

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Little Shepherd's Providential Dream**



Once upon a time there was a very poor peasant, he was the shepherd in a little village, and had been so for many years. His family was small, he had a wife and only the one child, a boy. Yet he had taken this boy, while he was still very small, out to the meadows with him and had inculcated him with the duties of a faithful shepherd; and so he was able, when the boy was only somewhat grown-up, to rely on him completely, to entrust the flock to him alone, and to earn some extra thruppences in the meantime by weaving baskets at home. The little shepherd cheerfully drove his flock out on to the meadows and pastures; he whistled or sang many a merry ditty, punctuating them with loud cracks of his shepherd's whip, and so time never hung heavy on his hands. At midday he would settle down quite comfortably beside his flock, eat his bread and drink from the stream, and then sleep for a while until it was time to move on.

One day, the little shepherd had lain down for his midday rest under a shady tree, and he fell asleep and dreamed a most wondrous dream: He was going away, endlessly far away – there was a loud clinking, as if heaps

of coins were continually falling to the ground – a thundering, like the banging of incessant shots – an endless company of soldiers with weapons and in flashing armour – all of this circled, and buzzed, and roared around him. And he was constantly wandering and always climbing uphill, until he was finally up on the summit, where a throne had been put up, and he sat down in it, and beside him was a seat in which a beautiful woman – who had suddenly appeared – sat down. Now the little shepherd drew himself up in his dream and said, quite solemnly and ceremoniously, “I am the King of Spain.” But at that very moment he woke up. Thoughtful after his strange dream, the boy drove his flock onwards; and at home in the evening he told his parents, who were sitting before the door carving osiers, while he was helping them, about his wondrous dream, and at the end he said, “Truly, if I dream this one more time, I’ll go away to Spain, and see if I don’t become King!” – “Stupid boy,” his old father muttered, “making you the King indeed, don’t make a fool of yourself!” And his mother had a good giggle and clapped her hands and repeated in amazement, “King of Spain, King of Spain!” At midday the next day the little shepherd lay down under that tree and – O miracle! – the same dream enveloped his senses again. With difficulty did he stay to keep watch until evening; he would have liked to run home and then set out on a journey to Spain. When he at last drove his flock home, he announced that he had seen the dream a second time and said, “If I have that dream once more, I’m going away on the spot, right on the spot.” – On the third day he lay under that tree again, and exactly the same dream came for the third time. The boy drew himself up in his dream and said, “I am the King of Spain,” and with that he awoke, snatched up his hat and whip and little bag of bread from his couch, and gathering his flock,

he drove them straight towards the village. There the people began to tell him off for driving the flock in so soon, such a long time before Vespers; however, the boy was so excited that he paid no heed to the scolding of his neighbours or his own parents, but tied up his few items of clothing which he wore on Sundays in a bundle, hung it on the end of a walnut-stick, put it over his shoulder, and, without so much as a by-your-leave, set forth.

The boy was very fleet on his legs; he ran as swiftly as if he should arrive in Spain that night. Yet on this day he reached only a forest – nowhere was there a village or a solitary house – and he decided to bed down for the night in this forest among some thick bushes. But no sooner had he laid himself down to rest and fallen asleep than a noise woke him up again: a company of men, conversing loudly, were passing by the bushes where he had made his bed. The boy quietly emerged and followed the men at a short distance, thinking: Perhaps you will find a lodging after all; where these men sleep today, you can surely sleep too. – They had not gone much further at all when a quite respectable house appeared before them, albeit right in the heart of a dark forest. The men knocked, the door was opened, and the shepherd-boy slipped into the house with them. Inside, another door was opened, and they all walked into a large, very sparsely lit room, where many bundles of straw, mattresses, and blankets lay around on the floor, which the men seemed to have kept in readiness for their beds for the night. The little shepherd-lad quickly crawled under a pile of straw which was stacked close to the door, and he now paid heed to everything he could hear or perceive from his hiding-place. Being clever and sharp-witted, he soon found out that this company of men was a band of robbers, whose chief was the master of this house. This man mounted,

