

## DUENDE GIFTS

THE Duende can grant any request no matter how extravagant, if one takes the trouble to go alone to the forest and ask him in good faith. Of course one must be able to recite the proper incantation without leaving out a word. The moon must be just right and above all the Duende must be in a good humor. But even then his gift often brings about some unaccountable change that defeats the very purpose for which it was asked.

A long time ago there lived in the hill-encircled town of Tzalamha a poor young man who was so hospitable that his door always stood open and his only regret was that the smallness of his hut would not permit him to entertain the whole town at once. So he learned the incantation and went all alone to the forest on the dark of the moon, and the Duende must have been in a very good humor, for he immediately granted his request for sufficient money to build a castle big enough to accommodate all his friends at once. This happy young man then selected a beautiful site for his castle and while the first stones were being laid his heart swelled with joy at the thought of the pleasure that other people should find under his roof, but when the walls were about half done he began to like to be alone and long before they were finished he felt such dislike for his fellowmen that he even went out of his way to avoid them. And when the castle was finished even to the last stone on the turret he lived there entirely alone except for his sad-voiced wood pigeons. One night a poor old man overtaken by a storm knocked at the well-bolted door of the castle and asked for hospitality. The owner of the castle told him, "Begone, go away from here! Some fool in the village below will give you shelter." But the poor old man was tired and wet, so he said, "Surely, master, you will not drive me forth in such a storm! Do but give me some little corner," he pleaded, "for I shall go on my way as soon as the moon rises and drives away the clouds, from which the rain is pouring." But the owner of the castle still said, "Begone, begone from here!" and seeing that the old man lingered, he angrily added, "I wish the road to this castle would grow up, so that no man could find his way to my door." Then the old man, who was the Duende under one of

his many forms, walked sorrowfully away under the pouring rain, and immediately the castle began to sink. Slowly, slowly it went down and it kept on going down until only the turret was visible. At last that too disappeared. Though today no sign of the grand castle that stood on the top of the beautiful pine-covered hill is to be seen, the people of Tzalamha know that it once was there, for their fathers told them so, and they know that it still exists intact in the heart of the hill, for if one pauses at high noon any day as he walks along the road that lies at the foot of the hill he can hear the owner of the castle begging him most piteously to come in and visit him, and it is known that he still keeps wild pigeons, for the flutter of their wings as well as their gentle coo-ru-co is distinctly heard. The people know all these things, but they also know that the Duende set a great big horned serpent to guard that sunken castle, and that if one takes so much as a spadeful of earth from the hill around it this serpent will come out of the ground and go into the river. His great size will cause the river to overflow its banks and inundate the town and the people who escape drowning will die by pestilence.