the smoke from its nostrils darkened the air.

And when the Prince came in search of Wild Flower only a gray fox darted through the tangled weeds and bushes and was lost in the deep, dark wood. The Prince looked after it longingly.

“Oi! Oi!” he cried (which is the Japanese way of saying “Hello!”) “Would that I had my leopards with me. Then

THE FOX THAT WANTED

would I give chase and catch you, my fine fellow.”

But he had no time to bother with a fox when his loved one was lost in this queer and dangerous place, and he rushed frantically about the forest calling, “Wild Flower! Wild Flower! Dear Wild Flower!” But though he sought her for many days, and all the rowers joined in the hunt, he never saw her again. So he went back to the Bamboo Castle very sad and lonely, but every one there, tired of her airs and her temper, said she was a witch and he was well rid of her. When he thought over how peevish she had become he was inclined to agree with them, and finally he married a pretty and amiable little Princess and Wild Flower was forgotten.

And out in the shadowy depths of a cer-

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

tain wood a cunning gray fox smiled until he showed his shining teeth when a saucy bird, mocking the Prince's call, repeated, "Wild Flower! Wild Flower! Dear Wild Flower!" in its merry song. Then he lay down and rolled over in the wet leaves and licked his fur contentedly.

"I'm glad I'm out of that," he said. "Now I'll wait until the thousand years are up. Nothing will satisfy me except to be a fox with nine golden tails."

With never a regret he went back to the old life, and hunted mice and creeping things when he got hungry, and when there was neither moon nor stars, ran through the black night to the farm house far beyond the edge of the forest, and came back in the gray of the morning with his lips all bloody and his paws as well—

THE FOX THAT WANTED

the signs of his midnight feast in the chicken yard.

The wonderful wood, so dark, so still, so cool, put on patches of color with the passing month, and in the few spots where the sunshine sometimes crept, the trees grew vivid with the burning glory of autumn or pale and cold with the first blue blossoms of spring, then softly pink with azalea blooms or bright as a glowing sunset with the flowers of peach and cherry.

And in the Period of Greatest Light the leaves would cover the ground and make soft beds where all the wild things could sleep snug and warm during the Period of Greatest Cold. As for the fox, though he was a bit quarrelsome, the years passed pleasantly and peacefully. No one ever again came there to hunt, and such queer things had been whispered abroad

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

about what happened in this pathless country, where lived such strange creatures as never man had seen, that travelers went far out of their way rather than pass through it.

And on stormy nights, when the wind howled and windows rattled and the tempest-torn trees swayed and groaned, people all over the island barred their doors tight and fast, for they said: "The spirits of the wood are out to-night." And they lit incense sticks to keep them from coming in, and as they sipped their tea, told stories about the weird wood. A favorite one was that a beautiful Princess was kept there a prisoner by a cruel dragon, and of how a mighty Prince once found her and carried her away to his castle, but she heard the dragon calling, calling, calling her all the day and all the

THE FOX THAT WANTED

night, and at last either she slipped out of the castle and went to him or else he came and stole her away, no one knew just which way it was.

And while other brave men would willingly go to rescue her, yet they all agreed what was the use, for the dragon would get her again and they would have their trouble for nothing. So she had been there now for hundreds and hundreds of years, but was still young and lovely—so the story ran. But like all legends, it got a little twisted in the telling.

So many summers and winters came and went that every one except the fox forgot to count them. At last a famine spread over all the land. It was the Period of Greatest Heat. No rain had fallen for many a week. The earth was dry as a dead leaf, the grass turned brown,

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

the streams dried up, the birds all died or went away, one by one the animals perished, and the once beautiful Napatantutu was grim and desolate.

The fox was now five hundred years old. His coat of fur was whiter than when he was young, his legs were not so nimble and some of his teeth were gone. He searched the wood for food and water and could find neither. He grew so thin that his ribs stuck through the skin, so weak he trembled like the aspen when he walked. The pains of hunger gnawed him day and night and he felt as if he must surely die.

