

THE STORY OF CORN SILK—A MANDAN LEGEND.

RELATED BY JOSEPH PACKENEAU, ELBOWOODS.

There once lived an Indian girl whose father was a chief, and she had seven brothers who loved her dearly, but because she would not marry any one of their tribe, nor even the son of a great chief who lived a long way from them, they found fault with her and threatened to compel her to marry Black Eagle, a very terrible magician who lived in the land where the sun rises.

Now, Corn Silk was not the least frightened at this threat, for she was a brave girl, and so to show how little she cared, she secretly made ready for a journey to the land of Black Eagle. Early one morning she started out alone on her journey to the land of Black Eagle, carrying only a little bag of corn pemmican for food on her long journey. She met with some strange adventures which there is not time to relate, and traveled a most surprising distance by means

of her magic arts, and at nightfall she came in sight of a small tepee standing at the edge of a large wood.

Being skilled in all manner of wood craft and knowing the ways of all the animals, she saw at once that this was the summer home of the mouse people, the smallest of the underground tribes. She could see the flicker of the fire within and knew from the voices she heard that they were seated around the fire eating their suppers. She heard them telling each other of the difficulty they had met in getting the seeds and other food for their winter store. Said one, "My toe nails are sore from scratching in the ground, and I am dusty and very tired." Said another, "My mouth is sore from biting the seeds out of the husk and carrying them crammed in my cheeks to my little store house deep in the ground. How happy we will be if we can find some better food which will cost us less labor and pain to get."

She waited quietly outside until one of their children came out for more wood to replenish the fire, and, seeing her, ran back quickly, saying, "There is an Indian woman outside." Then Corn-silk heard some one say, "Invite her to come and sit by the fire," so she entered and was made welcome to a seat with the others in the little tepee which by her magic arts she entered without difficulty, making herself of the proper size while she was in their company. As she opened her bag of corn pemmican to eat a little for supper, the oldest mouse in the company asked her what she had in the bag. Upon being told that it was her food, they all desired to taste a little of it. Now, corn pemmican is made of parched corn pounded fine and mixed with buffalo tallow and dried buffalo meat pounded into powder. When each mouse had eaten its portion of the corn pemmican, they all declared that never before had they tasted such delicious food. Then the oldest of the mice said to her, "Corn Silk, we know why you have come on this journey, and because you have shared your food with us without knowing whether it would last you to your journey's end, we will help you when you come to the village of Black Eagle. We will send word to our queen, Grandmother Mole, and she will give orders to us all. You will see her on the fourth day of your journey. Tomorrow night you will come to the home of the next larger tribe of underground people, the gophers." So the next day Corn Silk set out on her journey, shortening the distance as before until she had gone as far as one might ordinarily travel in many days.

She found the tepee of the gopher people, who entertained her, and to whom she gave some of her precious corn pemmican as she had done the night before, and they promised to aid her when their queen should give them permission to do so. The third night she stayed at the home of the largest of the underground people, the tribe of prairie dogs, the wood chucks and the badgers.

The fourth and last night found her at the lodge of Grandmother Mole. After eating the last bit of the corn pemmican which Corn

Silk gave her freely, Grandmother Mole said to her, "Corn Silk, because you have given of your wonderful food to all the people over whom I rule, I will order them to help you when Black Eagle shall try to kill you. Listen carefully to what I tell you, and do not fail to carry out my instructions exactly. Black Eagle is a terrible magician who loves to kill those who visit him. Many have come to his village, but none have ever gone away again. So my people have told me as they have watched his village from every side ever since I have been queen of the underground people. Tomorrow when you go to his village, which is near by, he will welcome you and you will become his wife. You need not fear him until he tells you to come with him to the river to bathe. Then, before you leave his tepee, take care to unloose your hair so that it hangs freely on every side, untie your mocassin strings and let them trail upon the ground, unloose the fringes of your dress at the wrists and the waist and be sure that your clothing is not tied or fastened tightly anywhere. As you reach the bank with Black Eagle he will tell you to wait for him as he has forgotten something in his tepee which he must bring, and he will tell you to stand on a large buffalo skull on the edge of the bank until he returns. Do not follow his directions, but, instead, kick this skull over the bank into the water, and we will all be there to help you escape from Black Eagle. The secret of his terrible power lies in a magic shell he wears at his throat. He will come flying toward you in the form of a great black eagle, bringing with him a storm of wind that will sweep you into the river unless you obey my commands. Do not fear him even in this dreadful form, but snatch the shell from his throat and all will be well; he will then be powerless to harm you."

Corn Silk thanked Grandmother Mole many times for her kindness in promising to help her, and in the morning bade the queen of the underground people good bye and, after going some little distance, found herself at the entrance of the village of Black Eagle. As she entered and sought for the tepee of the great chief, she heard the people of the village say to each other as they stood at their doorways watching her, "What a beautiful young woman to be the bride of Black Eagle! What a pity it is that she must be killed like the rest of them!" They said this without knowing that Corn Silk understood their language, for she had learned it from Grandmother Mole the night before. So she became the wife of Black Eagle, and for many weeks she lived in the village and went about among the people there and heard them speak of her certain death whenever it should please Black Eagle to kill her. At last one morning the magician told her to come with him to the river. But Corn Silk remembered the warnings of Grandmother Mole, and by her own quick wit and the assistance of the all the underground people who were there to help her, she overcame Black Eagle and took

away his magic power. She lived as his wife many years in this village, and when their son was well grown, they all visited her father's home. Here by accident Black Eagle discovered and won back the magic shell which Corn Silk had taken from him and had kept hidden carefully ever since her coming to his village. As soon as he had possession of his magic power again, he flew away as a black eagle, and was never seen again.

The son of Corn Silk, He-Who-Watches-for-His-Prey, grew to be a very remarkable young man, and had two wives, one the daughter of a very famous northern chief of the tribe of Buffaloes, and the other, Corn Woman, from a far southern tribe. The Buffalo woman became angry one day at Corn Woman and returned to her own people, carrying her son with her, a boy much loved by his father. Corn Woman sent the father in pursuit of Buffalo Woman and he flies after them in the form of an eagle. He overtakes them, but cannot persuade his wife to return, and so he goes with them to her tribe, a great village in the far north, where the people can take the form of buffaloes whenever they choose to do so. Here he had a long contest with the mother of Buffalo Woman, who is a powerful witch, but he wins in every trial, partly by his magic power and partly by the help of Corn Woman, who comes to help him when he is caught in a trap and about to perish. He lives here in this village ever after and becomes the leader of the tribe.

The above much abbreviated form of the beautiful and interesting legend of Corn Silk contains very much of the tribal law and history of both the Mandans, who are the tribe of Corn Woman, and the Grosventres, to whom belongs the bad tempered Buffalo Woman, and the wicked witch, her mother. At some future time the entire legend will be published in full and every detail will then appear in its proper place.

