

## THE SHEPHERD BOY WHO BUILT A BRIDGE

*A French Folk Tale*

THIS is an old French folk tale. A folk tale is an old, old story about something that has happened many years ago, and which may, at first, be entirely true. Then during a long time—one or two or three hundred years, perhaps—it is told and retold. Each person who has told it may have changed the story a little, at different times, or added to it, until it finally becomes half history and half legend.

Now you shall hear the old French folk tale about the shepherd boy who built a bridge. In the southern part of France there is a very ancient town that was standing, much the same as it is now, long before the Spaniards came to the Philippines.

At that time, a wide river ran through the center of the town, and all around the town was built a high wall of stone, just like a wall of stone was built around Manila. You see, in those days walls were built around cities as a means of protection. Watch towers were built at several places on the wall around this old French town. From these watch towers, the soldiers used to keep a lookout for enemies. The town was called Avignon (pronounced av-eeen-yon).

Strange to say, there was no bridge across the river at Avignon for many

years. Soon after the first houses were built, the people made a fine wooden bridge over the river. But when the great piles of snow melted on the mountains, the water dashed down and washed the bridge away.

There were no great machines in those days, such as we have now, for lifting heavy stones and big pieces of iron, so all the bridges had to be made of wood.

When the wooden bridge of Avignon was washed away, the people rebuilt it,

but it was washed away again when the snow melted and there was a flood. This happened several times. At last, they gave it up, and did not try to build the bridge again. When they wanted to cross the river, they



did so by means of small rowboats.

The old folk tale tells us that there lived at this time up in the mountains a widow with her only boy. The mother earned a living for herself and her boy by taking care of the sheep. The boy did his part by caring for the sheep as they wandered over the mountain side eating the grass which grew there.

One day, while the shepherd boy was watching the sheep, he thought that he heard some one speak to him, telling him to go down to Avignon and build a bridge. When the shepherd boy looked around,

there was no one there, so he decided that he must have fallen asleep and dreamed.

The next day, he again took the sheep up to the mountain to graze. While they grazed, he amused himself by playing sweet music on his shepherd's pipe or flute. Suddenly he heard a voice behind him. It told him again, as it had done the day before, to go down to Avignon and build a bridge.

Although he could see no one, the shepherd boy answered the voice. "I cannot go to Avignon and I could *never* build a bridge, for I am only a little boy," he said.

However, so the legend tells us, the voice spoke to him again the next day, for the third time. The boy was so frightened that he ran all the way home to tell his mother.

To his surprise, his mother told him to obey the voice and go to Avignon.

"I will take care of the sheep while you are at Avignon," she said. "You must always obey the voice which tells you what your duty is."

So the shepherd boy started for Avignon. Sometimes, as he walked along, he would play a lively tune on his shepherd's pipe so that he would not be lonely.

It was Sunday when he reached Avignon, and as he came into the market square the church service was over and people were coming out of the church. A number of people spoke to him and asked him his name and where he lived.

"Why have you come to Avignon?" some asked. They laughed when he told them he had come to build a bridge over the river.

All this made him feel very sad, and he wished that his mother were there to tell him what to do.

Not knowing where to go, he wandered down to the river and sat down on its bank. When he saw the wide stream, he felt, more surely than ever, that he could never build a bridge across it.

While feeling very sad, he took his little pipe, or flute, from his pocket and began to play one of the sweet melodies he had so often played on the mountain when he was watching the sheep.

To his surprise, as soon as he started playing, a great stone moved out into the water and settled down in it, part of the way across.

The old folk tale goes on to tell us that from that time on, a great stone moved out over the water each time the tune was played, until, at last, the great stone bridge was finished.

The people who live in Avignon will all tell you, should you go there, that the bridge was built by the magic power of good music.

---

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is a folk tale?
2. Why did the shepherd boy play music on his flute while he watched the sheep?
3. What did the voice tell the shepherd boy to do?
4. When the young boy was feeling sad at Avignon what did he do to comfort himself?
5. What happened when he played a sweet melody?
6. Do you believe this a true story?
7. Where is Avignon?
8. Can you pronounce the name correctly? (ah-veen-yon).
9. Does music have power to influence people?
10. Can you name one piece of music which influences you?