Then he mustered up all the strength he had left and crawled to the big tree with the hollow trunk. There he fell down, a heap of skin and bones, and called feebly for the dragon. When this terrible creat-

THE FOX THAT WANTED

ure came out it blew fire and smoke at him in awful wrath.

“I thought you wanted to be a fox with nine golden tails. Why have you disturbed me?” it thundered.

“A fox with nine golden tails is a nice thing to talk about,” the poor fox whimpered, “but a wise man is better than a dead fox, even if it had twenty golden tails, so make me a wizard, Great One, and then will I trouble you no more.”

“Bah!” cried the dragon with such fury that the flames from its mouth flew up to the top of the hollow tree. When they died away the fox was nowhere to be seen. In his place stood a very solemn-looking old man with green spectacles and a bald head.

“Dear me, this is most peculiar,” he mumbled, as he pulled his long gray whis-

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

kers thoughtfully. "I will go to the nearest village and get something to eat, then I'll come back and talk to that dragon a while. If I can find out some of his secrets I will make myself the wisest man that ever lived and then will I become the richest."

From one end of the land to the other, and even to the islands far off the coast, spread the fame of the great magician who lived in a cave on the sea shore. Princes talked about him in their castles, and the very poorest people in their little bamboo-covered huts as they counted their grains of rice told of the wonderful wisdom of the Cave Man, as he was called. "He can do many strange things, but there is no use going to him if you have not money," they said sadly. "He is hungry for gold."

THE FOX THAT WANTED

Meanwhile the Cave Man waxed rich. The floor of his cavern home was strewn with shining gold, ornaments of silver and ivory were on the walls, and he had great bags of glittering jewels and treasures of untold value, all given him by those who had come to him for help.

He could tell when it would rain and when a man must plant his crop to reap a full harvest, where money was hidden if it had been stolen and who had taken it, who was the right girl for a man to marry and who was his secret enemy; he knew what would cure the sick, what would drive away evil spirits and everything that any one could ask him. But he was also very cruel. When the poor sought him in their sorrow he took away their last cent, and he gave neither to the sick nor to the hungry.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

“A wise man is greater than Princes or Kings,” he boasted. “Some day I will rule the land and all men shall pay tribute to me.” And he grew richer and richer every day. But still he was not happy. No matter how many costly and beautiful gifts were brought him, he was never satisfied. He became so mean and miserly that at last the good King said:

“We must rid ourselves of this man. Too long have I borne patiently with him and allowed him to oppress my people. He is very dangerous. If left alone he may do great harm and become the curse of the Kingdom. He has wisdom and wealth and they have not contented him. What will he want next? Our heads, perhaps.”

So one night while the Cave Man slept the officers of the King crept in, and after

THE FOX THAT WANTED

beating him with their spears, bound him hand and foot and carried him off to prison. All the gold and precious stones and splendid gifts the people had brought him were sold and the money given to the poor, and there was feasting and rejoicing everywhere, for every one had grown to hate and fear him.

“You might have done much good,” the King told him, “but you worked only evil. I shall keep you in prison for many years and see if you will learn to be good and happy as well as wise.”

The wizard went back to his dark little cell and pulled his long beard all the night long. When the sun peeped over the big blue mountains the next morning he had not closed his eyes. Like many men, wise and otherwise, he knew better how to manage other people's affairs than his own.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

He had not been able to bring any charms away from the cave, he had neither money nor friends, and in vain he racked his brain for a way of escape from his gloomy prison.

“I hate men,” he cried fiercely. “Why did I ever become one? They are nothing but stupid, two-legged animals. I see plainly now that it is more honor to be even a common gray fox than the wisest man in the world. Oh, that I had never seen that miserable dragon!”

But it did no good to talk this way. He was chained fast to the wall in a horrible dungeon, with nothing but bread and water to live on, and the thing to worry about now was how to get out. Just as he was trying to think up some plan there came the sound of the key turning in the rusty lock.