when the newly arrived members had laid themselves down, a somewhat raised seat and spoke in a deep bass voice: "My brave companions, give me a report on your work today, where you have broken and entered and what you have bagged!" The first to stand up was a tall man with a coal-black beard, and he answered: "My dear chief, early today I robbed a rich nobleman of his leather trousers; they have two pockets, and whenever you turn these inside-out and give them a good shake, a heap of ducats will fall out onto the floor." – "That sounds very good!" said the chief. Another of the men stepped forward and reported: "Today I stole the three-cornered hat from a general; this hat has the property that, when you turn it on your head, shots will ring out incessantly from the three corners." – "That's good to hear!" said the chief. And a third man stood up and said, "I robbed a knight of his sword; if you thrust its point into the earth, a regiment of soldiers will instantly spring up." – "A brave deed!" lauded the chief. Now a fourth robber got to his feet and began, "I pulled the boots off a sleeping traveller, and when you put them on, you will cover seven leagues with every step." – "Quick work, that's what I like!" said the chief contentedly. "Hang your booty on the wall, and then eat and drink and sleep your fill." With these words, he left the robbers' bedchamber; they had a good old carouse and then fell fast asleep. When all was still and peaceful, and the robbers were asleep to a man, the little shepherd crept out, climbed into the leather trousers, put on the hat, girded on the sword, slipped into the boots and then stole out of the house. Outside the boots very soon showed their magical power, to the little one's delight, and in next to no time the lad was striding into Spain's great royal seat, called Madrid.

Here he asked the first person he met for the grandest inn, but for

answer he received: "Little fellow, just you go to where your sort make a stop, and not where rich gentlemen dine." But a shining gold coin immediately made that man more polite, and he now readily became the little shepherd's guide and showed him the best inn. Once he had arrived there, the youth at once rented the finest room and pleasantly asked his host: "Well, how are things in your city? What's the latest news?" The innkeeper pulled a long face and replied, "Little Lord, I take it that you are a stranger in this land? It would seem you have not heard that our Royal Majesty is arming himself with a force of twenty thousand men? We have enemies, you see; oh, this is really a terrible time! Little Lord, would you perhaps like to join the military too?" – "Certainly,

certainly," said the slender youth, and his face beamed with joy. When the innkeeper had retired, he took his trousers off forthwith, shook out a pile of gold coins, bought himself sumptuous clothes and weapons and jewellery, fitted himself out with all of



these, and requested an audience of the King. And when he arrived at the castle and was led by two chamberlains through a large and splendid hall, he met a wonderfully charming young lady, and she curtsied gracefully to the handsome youth who was walking in the midst of the courtiers and who greeted her politely, and the courtiers whispered, "That is the Princess, the King's daughter." The young man took no little delight in the beauty of the King's daughter, and his delight and enthusiasm led him to speak boldly and bravely before the King. He said, "Your Royal Majesty! I hereby humbly offer my services as a warrior. My army, which I shall bring to you, will gain the victory for you; my army will conquer everything that my King

commands to be conquered. But I request a reward: that I may, if I carry the day, take your fair daughter to wife. Will you agree to that, most gracious Majesty?" The King was astonished at the youth's bold words and said, "Fine, I agree to your demand; if you return home victorious, I shall appoint you my successor and give you my daughter to wife."

Now the erstwhile shepherd betook himself out into the open country and thrust his sword repeatedly into the earth, and in a few minutes many thousands of soldiers were standing in the field armed for battle, and the youth was seated as commander, luxuriously armed and adorned, on a splendid steed that was decorated with coverings threaded with gold, and whose bridle flashed with jewels; and the young commander rode out towards the enemy, and there was a great and bloody battle; from the commander's hat there thundered an incessant torrent of deadly shots, and his sword called one regiment after another out of the earth, and so, only a few hours later, the enemy was defeated and scattered and the banners of victory were fluttering. The victor pursued the enemy and took from him the best part of his land as well. Victorious and covered in glory, he then returned to Spain, where the fairest fortune awaited him. The beautiful King's daughter had been no less delighted by the spruce youth, when she had met him in the hall, than he had by her; and the most gracious King, appreciating the very great services rendered by the brave youth, kept his word, gave him his daughter to wife, and made him his successor and heir to the throne.

The wedding festivities were splendid and sumptuous, and the former shepherd was sitting in Fortune's lap. Soon after the wedding the old King placed sceptre and crown in his son-in-law's hands, who sat proudly

on the throne with his fair wife beside him, and homage was paid to him, as the new King, by the people. Then he remembered his dream, which had come so beautifully true, and remembered his poor parents, and he said, once he was alone with his wife: "It is like this, my love, my parents are still alive, but they are very poor, my father is the village shepherd, far from here, and I myself watched the flock as a boy, until it was revealed to me by a wonderful dream that I would become King of Spain one day. And fortune favoured me – you see, I am King now, but I would like to see my parents happy too; therefore I wish, with your gracious assent, to travel home and fetch my parents." The Queen readily consented to let her husband go, and he went very quickly, for he had on the seven-league boots. On the way, the young King returned the marvellous objects he had taken from the robbers back to their rightful owners, except for the boots; fetched his poor parents, who were quite beside themselves with joy; and gave the owner of the boots a Duchy in exchange. Then he lived happily and worthily as the King of Spain until the end of his days.