

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Cat and the Mouse**



‘Once upon a time there was a man in whose larder mice were wreaking havoc, so he took a cat to expel and extirpate them. Now among the mice there was one who was very large and also stronger than the others, and when she perceived what the man had done, she sought an opportunity to talk with the cat from a safe place; and she said to her, “I know that your master has commissioned you to drive away and kill me and my friends. Now I am pleased to make your acquaintance, and I would like to recommend myself to your favour and live with you in perfect amity.” The cat said: “I am exceptionally pleased to become acquainted with you, and I shall hold the honour of your friendship in the highest esteem. Also, nothing would be more welcome to me than associating with you, but I must not make you a promise I am not able to keep. You see, most venerable mouse, my master has made me the guardian of his house so that you and your tribe will do him harm no longer; now if I were to spare you, people would say: ‘That is a worthless cat!’ Therefore either eschew inflicting harm on my master or leave the house and seek another abode that is suitable for you; in any case, do not lay blame on me if you come to harm.” The mouse said, “I have asked you politely, and I ask you so again, grant me my freedom and give me your friendship.” “Well,” said the cat, “I hold you dear, but how

am I to reconcile my friendship with you to my duty regarding the harm your companions inflict upon my master? If I let you live, he will kill me, as is proper. Therefore, I shall give you three days' grace, in which time you may look around for a new dwelling." The mouse replied, "I would move away from this dwelling only with great difficulty and reluctance; I shall take care not to come too close to you, and remain here as long as I please." The cat spared the mouse, true to her word, for the space of three days, which made the mouse feel quite safe, and she no longer behaved as if there were a cat in the house; when the three days were over, and the mouse ran out of her little hole again, as nonchalant as you please, the cat, which was lying in wait in the corner of the larder, leapt out and caught and devoured the mouse, bones and all.'

"This is a parable," Bird Mosam continued, "from which you can see that it does not become the sensible man to scorn the advice of true friends. And the proverb says that the advice of friends is often like a bitter medicine, which is salubrious all the same and drives the infirmity out."

The birdwife reflected long and wavered as to what she should do, and how it might be accomplished without any suspicion of a wicked deed falling on her. Then the false friend advised her to take one of those fish which fishermen had fixed on the end of a line to lure larger fish, and to place this among the fish her husband would eat, so he would choke to death on it. The wife did this, and because Bird Holgott was old, and could not catch fish himself any more, and his wife let him go hungry every now and then, he greedily gulped down the fish with the hook inside and choked to death on it, and in his last moments he cursed her, she who had so shamefully doomed him to death. When this was done, Bird Mosam lived

with the faithless wife a little while longer, but because food became ever scarcer he began to grow very weary of her, and he fell on her to kill her. Just then her sons flew up, coming to visit their dear parents, and they swooped down on Bird Mosam; their mother, who was on the point of death, confessed everything to them before passing away. So they pecked out Bird Mosam's eyes with their sharp beaks and left him to starve wretchedly to death; and in this way did they avenge the double sin he had committed against their parents.