CHAPTER IV

THE next moment he was surprised to see an ugly old woman coming toward him. She was dressed in a purple satin gown with gold birds embroidered upon it, her bony fingers sparkled with rings, a long chain of pearls was around her neck, and he knew by the crown on her head that it was the Queen-Mother herself.

“I have heard that you were very wise,” she said, peering at him. “If that is true, why don’t you get out of this dark hole?”

“Ah, I could,” he moaned, shaking his head sadly, “but my charms are all in the cave. I have there a key that will unlock any door, a mantle that will make the

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

wearer invisible to mortal eyes, a root that will cure any disease, a piece of money that the one who carries it will never have an empty pocket, and there, too, is the famous pearl that will make the woman who wears it seem the most beautiful woman in the world." The old woman crept closer to him.

"What did you say about a pearl?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Ah, it is a pearl fit for a Queen," he said, pursing up his lips. "It is big as the egg of a swan, shaped like a perfect pear and white as a dragon's tooth. The woman who wears it hung around her neck all men will adore. She will always be young, always the loveliest lady that was ever seen." The eyes of the Queen glittered greedily.

"Where is that pearl, wizard?" she

THE FOX THAT WANTED

asked, grasping his arm so tightly that her claw-like fingers dug into his flesh. But the wizard only smiled.

“The wise man tells not all he knows,” he answered. She caught him by the shoulders and shook him fiercely.

“Speak! Speak!” she commanded. “Tell me where you keep this priceless pearl or I will have your tongue torn out by the roots.”

“That would be a pity,” he said calmly. “Then the pearl would never be found, and no woman would have the glory of being the most beautiful woman in the world.” The old woman screwed up her wrinkled face and tapped her foot impatiently on the stone floor. Then she said with a cunning leer:

“If that pearl were mine—so great is the power of beauty—I would rule the

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

land in place of my step-son the King. Then would you be my chief counsellor and next to me in authority, which surely would be better than spending all your years in a dark dungeon where no one will ever hear of your wisdom. You could live in my palace and have many servants to wait upon you, and if I were the most beautiful woman, you could become the richest man in the kingdom. It would be a sad thing for the pearl to crumble away and never be worn by a woman, and also for the great Cave Man to die a wretched death—perhaps of hunger—in this dirty hole.”

“If I were only free I could bring you the pearl,” the wizard answered. “No one save me can ever get it, for it is watched by a dragon with eyes that are always open and teeth that are sharp and cruel.”

THE FOX THAT WANTED

The Queen looked at the door she had just unlocked.

“I have the key,” she said thoughtfully, “but there is not only the jailer without, but many guards that you must pass.”

“You have much gold,” he suggested, “and yet that pearl is worth more to a woman than all the gold and jewels of the earth. It will bring her everything her heart desires.” She shook her head.

“I cannot buy all the guards,” she told him. Some of them are old and faithful servants of the King. You must find some other way.”

“You speak of ways as if they were easy to find,” he grumbled, and his heart again felt heavy in his breast.

“They should be—for a wise man,” she tauntingly replied. “Surely you must have left your wits in the cave too. But I

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

must be off. The King gives a banquet to-night in honor of his bride, who is called the Fairest Creature of the Flowery Kingdom. And she likes that better than the name of Queen."

"Stay," cried the wizard quickly. "The way is found. Know you the weed with the purple flower that has crimson dots on its petals—a weed with glossy, pointed leaves that grows by every wayside and sends out a strange perfume after the sun goes down?" The Queen nodded. "Well, squeeze the juice from the stem of this weed. A few drops of that in the wine to-night and all the castle will fall into sleep so deep that though I rode away on a prancing steed no one would hear me. See that my keepers drink of that wine. Then open my door, unloose my chains and leave the rest to me." The old woman

THE FOX THAT WANTED

cackled in her thin, shrill voice. Suddenly she stopped and looked at him suspiciously.

