

THE GREAT STORY-TELLER WHO MADE THE ANIMALS TALK



This is the famous old story-teller Æsop entertaining a group of eager listeners on a hillside on some afternoon in the golden days of Greece, the Greece of long ago. How the Greek boys must have learned to love the sight of that homely face and called out to each other as they saw him coming: "Oh, here's that wonderful man that makes the animals talk!" And the grown-ups liked his stories just as well, for in them Æsop tucked away a lot of sound advice and shrewd criticism of human weaknesses that apply just as much to-day as in the far-away days when first he told them. Perhaps that is why they have lived so long.

ÆSOP (*ē'sōp*). The frogs, according to the fable, were grieved because they had no king and sent ambassadors to Zeus, chief of the gods, to ask him for a ruler. Realizing that the frogs were very stupid, Zeus cast down a log into the pond. The frogs were terrified at the splash it made as it hit the water, and sought shelter at the bottom. When they noticed that the log did not move they grew to despise this lifeless ruler and climbed over the log and squatted upon it.

After some time they again sent messengers who requested the god to appoint another sovereign. This time Zeus sent an eel to the pond. He was an easy-going, good-natured fellow, and the frogs thought that he too made a very poor king.

So they sent a third time to the god to ask for a different ruler. Zeus was now out of patience and sent them a stork, who each day ate up a

frog or two until soon there was none left to croak and complain.

This story, which is said to refer to the seizure of power over Athens by the tyrant Pisistratus, is a very good example of Æsop's fables. Tradition says that Æsop, who lived from about 620 to 560 B.C., was originally a Greek slave, ugly and deformed in person, but of brilliant mind. In his fables animals are made to act and talk as human beings, and moral lessons and bits of wisdom are conveyed in such a forceful and delightful way that they have been popular with young and old for many centuries.

Æsop was freed by his master after a time, and gained such a reputation that he was invited to live at the court of Croesus, King of Lydia. His end came, it is said, when he was sent by Croesus to the temple of Apollo, at Delphi, where he so aroused the anger of the Delphians that he was thrown from a precipice.