

"I do indeed;—but a Town Hall!"

"Is it not good enough?—Think of the examples they had. The early folk were not afraid of great things;—remember the tunnel; the railway; the Provincial Chambers; the Cathedral—"

"Yes, yes; I know," I interrupted; "but my dear nymph!—you do not know the people of Christchurch. The works you mention are as the relics of a bygone era;—the present people will not venture on such undertakings. 'Wait,' they say, 'wait and see what Wellington does; what Auckland does;—wait and see if money won't get cheaper;—we don't think it would pay;—wait, perhaps someone will make us a bequest.' Now the older era never thought in that way, or talked in that way; they had no care for what others did or would do; they had no time to wait for visionary bequests or more visionary cheap money; their thoughts were big and their acts were big;—but the present people of Christchurch!—my dear nymph—"

But even as I spoke the building slowly faded away, the music died, the lights dwindled;—the rotunda came again, the filagree of trees.

I turned to my nymph, but she too had faded with the rest; and I was sorry;—for I had much more to say to her about these good people of Christchurch.

Kanawa and the Elves.

WAS he really lost? These valleys with their babbling streams, their archways of great ferns, seemed so like one another that he could not say if he were near the village, or if he were a day's journey distant. At times he seemed to remember the rugged trees around him; at others they seemed strange; but before very long he was quite sure he was lost. The bush was dense, and the sun was already sinking towards the tops of the hills behind him. Kanawa scrambled down the rocky stream as fast as he was able; but hurry as he would the darkness fell as the sun sank behind the hills, and still he was in the midst of the bush.

He had reached an open space where the water, having fallen over a rugged, fern-covered bank, spread in a wide pool before again hurrying on down the valley. It was almost dark. The bush before him seemed even denser than that through which he had passed, and Kanawa thought with terror of the creatures which might lurk in the dark shadow of the tangle-covered trees. He called loudly, but there was no answer to his calls. This came of wandering too far! Never again would he venture such a distance alone. Tired of calling, he made up his mind that it would be better to stay in the open glade where he was than to venture down the dark alley through which the water noisily hurried from the pool.

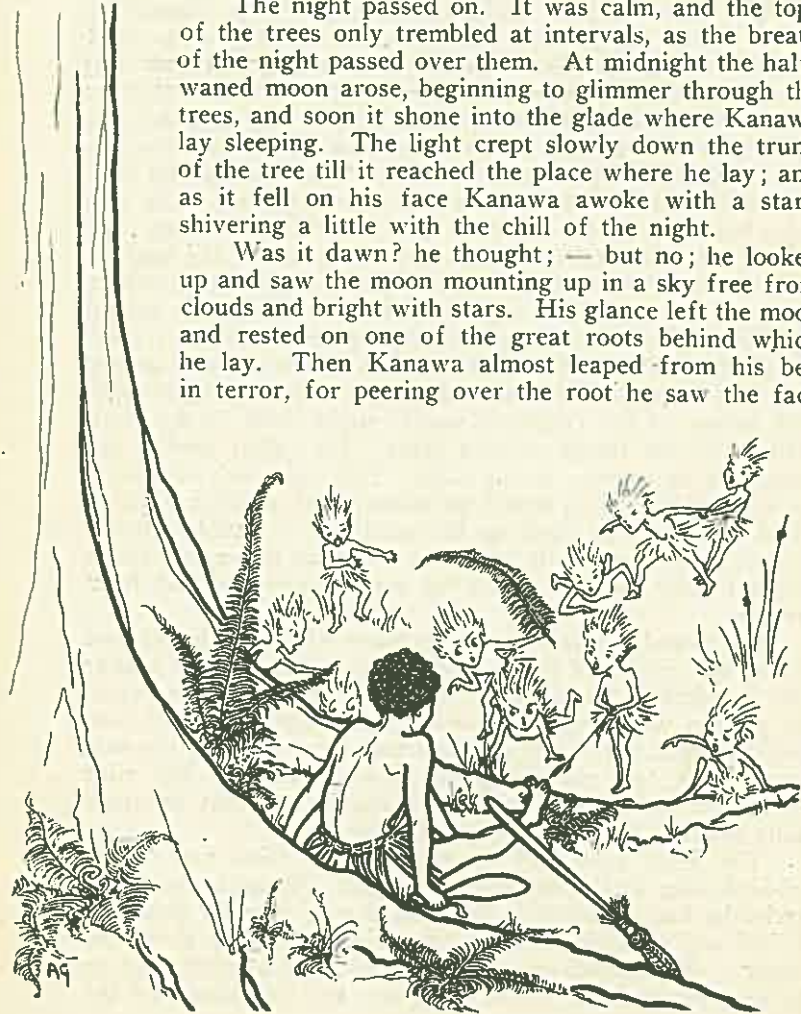
He looked around for some place where he might rest during the night, and in the midst of the glade he saw a huge tree, a pukatea, the trunk of which for some distance from the ground was deeply furrowed, as if buttresses had been placed against it to hold its spreading head towards the sky. Great roots, too, ran along the ground, and in the wide crevice formed by two of these Kanawa saw that he could easily make a snug bed of leaves and fern.