“But you will return?” she questioned. “You will bring that precious pearl to me? If you stayed away you would be searched for in every corner of the land. You could not escape my vengeance. No matter how clever you were, the officers of the King would one day find you—even as they found you this time—and when you were caught your head would be brought back to court. Remember my words, Cave Man, if you play me false.”

“Only let me get out, and if I do not return you are welcome to the head of the wisest man in the kingdom,” he told her. “But you must give me seven days—three to go, three to come back, and one day to persuade the dragon to give me the pearl,

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

for he is a jealous monster and ugly when he is roused. It will not be an easy matter to get him to give me his treasure, and no one can steal it from him.

“After the sun has set on the seventh day I will stand before you. Wearing my magic mantle, I will slip by the soldiers and the guards like a puff of wind, and no one will see me pass, no one hear my footsteps. And because this time I will have all my charms with me, no man can harm me. And I will bring you the greatest gift that was ever given to a woman.”

Still chuckling to herself, the old woman unlocked the door of the little cell and slipped away. When she had gone the wizard laughed until his chains rattled. Then he lay down on the hard floor and fell into a peaceful sleep.

That night the banquet in the King's

THE FOX THAT WANTED

palace was a merry affair, and when the rejoicing was at its height the Queen-Mother came in and said:

“Let us send wine to all the servants and to the jailers and even to the guards without, that they may all drink to the health of the lovely Queen.”

“Good! Good!” cried the King, as he raised his cup on high. “Every one in the whole city shall have food and drink to-night. Let it be given freely to all.”

But the eyes of many were already so heavy that they forgot to cheer his words, and soon one by one they fell over as they sat eating and rolled upon the floor. At last even the King was overcome, and went fast asleep in his great carved chair with his crown awry. And all of the servants, having had much wine, lay at their posts like dead men.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

When all was still the Queen-Mother ran to the prison, and taking the keys from the waist of the sleeping jailer, unlocked the wizard's cell. He was expecting her, and he cried impatiently:

“You were long in coming. The people everywhere will soon be astir, and they will capture me and bring me again to the King if they meet me on my way to the cave.” (For he did not want her to know that he was going straight to the haunted forest.) While he talked she had unfastened his chains with trembling hands.

“Go! Go!” she entreated. “There is not a moment to be lost. Even now the fireflies are putting out their lights and waiting for the dawn. See, here is gold to pay for your journey and food to last you for a week. Hurry back to me with the wonderful pearl, and when I am the

THE FOX THAT WANTED

most beautiful woman in the land you shall be the greatest man.”

“When I return you shall be in truth the fairest woman men ever looked upon,” he promised solemnly. Then he wrapped his cloak about him and bowed himself from her presence.

When he was out of sight of the old lady he laughed to himself, and ran like a shadow through the sleeping town. On and on he went, over the Fertile Plain of Sweet Flags and through the long fields of waving rice, never once stopping to get his breath until he stood on the bank of the river. There he found a boat fastened to the shore, and soon he was rowing up the stream with all his might.

But not yet was he safe. Because so many people throughout the country

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

knew the Cave Man and hated him, he was in constant fear of being seen. In the daytime he hid in the tall rushes on the river bank and slept, and all the night he plied his oars with feverish zeal, until his hands were blistered and his back about to break. Once a party of fishermen came so close to the reedy shore where he lay trembling that he could hear every word they said. And what he heard did not make him any more comfortable.

“The King has offered a great price for the head of the Cave Man,” said one, “and men are hunting all over the island for him. Even if he were a needle they would find him. On the night of the great banquet he cast a spell on the court and caused every one to fall asleep. Then he opened his prison door and ran away. Now the King will know no peace until he

THE FOX THAT WANTED

is dead. And whoever brings his head to the city will be a rich man for life."

