

THE JUDGEMENT OF MIDAS

ADAPTED FROM OLD GREEK FOLK-STORIES, BY JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

The Greek God Pan, the god of the open air, was a great musician. He played on a pipe of reeds. And the sound of his reed-pipe was so sweet that he grew proud, and believed himself greater than the chief musician of the gods, Apollo, the sun-god. So he challenged great Apollo to make better music than he.

Apollo consented to the test, for he wished to punish Pan's vanity, and they chose the mountain Tmolus for judge, since no one is so old and wise as the hills.

When Pan and Apollo came before Tmolus, to play, their followers came with them, to hear, and one of those who came with Pan was a mortal named Midas.

First Pan played; he blew on his reed-pipe, and out came a tune so wild and yet so coaxing that the birds hopped from the trees to get near; the squirrels came running from their holes; and the very trees swayed as if they wanted to dance. The fauns laughed aloud for joy as the melody tickled their furry little ears. And Midas thought it the sweetest music in the world.

Then Apollo rose. His hair shook drops of light from its curls; his robes were like the edge of the sunset cloud; in his hands he held a golden lyre. And when he touched the strings of the lyre, such music stole upon the air as never god nor mortal heard before. The wild creatures of the

wood crouched still as stone; the trees kept every leaf from rustling; earth and air were silent as a dream. To hear such music cease was like bidding farewell to father and mother.

When the charm was broken, the hearers fell at Apollo's feet and proclaimed the victory his. All but Midas. He alone would not admit that the music was better than Pan's.

"If thine ears are so dull, mortal," said Apollo, "they shall take the shape that suits them."

And he touched the ears of Midas. And straightway the dull ears grew long, pointed, and furry, and they turned this way and that. They were the ears of an donkey!

For a long time Midas managed to hide the tell-tale ears from everyone; but at last a servant discovered the secret. He knew he must not tell, yet he could not bear not to; so one day he went into the meadow, scooped a little hollow in the turf, and whispered the secret into the earth. Then he covered it up again, and went away. But, alas, a bed of reeds sprang up from the spot, and whispered the secret to the grass. The grass told it to the tree-tops, the tree-tops to the little birds, and they cried it all abroad.

And to this day, when the wind sets the reeds nodding together, they whisper, laughing, "Midas has the ears of an donkey! Oh, hush, hush!"

