

The Clever Weaver

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Armenian

Intermediate

6 min read

Once upon a time the king of a far country was sitting on his throne, listening to the complaints of his people, and judging between them. That morning there had been fewer cases than usual to deal with, and the king was about to rise and go into his gardens, when a sudden stir was heard outside, and the lord high chamberlain entered, and inquired if his majesty would be graciously pleased to receive the ambassador of a powerful emperor who lived in the east, and was greatly feared by the neighbouring sovereigns. The king, who stood as much in dread of him as the rest, gave orders that the envoy should be admitted at once, and that a banquet should be prepared in his honour. Then he settled himself again on his throne, wondering what the envoy had to say.

The envoy said nothing. He advanced to the throne where the king was awaiting him, and stooping down, traced on the floor with a rod which he held in his hand a black circle all round it. Then he sat down on a seat that was near, and took no further notice of anyone.

The king and his courtiers were equally mystified and enraged at this strange behaviour, but the envoy sat as calm and still as an image, and it soon became plain that they would get no explanation from him. The ministers were hastily summoned to a council, but not one of them could throw any light upon the subject. This made the king more angry than ever, and he told them that unless before sunset they could find someone

capable of solving the mystery he would hang them all.

The king was, as the ministers knew, a man of his word; and they quickly mapped out the city into districts, so that they might visit house by house, and question the occupants as to whether they could fathom the action of the ambassador. Most of them received no reply except a puzzled stare; but, luckily, one of them was more observant than the rest, and on entering an empty cottage where a swing was swinging of itself, he began to think it might be worth while for him to see the owner. Opening a door leading into another room, he found a second swing, swinging gently like the first, and from the window he beheld a patch of corn, and a willow which moved perpetually without any wind, in order to frighten away the sparrows. Feeling more and more curious, he descended the stairs and found himself in a large light workshop in which was seated a weaver at his loom. But all the weaver did was to guide his threads, for the machine that he had invented to set in motion the swings and the willow pole, made the loom work.

When he saw the great wheel standing in the corner, and had guessed the use of it, the merchant heaved a sigh of relief. At any rate, if the weaver could not guess the riddle, he at least might put the minister on the right track. So without more ado he told the story of the circle, and ended by declaring that the person who could explain its meaning should be handsomely rewarded.

‘Come with me at once,’ he said. ‘The sun is low in the heavens, and there is no time to lose.’

The weaver stood thinking for a moment and then walked across to a window, outside of which was a hen-coop with two knuckle-bones lying beside it. These he picked up, and taking the hen from the coop, he tucked it under his arm.

‘I am ready,’ he answered, turning to the minister.

In the hall the king still sat on his throne, and the envoy on his seat. Signing to the minister to remain where he was, the weaver advanced to the envoy, and placed the knuckle-bones on the floor beside him. For answer, the envoy took a handful of millet seed out of his pocket and scattered it round; upon which the weaver set down the hen, who ate it up in a moment. At that the envoy rose without a word, and took his departure.

As soon as he had left the hall, the king beckoned to the weaver.

'You alone seem to have guessed the riddle,' said he, 'and great shall be your reward. But tell me, I pray you, what it all means?'

'The meaning, O king,' replied the weaver, 'is this:

The circle drawn by the envoy round your throne is the message of the emperor, and signifies, "If I send an army and surround your capital, will you lay down your arms?" The knuckle-bones which I placed before him told him, "You are but children in comparison with us. Toys like these are the only playthings you are fit for." The millet that he scattered was an emblem of the number of soldiers that his master can bring into the field; but by the hen which ate up the seed he understood that one of our men could destroy a host of theirs.'

'I do not think,' he added, 'that the emperor will declare war.'

'You have saved me and my honour,' cried the king, 'and wealth and glory shall be heaped upon you. Name your reward, and you shall have it even to the half of my kingdom.'

'The small farm outside the city gates, as a marriage portion for my daughter, is all I ask,' answered the weaver, and it was all he would accept. 'Only, O king,' were his parting words, 'I would beg of you to remember that weavers also are of value to a state, and that they are sometimes cleverer even than ministers!'

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