

Bobino

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Unknown

Intermediate
9 min read

Once on a time there was a rich merchant, who had an only son called Bobino. Now, as the boy was clever, and had a great desire for knowledge, his father sent him to be under a master, from whom he thought he would learn to speak all sorts of foreign languages. After some years with this master, Bobino returned to his home.

One evening, as he and his father were walking in the garden, the sparrows in the trees above their heads began such a twittering, that they found it impossible to hear each other speak. This annoyed the merchant very much, so, to soothe him, Bobino said: 'Would you like me to explain to you what the sparrows are saying to each other?'

The merchant looked at his son in astonishment, and answered: 'What can you mean? How can you explain what the sparrows say? Do you consider yourself a soothsayer or a magician?'

'I am neither a soothsayer nor a magician,' answered Bobino; 'but my master taught me the language of all the animals.'

'Alas! for my good money!' exclaimed the merchant. 'The master has certainly mistaken my intention. Of course I meant you to learn the languages that human beings talk, and not the language of animals.'

'Have patience,' answered the son. 'My master thought it best to begin with the language of animals, and later

to learn the languages of human beings.'

On their way into the house the dog ran to meet them, barking furiously.

'What can be the matter with the beast?' said the merchant. 'Why should he bark at me like that, when he knows me quite well?'

'Shall I explain to you what he is saying?' said Bobino.

'Leave me in peace, and don't trouble me with your nonsense,' said the merchant quite crossly. 'How my money has been wasted!'

A little later, as they sat down to supper, some frogs in a neighbouring pond set up such a croaking as had never been heard. The noise so irritated the merchant that he quite lost his temper and exclaimed: 'This only was wanting to add the last drop to my discomfort and disappointment.'

'Shall I explain to you?' began Bobino.

'Will you hold your tongue with your explanations?' shouted the merchant. 'Go to bed, and don't let me see your face again!'

So Bobino went to bed and slept soundly. But his father, who could not get over his disappointment at the waste of his money, was so angry, that he sent for two servants, and gave them orders, which they were to carry out on the following day.

Next morning one of the servants awakened Bobino early, and made him get into a carriage that was waiting for him. The servant placed himself on the seat beside him, while the other servant rode alongside the carriage as an escort. Bobino could not understand what they were going to do with him, or where he was being taken; but he noticed that the servant beside him looked very sad, and his eyes were all swollen with crying.

Curious to know the reason he said to him: 'Why are you so sad? and where are you taking me?'

But the servant would say nothing. At last, moved by Bobino's entreaties, he said: 'My poor boy, I am taking you to your death, and, what is worse, I am doing so by the order of your father.'

‘But why,’ exclaimed Bobino, ‘does he want me to die? What evil have I done him, or what fault have I committed that he should wish to bring about my death?’

‘You have done him no evil,’ answered the servant ‘neither have you committed any fault; but he is half mad with anger because, in all these years of study, you have learnt nothing but the language of animals. He expected something quite different from you, that is why he is determined you shall die.’

‘If that is the case, kill me at once,’ said Bobino. ‘What is the use of waiting, if it must be done?’

‘I have not the heart to do it,’ answered the servant. ‘I would rather think of some way of saving your life, and at the same time of protecting ourselves from your father’s anger. By good luck the dog has followed us. We will kill it, and cut out the heart and take it back to your father. He will believe it is yours, and you, in the meantime, will have made your escape.’

When they had reached the thickest part of the wood, Bobino got out of the carriage, and having said good-bye to the servants set out on his wanderings.

On and on he walked, till at last, late in the evening, he came to a house where some herdsmen lived. He knocked at the door and begged for shelter for the night. The herdsmen, seeing how gentle a youth he seemed, made him welcome, and bade him sit down and share their supper.

While they were eating it, the dog in the courtyard began to bark. Bobino walked to the window, listened attentively for a minute, and then turning to the herdsmen said: ‘Send your wives and daughters at once to bed, and arm yourselves as best you can, because at midnight a band of robbers will attack this house.’

The herdsmen were quite taken aback, and thought that the youth must have taken leave of his senses.

‘How can you know,’ they said, ‘that a band of robbers mean to attack us? Who told you so?’

‘I know it from the dog’s barking,’ answered Bobino. ‘I understand his language, and if I had not been here, the poor beast would have wasted his breath to no purpose. You had better follow my advice, if you wish to save your lives and property.’

The herdsmen were more and more astonished, but they decided to do as Bobino advised. They sent their

wives and daughters upstairs, then, having armed themselves, they took up their position behind a hedge, waiting for midnight.

Just as the clock struck twelve they heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and a band of robbers cautiously advanced towards the house. But the herdsmen were on the look-out; they sprang on the robbers from behind the hedge, and with blows from their cudgels soon put them to flight.

You may believe how grateful they were to Bobino, to whose timely warning they owed their safety. They begged him to stay and make his home with them; but as he wanted to see more of the world, he thanked them warmly for their hospitality, and set out once more on his wanderings. All day he walked, and in the evening he came to a peasant's house. While he was wondering whether he should knock and demand shelter for the night, he heard a great croaking of frogs in a ditch behind the house. Stepping to the back he saw a very strange sight. Four frogs were throwing a small bottle about from one to the other, making a great croaking as they did so. Bobino listened for a few minutes, and then knocked at the door of the house. It was opened by the peasant, who asked him to come in and have some supper.

When the meal was over, his host told him that they were in great trouble, as his eldest daughter was so ill, that they feared she could not recover. A great doctor, who had been passing that way some time before, had promised to send her some medicine that would have cured her, but the servant to whom he had entrusted the medicine had let it drop on the way back, and now there seemed no hope for the girl.

Then Bobino told the father of the small bottle he had seen the frogs play with, and that he knew that was the medicine which the doctor had sent to the girl. The peasant asked him how he could be sure of this, and Bobino explained to him that he understood the language of animals, and had heard what the frogs said as they tossed the bottle about. So the peasant fetched the bottle from the ditch, and gave the medicine to his daughter. In the morning she was much better, and the grateful father did not know how to thank Bobino enough. But Bobino would accept nothing from him, and having said good-bye, set out once more on his wanderings.

One day, soon after this, he came upon two men resting under a tree in the heat of the day. Being tired he stretched himself on the ground at no great distance from them, and soon they all three began to talk to one another. In the course of conversation, Bobino asked the two men where they were going; and they replied that they were on their way to a neighbouring town, where, that day, a new ruler was to be chosen by the people.

While they were still talking, some sparrows settled on the tree under which they were lying. Bobino was silent, and appeared to be listening attentively. At the end of a few minutes he said to his companions, 'Do you know what those sparrows are saying? They are saying that to-day one of us will be chosen ruler of that town.'

The men said nothing, but looked at each other. A few minutes later, seeing that Bobino had fallen asleep, they stole away, and made with all haste for the town, where the election of a new ruler was to take place.

A great crowd was assembled in the market-place, waiting for the hour when an eagle should be let loose from a cage, for it had been settled that on whose-soever house the eagle alighted, the owner of that house should become ruler of the town. At last the hour arrived; the eagle was set free, and all eyes were strained to see where it would alight. But circling over the heads of the crowd, it flew straight in the direction of a young man, who was at that moment entering the town. This was none other than Bobino, who had awakened soon after his companions had left him, and had followed in their footsteps. All the people shouted and proclaimed that he was their future ruler, and he was conducted by a great crowd to the Governor's house, which was for the future to be his home. And here he lived happily, and ruled wisely over the people.

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