

Master and Pupil

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Danish

Intermediate
5 min read

There was once a man who had a son who was very clever at reading, and took great delight in it. He went out into the world to seek service somewhere, and as he was walking between some mounds he met a man, who asked him where he was going.

'I am going about seeking for service,' said the boy.

'Will you serve me?' asked the man.

'Oh, yes; just as readily you as anyone else,' said the boy.

'But can you read?' asked the man.

'As well as the priest,' said the boy.

Then I can't have you,' said the man. 'In fact, I was just wanting a boy who couldn't read. His only work would be to dust my old books.'

The man then went on his way, and left the boy looking after him.

'It was a pity I didn't get that place,' thought he 'That was just the very thing for me.'

Making up his mind to get the situation if possible, he hid himself behind one of the mounds, and turned his

jacket outside in, so that the man would not know him again so easily. Then he ran along behind the mounds, and met the man at the other end of them.

‘Where are you going, my little boy?’ said the man, who did not notice that it was the same one he had met before.

‘I am going about seeking for service?’ said the boy.

‘Will you serve me?’ asked the man.

‘Oh, yes; just as readily you as anyone else,’ said the boy.

‘But can you read?’ said the man.

‘No, I don’t know a single letter,’ said the boy.

The man then took him into his service, and all the work he had to do was to dust his master’s books. But as he did this he had plenty of time to read them as well, and he read away at them until at last he was just as wise as his master—who was a great wizard—and could perform all kinds of magic. Among other feats, he could change himself into the shape of any animal, or any other thing that he pleased.

When he had learned all this he did not think it worth while staying there any longer, so he ran away home to his parents again. Soon after this there was a market in the next village, and the boy told his mother that he had learned how to change himself into the shape of any animal he chose.

‘Now,’ said he, ‘I shall change myself to a horse, and father can take me to market and sell me. I shall come home again all right.’

His mother was frightened at the idea, but the boy told her that she need not be alarmed; all would be well. So he changed himself to a horse, such a fine horse, too, that his father got a high price for it at the market; but after the bargain was made, and the money paid, the boy changed again to his own shape, when no one was looking, and went home.

The story spread all over the country about the fine horse that had been sold and then had disappeared, and at last the news came to the ears of the wizard.

‘Aha!’ said he, ‘this is that boy of mine, who befooled me and ran away; but I shall have him yet.’

The next time that there was a market the boy again changed himself to a horse, and was taken thither by his father. The horse soon found a purchaser, and while the two were inside drinking the luck-penny the wizard came along and saw the horse. He knew at once that it was not an ordinary one, so he also went inside, and offered the purchaser far more than he had paid for it, so the latter sold it to him.

The first thing the wizard now did was to lead the horse away to a smith to get a red-hot nail driven into its mouth, because after that it could not change its shape again. When the horse saw this it changed itself to a dove, and flew up into the air. The wizard at once changed himself into a hawk, and flew up after it. The dove now turned into a gold ring, and fell into a girl’s lap. The hawk now turned into a man, and offered the girl a great sum of money for the gold ring, but she would not part with it, seeing that it had fallen down to her, as it were, from Heaven. However, the wizard kept on offering her more and more for it, until at last the gold ring grew frightened, and changed itself into a grain of barley, which fell on the ground. The man then turned into a hen, and began to search for the grain of barley, but this again changed itself to a pole-cat, and took off the hen’s head with a single snap.

The wizard was now dead, the pole-cat put on human shape, and the youth afterwards married the girl, and from that time forward let all his magic arts alone.

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