The noisy kaka had ceased its harsh cries, and only a bell-bird sang in the deepening twilight. Kanawa ate a few berries he had collected in the bush above, then lay down on his bed and watched the stars appearing in the sky above the treetops. He looked from the stars to the waterfall, and on the wet, mossy bank beside it he saw the tiny lamps of the

glow-worms, faintly burning as if the fairy-folk were about their evening labours. Watching them, he soon grew drowsy. The bell-bird had ceased its song, and he heard nothing but the babbling of the stream as it fell into the pool, and now and again the cry of the morepork as it flew about noiselessly, seeking food in the upper parts of the trees. Kanawa nodded; the falling water was a lullaby, and soon he fell fast asleep, dreaming he was at the village again, enjoying himself with his companions.

The night passed on. It was calm, and the tops of the trees only trembled at intervals, as the breath of the night passed over them. At midnight the half-waned moon arose, beginning to glimmer through the trees, and soon it shone into the glade where Kanawa lay sleeping. The light crept slowly down the trunk of the tree till it reached the place where he lay; and as it fell on his face Kanawa awoke with a start, shivering a little with the chill of the night.

Was it dawn? he thought; — but no; he looked up and saw the moon mounting up in a sky free from clouds and bright with stars. His glance left the moon and rested on one of the great roots behind which he lay. Then Kanawa almost leaped from his bed in terror, for peering over the root he saw the face



of one of the wood-elves. The elf, catching his look, suddenly disappeared, and presently Kanawa saw two faces peering over the root, — another, and another, until a row of earnest eyes gazed at him from the half-darkness beyond. He scarcely dared move, so filled was he with terror. He had often heard of the elves, but until now had never seen them. He knew they would do him no harm, but it was hard to believe so when he was alone with them—and at night! Why did they watch him so closely? Why did they remain concealed behind the root? Then he heard elfin chattering and elfin laughter, as if the glade were alive with merry fantails. Those who watched him again disappeared, vanishing as if they had been blown out.

Slowly Kanawa sat up, when he saw that the glade was indeed filled with elves; he had lain to rest in their very playground! They ran hither and thither, they climbed the swaying vines of the supple-jacks and lawyers; they seemed to be everywhere. Kanawa glanced towards the waterfall. An old fuchsia tree, fallen from the steep hillside, leaned across the waterfall, its twisted branches with their ragged bark stretching this way and that as if looking for the life that had once been theirs. And now indeed they were full of life;—the elves clambered over them, some mounting the branches that reached the highest, some climbing out on those that stretched towards the fall, laughing as the spray fell over them like mist, gemming them like the round green leaves of the silver-back orchid. Some were high in the trees where the yellow clematis hung in scented loops and trails; some drank nectar from the flowers; some laughed as they startled the sleeping birds; some were themselves startled as a crying morepork brushed past them;—all were merry, and, hearing their laughter Kanawa seemed to forget his fears.

Presently, however, the elves again caught sight of him, and a troop came towards him, grimacing like a band of pigmy warriors. First they crept stealthily, then they rushed as if to attack him. Kanawa grasped his weapons in alarm; but the elves, coming towards him with fierce looks and gestures, turned aside before they reached him, and went off, laughing merrily, as others took their places in the pretended attack. Were they making fun of him? thought Kanawa;—whatever their intentions might be, he would be prepared, and he sat ready with his weapons; but though one band after another charged towards him, they never harmed him—never even touched him.

Perhaps, thought he, they will leave me if I give them my treasures. He took his tiki ornament from his neck, his

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mere from his belt—both were made from beautiful greenstone, skilfully worked, valuable, and delightful to look upon. He hung them on the end of his long wooden staff and reached them towards the elves, laying them on the ground before them. They were delighted. They turned them about, looked at them this way and that. They poised the mere, the beautiful club, one pretending to strike another and falling with the weight of the weapon, whilst his companions laughed merrily. They quite forgot Kanawa.

Whilst the elves thus admired the treasures, Kanawa noted that the white moon grew paler; streaks of light appeared through the trees; the stars faded; day was breaking! Kanawa was overjoyed. The elves, too, saw the daylight appear, and hurried away, singing cheerily, and carrying with them, as Kanawa thought, the tiki and the mere. Soon they were lost to sight and hearing, and he arose, stiff from having sat so long, and still trembling a little with fear. Now the jangle of the birds began; and all his fears left him. The kaka screamed loudly, "Get up! Get up!" but Kanawa was up before them.

He stepped out from the tree, and lo! upon the ground lay his treasures. Had he not seen them carried off by the elves? But no, there they lay. He touched them—they were real; he lifted them—they were his very weapon and tiki. But, strange to say, though he held them in the sunlight, they cast no shadow—it was their shadows only that the wood-elves had carried away.

Kanawa hurried off, and soon reached his village; and when his friends disbelieved his story of the elves, he lifted up his mere, and lo! it cast no shadow; so who could doubt his word?