

## MOKE LEARNS ABOUT FIRE

In our last issue Hihi, the invisible sunbeam fairy, had just left Moke, the lonely boy, who had returned to the road on the hills above Te Whanganui a Tara.

In returning to the road Moke had again placed his hands on top of a post and vaulted over the fence. He did this because a farmer had told him that if there was no gate handy to go through, he must either slip under the bottom wire of the fence, or, if he had to climb over, to do this by putting all his weight on a post, so as to avoid putting his weight on the wires, which might force out the staples or stretch the wires.

As he walked up the road he remembered why he had crossed over the fence; he wanted to see whether any of the princes had arrived yet. For some time Moke had been watching the damp little gully. He had seen the tauhinu<sup>1</sup> grow; then came some koromiko and some whauwhaupakus, also some mahoes, and he knew there were small seedlings of kaikomako and titoki, but these were only the humbler people in the plant kingdom. The aristocrats, or princes, as Moke liked to call them, were the totaras, rimus, matais, ratas, and the kahikateas, all of which still grew not far away. So each time he passed the gully he slipped over and searched eagerly for some indication that the princes had arrived. Thus musing he came to the top of the hill from which he could obtain a wonderful view of Te Whanganui a Tara (the Great Harbour of Tara) on the one side, and of the valley of the Wainuiomata on the other. Passing under an archway of beech trees, which nearly met over the road, he pressed on down the hill.

On the hill side of the road, there was still virgin bush, bush which had not been milled, but on the valley side the land had been cleared and there was a very well built fence on that side. Sheep dotted the landscape, and below on the flat some cattle were grazing. Further on he could see a farmer working with a pair of horses and a plough, and just below he saw Kahu, the hawk, slowly circling round apparently looking for something to have for dinner. On down the hill he went. Halfway down he left the road and climbed up a gully, just to see what was there. He saw Piwakawaka, the fantail, flitting about, and for some time amused himself shaking the trees and watching the bird dart after dislodged insects. After a

while the bird disappeared but soon returned, or perhaps it was its mate which returned, he couldn't tell which. He suspected there might be a nest about and thought he would peep at it from a distance, so as not to disturb the sitting bird, but he was disappointed because he couldn't find it.<sup>2</sup>

Tiring of this he returned to the road and went on down until he came to a little clearing in the bush. There he took off his pack, and took out a small billy and went in under the bush to where there was a damp gully, with a tiny trickle of water. He went on down a few yards until he found a partly filled-in hole. This he carefully cleaned out and watched it fill with water, which soon cleared and looked delightfully cool. He filled his billy and returned to the clearing.

Near the edge of the bush there were some stones which had been used for a fireplace previously. He looked at it for a moment or two and then said aloud "Too near the bush"; so he shifted the stones to the middle of the clearing, where he proceeded to build a fire. While doing this he was wondering why some folk, who seemed quite decent folk, would light their fires up against the roots of trees. Young as Moke was, he knew that a fire lit against the trunk of a tree would injure the tree dreadfully, quite likely kill it, and he wondered how those folk would like to have a fire lit up against their own legs. He struck a match and lit the fire, which burned well for a few seconds, and then went out.

"Blow," said Moke.

"No use," said a voice alongside him; "blowing won't help until you lay the fire right", and Moke knew Hihi had returned.

"Sorry," said Moke, "I didn't know you were about, but what was wrong with my fire?"

"You smothered it with too much weight," said Hihi. "Now do what I say. You see the rotten branch over near the bank? Get it and break off two pieces, each about eighteen inches long."

So Moke broke off the pieces, which were about four inches thick, and brought them to the fireplace.