

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Grateful Beasts**



Once a pilgrim was on a journey, and on his way through a forest he came upon a wolf's pit and perceived that there was something alive inside. And when he looked down, he saw a man inside, who was a goldsmith, and by him were an ape, a snake, and an adder; they had all fallen into the pit unawares. Then the pilgrim thought to himself: Use mercy with the wretched, and help man from his foes. So he threw a rope down into the pit and held one end of it firmly in his hands, intending to pull up the goldsmith; but the ape quickly leapt onto it, climbed up, and sprang out of

the pit. A second time did the pilgrim throw the rope down, and the adder wriggled up it. And the third time, the snake grasped the rope and also came up to the surface. These three animals thanked the pilgrim for his kindness and said to him: "We shall seek to repay you for the good turn you have done us, and when your path brings you near to us, you may count on our being at your service to the best of our powers; but be warned in good faith against the man down there, for there is nothing alive so ungrateful as he. We have experienced this, and we tell it to you that you might be on your guard."

With that the three animals parted from the pilgrim, but he recalled his duty, how it behoves man to help man, and he threw the rope into the pit again and pulled the goldsmith out. This man rendered thanks in many

words for the mercy and compassion the pilgrim had shown him, and he asked that he pay him a visit in the royal capital, where he lived, and so left him.

The wanderer continued his journey and came into the vicinity of the capital, and to the place where the ape, the adder, and the snake lived. They were delighted to see him, and the ape brought the wanderer, who was very weary, fruit and sweet figs, while the adder showed him a cool, pleasant grotto where he could rest and repose; and it lay itself down before the entrance to guard the sleeper, for no one dared go where the great adder was lying. The snake, meanwhile, slipped into the royal castle and stole some golden jewels which it gave to the wanderer as a gift, but it did not tell him whence it had taken them. When he had taken his leave of the animals, the pilgrim entered the royal city and sought out the goldsmith; he showed him the jewels and offered them to him for sale. The goldsmith recognised them to be the King's property, but he held his tongue, then went to the King and announced that he was holding the jewel thief prisoner in his house. He received a handsome reward for this, and the King sent out his bailiffs; they caught the wanderer, beat him, and led him through the streets and out of town to the gallows to hang him. On the way the old man remembered the animals' warning and gave a loud sigh: "Oh, had I followed your advice, faithful beasts, this tribulation would not have been my lot!" Now the snake just happened to have its residence by the road that led to the scaffold, and hearing the laments of the innocent man, for whose misfortune it also was to blame, it was troubled and began to consider how it could help him. So when the King's son, a young boy, was brought down

this road that he might watch the thief's punishment, the snake crept towards him and bit him in the leg, which soon swelled up. Then everyone stopped short in horror, and doctors and astrologers were urgently sent for, to help if possible. The doctors brought theriac with them, a medicine praised for its efficacy against snakebites, yet it was no use. But the astrologers read in the stars that the wanderer being taken to his death was innocent, and the King's son himself cried out in a loud voice, "Bring the pilgrim here to me, and let him lay his hand on my wound and my tumour, then shall I be whole again!"

Then the pilgrim was brought before the King, who asked about his adventures, and he truthfully told the King everything, about the good, grateful beasts and about the abominable ingratitude of the goldsmith whom he had saved from death. And then he raised his hands and his eyes to Heaven and implored: "Oh almighty God, as truly as I am innocent of this theft, so truly may Your hand heal this boy!" And thenceforth the King's son was restored to health. When the King saw this, he was glad and gleeful at heart, and he honoured the pilgrim with precious gifts, let him have all those jewels for the sake of which he had suffered mortal anguish, and had the goldsmith hanged on the spot as punishment for his great and black ingratitude.