"I wish I could be the lucky one," said another. "I've been looking in every boat to-day for him." It seemed to the frightened Cave Man they must hear his heart beating, so near he was, and perhaps they would had they not been so busy talking. When at last they went away he did not dare to move for a long time, and that night he rowed harder and faster than ever.

When the morning of the sixth day dawned he cried aloud for joy, for in the dim light he saw the familiar shadows of Napatantutu. When he had come nearer, even within the shade of the great trees and the overhanging vines, he leaped out of the boat, and as soon as his feet had touched the ground, started toward the

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

home of the dragon. He had thrown away his cloak, his food, his gold, for he no longer had need of them. Once more he was to be free.

In the wood all was silent and lone. Not even a bird was stirring as he sped over the cool, wet grass. The daylight had not yet crept through the thick leaves, and once he stumbled over a dead log and rolled headlong into a muddy hole. The only light he saw came from a frog who had filled himself with fireflies, and they now shone through his round stomach like a shaded lamp as he slept under a sheltering bush.

The darkness was just stealing away when he came to the big hollow tree and knocked twice.

“Alas, Most Powerful One, I am here again,” he cried, as the dragon writhed

THE FOX THAT WANTED

slowly out. "It is quite as bad to be a wise man as a pretty woman—one is stupid, the other useless. A fox is a far finer creature than either of them, so make me a fox again, O mightiest of living things, and this time will I be content for the thousand years to pass."

"Will you never be satisfied?" snorted the dragon. "You are not willing to be what nature made you and you don't like anything I do for you. Still, as you have not yet been chased by a dog, I must grant your wish. But the next time you get into trouble you needn't come to me—remember that!" And a moment later a gray fox ran past the hollow tree and with mighty leaps and bounds went crashing through the thicket.

CHAPTER V

A GAIN the fox went back to his old sly ways, and for a time was quite pleased to be only a fox and live in beautiful Napantatutu. Of men and men's ways he had quite enough, he was often heard to say, and he would cock his head to one side and wink and grin every time he thought of the poor old lady who was still waiting for her pearl.

The animals came and went, and their children and their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, and still he lived on. Most foxes would have been happy to have such a quiet, comfortable time in an enchanted land and wouldn't have found anything to worry about. But after a few hundred years he again got restless and

THE FOX THAT WANTED

tired and nothing was good enough for him. He spent all his time planning what he would do when he was a fox with nine golden tails. He talked of nothing else, and became the greatest bore in the forest. And he made so much fun of the peacock, saying it wore painted feathers, that the poor bird got ashamed to spread its tail.

Soon he was shunned by all of the animals. The frog hopped away when it saw him coming, the grasshopper whirred up to the top of the tallest tree, the owls rolled their eyes at him, flapped their wings and away they went, and even the lazy old tortoise, that every day came out to take its nap in a little spot of sunshine, tried to crawl away in a hurry when it heard him coming, and sometimes in its haste rolled all the way down the river bank.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

Year by year he went from bad to worse. He found fault with everybody and everything, and was so cross that after a while he didn't have a single friend. He not only quarreled with all of his neighbors and snapped and snarled at every one who spoke to him, but he greedily swallowed any little helpless creatures that crossed his path, so that at last all of the animals hated him even more than they feared him.

Then, too, he refused to have anything to do with any other foxes that found their way into the peaceful wood, and made their lives miserable with his airs.

"You are nothing but common beasts," he told them haughtily. "You will never have even one golden tail, while I will one day be the wonder of the world."

"Hadn't you better wait until you get

THE FOX THAT WANTED

your fine tails before you brag so much?" asked one saucy young fellow. "It may not be any better than being a woman or a wizard or even an old gray fox."

"A fox with nine golden tails is the most magnificent thing that was ever seen or heard about," he snarled. "I will be the King of Beasts and even men will worship me," and he walked away switching his one bushy tail angrily. And he could only console himself by thinking what a sad thing it was not to be appreciated.

