

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Three Feathers**



A little son was born to a man, and when the father went out to seek a godfather to stand sponsor to his child, he found a beauteous youth whom he loved at once with all his heart. And when he conveyed his request, the youth was quite willing to come along and sponsor the child, and he left a young white steed as a christening gift for his

godson. This youth was none other than Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The young boy, who had been christened with the name Henry, grew up to the delight of his father and mother; and when he reached the age of adolescence, home lost its hold on him, and he felt drawn to distant lands and deeds and adventures. So he took his leave of his parents, mounted the saddled steed which the unknown youth had given him as a baptismal gift, although he did not know its true value, and rode out bright and breezy into the world. One day, he was riding through a forest, when behold! close by the path there lay a feather from a peacock's tail, and the sun shone on the feather so that its bright colours gleamed with a radiant splendour. The youth pulled his steed to a halt, intending to dismount to pick the feather up and stick it in his hat. Then the steed opened its mouth and said, "Oh, leave the feather lying on the ground!" The youth was amazed that the steed could talk, and a shudder ran through him; he stayed in the saddle, did not dismount, did not pick up the feather, and rode on. After some time, it happened that the youth rode up to the bank of a stream, and behold! there lay on the green grass a colourful feather, much more beautiful than the one in the forest, and the youth's heart craved it as an adornment for his

hat; for he had never seen so magnificent a feather in all his born days. But as he was about to dismount, the steed spoke once again: "Oh, leave the feather lying on the ground!" And again the youth was amazed beyond measure that the steed spoke, for it usually did not say a word; this time also he did as he was told, stayed in the saddle, did not dismount, did not pick up the feather, and rode on.

Now it was but a short time before the youth came to a high mountain, and as he was about to ride up, there lay by his feet, on the meadow floor, another feather; in his estimation, it was the most supremely beautiful feather in the whole wide world, and he had to have it.

The feather glittered and sparkled like pure blue and green precious stones, or like bright dewdrops in the morning sun. But again the steed spoke: "Oh, leave the feather lying on the ground!" This time, the youth was unable to obey the horse and unwilling to heed its advice, for he had all too strong a craving for the delightful, magnificent adornment. He dismounted, picked the feather up and put it in his hat. Then the steed spoke, "Alas, what harm you have brought down on yourself! I fear you will come to rue this yet." It said no more. The youth rode on, and he came to a handsome and well-built city, where he saw many citizens bedecked with garlands, and a splendid procession came towards him with pipers and drummers and trumpeters, and many flags being waved, and it was marvellous to behold. And in the procession were maidens strewing flowers, and the four most beautiful girls bore a cushion on which was a royal crown. And the town elders handed the crown to the youth, saying: "All Hail to you, noble youth sent to us from God! You shall be our King! Praise be to God, the Lord for

all eternity!" The youth, who did not know what was happening to him, then felt the royal crown on his head; and he knelt down and praised God and the Saviour. Had he picked up the first feather, he would have become a Count; the second, a Duke; and if he had not picked up the third feather, he would have found a fourth one on the mountaintop, and the steed would have said: "Pick this feather up." Then he would have become a mighty Emperor over many of the world's realms, and the sun would never have set on his lands. But he was content even so; and he became a gracious, wise, just and pious King.