

**THE BASKET WOMAN:
A BOOK OF FANCIFUL
TALES FOR CHILDREN**

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The basket woman: a book of fanciful tales for children by Mary Austin

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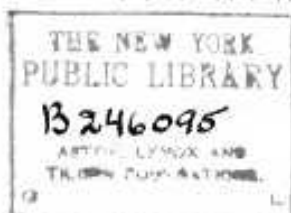
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PREFACE

ALL of these stories are so nearly true that you need not be troubled in the least about believing them. They all occurred in that strip of country which lies east of the Sierra Nevada mountains and south of Yosemite. All the names of places are as you will find them on the map, except the Indian names. Indian names for places all mean something in particular, as *Pahrump*, which is a Paiute word, signifying that this is a place where there is water enough to raise corn, and might be applied to any place answering that description.

The customs and manners are all as they may be found in the many small clans of the Paiutes; but it really ought to be spelled Pah Utes, for it means The Utes Who Live by the Water, to distinguish them from the Utes who live in the Great Basin, where there are

almost no running streams. These clans are so mixed together now by marriage and by the breaking down of old tribal usages that it is not possible to say in which clan the tales originated, and they have become changed and confused, very much as we know the old tales of Greeks and Romans to be. The words "mahala" and "campoodie" are not Indian words, but they are used by Indians as well as by white men all over the Pacific Coast, the first to designate an Indian woman, and the second a village or collection of huts. No one knows quite how "mahala" came to be used. It might be a word belonging to some tribe that white men first became acquainted with, and it has been surmised to be a mispronunciation of the Spanish *mujer*, meaning woman. "Campoodie" is from the Spanish *campo*, and is often pronounced and spelled "campody." A wickiup, as every one in the West knows, is a hut of reeds or brush, very often pieced out with blankets and tin cans.

I know that the story of the Coyote-Spirit is true, because the Basket Woman told it to

me, and evidently believed it. She said she had seen Coyote-Spirits herself in Saline Valley and at Fish Lake. In the same way she told me about The Fire Bringer, and Kern River Jim told me of Tavwots and how it happens that there are no trees on the high mountains. And if this last is not true, how are you going to account for the fact that there really are no trees there? As for Mahala Joe, he lives and wears his woman's dress at Big Pine, and if this account of how he came by it is not just as it happened, it might very well be; for he is not the first Indian who has adopted woman's dress to escape going to war, though there are no others left in this district.

I know that the story of the Crooked Fir is true, because if you come up the Kearsarge trail with me I can show you the very tree, and also the place where the White Bark Pine stood; for I was one of the party that took it on its travels over the mountain: and the rest of the stories are all as true as these.