"They are all jealous of me," he told himself, as he didn't often get a chance to talk to any one else. And he fretted and fumed from morning until night, counting the years that must pass, and he grew old and thin worrying because the days were so long.

But everything comes if you only wait

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

long enough, and at last the day came when he was a thousand years old. He had stayed all night by the hollow tree so that he would be on hand early in the morning, and long before it was day he began to knock and bark and call for the dragon. Even before the sun had touched the treetops the dragon came out rubbing its eyes sleepily.

“How dare you wake me up?” cried the angry creature, blowing out fire and sparks and smoke until it looked like a volcano.

“This is my thousandth birthday, and I want my nine tails of gold,” whined the fox.

“You are a blithering old bother,” roared the dragon. “You don’t know what you want and you don’t want anything after you get it. Well, this is your

THE FOX THAT WANTED

last visit to me. Don't let me ever see you again." With another snort it raised its forked tail all covered with silver scales high above its head, opened its huge mouth and yawned furiously.

Then it slowly wriggled back into its dark bed, and standing without was a fox with nine big, bright, glittering, golden tails. Never, never had such a thing been seen by man or beast!

Even the fox was stunned for a moment when he found what had happened to him. Then he puffed out with pride until he almost burst, and held his head so high that he nearly fell over backward. He stood alone—the wonder of the whole world!

His first thought was to run and show himself to all the animals of the forest. And he started to skip joyfully away, but

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

alas! he was as one rooted to the spot. Now he found to his horror that his golden tails were so heavy he could not walk, much less run. He had never thought about this, and he stood trembling in his tracks, wondering just what he would do about it. Besides, although he knew they must be very beautiful, he could only twist his head far enough around to see the tip end of one of them, and he wanted so to see them all and know how very grand he really did look.

He kept lifting up first one foot and then another, and straining and tugging in his struggle to trot off and let himself be seen. But never again would he be able to run through the cool weeds and leap over the streams and roll in the soft moss and kick up his heels in rustling beds of leaves, for nine tails of gold were an awful

THE FOX THAT WANTED

load to carry. As he grew more used to them he found he could manage to totter along with slow and painful steps, but it was very hard work. But when he thought of what the other poor animals would think and say when they beheld him in all his glory he again puffed out with pride.

After all, if he couldn't get about very well now, he would have all of them to wait upon him, so it didn't much matter. All he need do was to stand up and be admired. It is true he wasn't a bit comfortable, for the tails were like lead, and already his poor back was aching, but still one would be willing to have back-ache to be the most splendid creature on earth. There never had been, there never again would be anything like him. He was the one superb ornament of the world. He kept repeating this to himself with much

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

satisfaction. And if he couldn't walk, he could ride in the future on the backs of his adoring slaves and perhaps that was better.

As the fox strutted feebly and slowly through the leaves and over the dewy grass where he had once scampered and frolicked, suddenly he saw a procession of all the creatures of the wood, with the monkey ahead, coming to meet him, for they were very curious to know if he would get his golden tails. He stopped and stood silent and haughty, waiting for them. They gathered around him, but said never a word. And so he cried out shrilly:

“Behold your King! I am the most wonderful animal in all the world. Never again on land or on sea will there be bird or beast or fish or fowl that can compare

THE FOX THAT WANTED

with me. Stupid things that you are, fall down and worship me.”

Now, what the animals saw was not anything beautiful or wonderful, but just the same old gray fox, with his back bald in patches, his legs trembling and his body twisted crooked by the weight of nine stiff yellow tails that stuck out behind him. And the more they looked at him the funnier figure he cut. As he ended his proud speech he tried to spread his magnificent tails and strut as he had seen the peacock do, but he toppled over backward and kicked and squirmed in his efforts to get on his feet again.

