

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The King's Cathedral**

Once upon a time there was a King who built a magnificent cathedral in honour and in praise of God, and it was the King's express command that no one was allowed to contribute so much as a farthing to the construction, upon pain of death, for he wished to build it entirely with his own riches. And it happened this way, and the cathedral was completed, a beautiful and worthy edifice fitted with every splendour and every adornment. And then the King had a large marble tablet set up, in which he had the words engraved in golden letters that he, the King, had built the cathedral alone and no other had contributed. But the tablet had been erected for a day and a night, when in the night the writing was altered, and in place of the King's name another name was written there, and it was that of a poor woman, so it now read as if *she* had built the whole magnificent cathedral. The King was mightily annoyed; he had the name effaced and his own name inscribed again. But the next morning the name of that poor woman was on the tablet once more, and everyone read that *she* was the founder of the cathedral. And for the third time the King's name was written on the tablet, and for the third time it vanished and the woman's name appeared. Now the King realised that this was the finger of God writing, and humbling himself, he caused the woman to be sought out and summoned before his throne. Filled with fear and alarm she came before the King, who spoke to her: "Woman, we are in the midst of marvellous things; tell me the truth, by God and on your life! Did you not, after all, hear my command that no one was to give towards the cathedral? Or did you give towards it notwithstanding?"



Then the woman fell at the King's feet and said, "Mercy, my lord and King! I will confess everything unto your mercy! I am an extremely poor woman; I must spin to earn my meagre bread, just enough for hunger not to kill me; and as I had a farthing to spare, I would dearly have

liked to offer it to your temple-building in honour of God, but I feared, oh Lord, your edict and your harsh threat, and so I used the farthing to buy a bundle of hay, which I strewed on the road for the oxen which pulled the stones to your cathedral, and they ate it. Thus did I act, following my will, but without violating your command."

Then the King was powerfully moved by the woman's words, and he saw how the Lord God had appreciated her pure heart and accepted it as a greater offering than his own vast riches. And the King amply endowed the poor woman and took the punishment of his vanity deeply to heart.