At this the animals set up a shout that echoed through the forest. The monkey laughed until he had to hold on to the limb of a tree by his tail to keep from falling off, the bear grinned at first and then let

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

out loud ha! ha's! the hen cackled, the owls whoo-ed, the crickets chirped, the pigeons coo-ed with such glee they gurgled and choked, the rooster crowed, the parrot shrieked, the peafowl screamed, the ducks squawked, the frogs croaked and young Luxuriant-Thick-Mud-Master bellowed until the earth shook.

The fox was at first dazed. Then he thought that he was so marvelous an object they had all gone crazy at the sight of him, and he waited for them to come to their senses. When they had quieted down a bit he said scornfully:

“Foolish things of the wood, I am not going to hurt you. If you obey me I shall treat you kindly. But you must find me the daintiest food and carry me everywhere I wish to go. Now hurry and get me my breakfast.”

THE FOX THAT WANTED

But the animals saw that a fox with nine golden tails was but a helpless thing, not as much to be feared as the spry and snappy old fellow they had known for so many years. So some of them laughed and some of them sat down to watch him.

“Obey me!” he screamed, his tongue hanging out with rage. “There never before was anything made like me.”

“No, because you are useless,” said the tortoise.

“A fox with nine golden tails is the greatest thing in the world,” he went on, not noticing the tortoise.

“How do we know they are not brass tails?” asked the owl, and winked wisely.

“And who is going to keep them polished?” asked the practical ant, who was known as a good housekeeper.

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

“Who? Who-oo?” hooted the owl.

“Not I,” said the grasshopper promptly, for he was afraid of work.

The fox, puzzled, helpless and angry, could only grit his teeth and glare at them. A spider, remembering how he had killed her whole family with a blow of his paw, crept up and stung his leg, the wee soft rabbits that he knew were such toothsome dainties hopped around him and laid back their pretty pink ears and sniffed, the fat and fuzzy little chickens, who had been taught to hide under mother’s wing and hold their breath when he came in sight, now flapped their baby wings under his very nose and then ran away and cried “peep! peep!” at him, and the monkey giggled and threw a nut that hit one of his fine tails a sounding whack.

For once the quick wit of the fox de-

THE FOX THAT WANTED

serted him. He could only turn up his nose and snarl slowly, for he was trying with all his might to plan what to do next. He was the richest fox in the world—the only living creature with nine golden tails—but what good were they to him if these silly creatures would not wait on him and worship him? In all the years he had lived among them he had been greedy and selfish and cross and ugly, and now he had not a single friend. But he didn't blame himself, he blamed them. And the rage shut up within him boiled and bubbled until he foamed at the mouth. How he hated every one of them! Oh, if he could only take off his golden tails long enough to whip the saucy monkey! And how very nice one of those downy little chicks would taste!

“I have all the gold in the wood,” he

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

said at last. "I am your King and you are too stupid to know it."

"Only men are ruled by a man because he has gold," said the wise old tortoise. "We know better. Had you been brave and kind and good we would now be proud of you. But you have thought only of yourself, now help yourself. You have all that you wanted—be satisfied."

"As it is daylight I don't see very well," said the owl, blinking, "but it doesn't seem to me that you are any handsomer with your nine golden tails than you were with your old gray brush."

The fox started. Could he believe his ears? Not any handsomer than any common fox—he who had nine wonderful, glittering tails of purest gold?

"You are jealous of me—jealous—jealous," he barked.

THE FOX THAT WANTED

But as the animals did nothing but laugh a great fear came over him. Perhaps after all his tails were put on wrong! It had really been quite dark when the dragon came out, and as he was not used to giving away golden tails, he might have made a mistake and stuck them on backward. Something surely was the matter with them. He must go to the river at once and see for himself.

But he who had once been so light of foot that he hardly left a track in the softest mud as he skipped along, now found it very, very hard to get across the little strip of grass and weeds that lay between him and the forest mirror. He put forth every bit of his strength and swayed and tottered along, and all the animals followed him, scampering and laughing and pushing and shoving each other. And

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

when he at last reached the bank, squirm and twist as he would, he could not get a glimpse of himself. He screwed his head around until his throat hurt, he twisted his thin body until his ribs stuck out, he stood on three legs and fell over on his nose trying to stand on two, but always the tails seemed to turn around the wrong way, and the very best he could do was to see one of them. The animals kept making fun of him as they watched him.

“What are you going to do with them?” politely asked the bear.

“Do you have to wear them all the time?” quacked the goose.

“Oh, no, he is going to lend them to the tortoise sometimes,” snickered the monkey. The fox, who had almost tied himself into a knot in his efforts to throw

THE FOX THAT WANTED

a proper shadow, did not take the trouble to notice them.

“One tail is enough for me,” screamed the peacock, as he spread his shimmering fan and danced until he got so pigeon-toed he had to stop.

“My grandmother—who was nine hundred if she was a day—told me it wasn’t any fun to be better than anybody else,” said the parrot, snapping his bill. “One got so dreadfully lonely.”

But the fox only turned his head first to one side and then to the other in his struggle to find out how he looked. He strained and tugged until his tongue hung out and water dripped from his jaws, he tried so hard to move his stiff tails that his muscles cracked, and all the time he kept backing out, out, until he stood on the very tip edge of the high bank. But he was

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

so busy looking for his shadow that he never thought about anything else, and suddenly the dirt crumbled under his feet and without a moment's warning he tumbled backward into the river with such a mighty splash and splutter that all the animals got a shower.

When he hit the water he struck out with all four of his feet, for he was a good swimmer, but the tails of gold were like iron weights upon his back, and he only churned the water into foam as he kicked and snorted. Then with one great struggle that sent the ripples flying in every direction, he shot down like a torpedo to the very bottom of the deep river. And he never came up again! The animals shrieked and ran to the river bank.

The stork, who had been standing on one leg all the morning, took down his

THE FOX THAT WANTED

other in a hurry and hopped over into the rushes, where he stretched his long neck as far as ever he could and peeped into the muddy stream, the monkey wrapped his tail around a bush to keep from falling as he screwed up one eye and tried in vain to see what had become of the fox, Luxuriant-Thick-Mud-Master toppled off the bank in his fright and made another splash, a fish, not knowing what to make of so much noise, jumped out in the grass and turned a somersault, the owl snapped both his glassy eyes, but saw nothing, the bullfrog dived down as far as he could and came up coughing and choking, but the fox, golden tails and all, was gone forever.

“He made a plunge where the stream was deep
And saw too late his blunder,
For he had hardly time to peep
Before his foolish head went under,”

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

sadly said the tortoise, who prided himself on knowing a lot of real poetry. But the rabbit winked his long ears and whispered to the ant: "Good ride-dance!"

Once again hundreds and hundreds of years went by, as they always do if you wait a while. Every animal that had known the poor fox had been dead a long time, and those that came after them told this tale as I have told it to you, only they weren't quite certain it was true, and some of the young beasts said it was nothing but a fairy story.

But one day a pearl fisher came up the river in his little boat, and while he was diving down in the deepest part of the water he found a queer-looking object sticking up in the mud, and when he had brought it ashore and washed and

THE FOX THAT WANTED

scrubbed it, he found it was a tail of pure gold. Hardly believing his good fortune, he took it away with him, and many wise men looked at it through spectacles and microscopes, and weighed it and thumped it and tasted it and wrote long papers about it filled with so many big words that no one ever read them.

And to-day you may see this very same tail, looking rather old and rusty, in one of the museums of a foreign city, and beside it is a card telling that this is undoubtedly the golden feather that the great King No-Thing-Fan of Japan once wore in his crown, which shows that even very wise people sometimes make mistakes. But it was the fairy godmother to the poor pearl diver, who sold it for so much money that he was able to buy a cozy little bam-

NINE GOLDEN TAILS

boo cottage for his family and to ever after give them as much as they wanted to eat, and so one of the tails of the fox did some good in the world after all.

THE END.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00025605172

