

PORTUGUESE FOLK-TALES

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Portuguese Folk-Tales by Henriquetta Monteiro & Consiglieri Pedroso

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HENRIQUETTA MONTEIRO & CONSIGLIERI PEDROSO

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INTRODUCTION.

THE thirty stories which Prof. Consiglieri Pedroso has selected from his collection of five hundred in-edited Portuguese Folk-Tales have this great merit—they are evidently genuine. Just as it is easy to decide in the case of certain tales which their collectors profess to have gathered from rustic lips that they have been submitted to literary manipulation, so is there no difficulty in recognising the justice of the claim made by these Portuguese stories to be considered as “popular” in the technical sense of the word. Their occasional clumsiness and obscurity, their frequent forgetfulness of their original meaning, and some of their other peculiarities, may be objected to by lovers of neat and trim fairy-tales, but those characteristics will be accepted by more serious students of folk-lore as trustworthy evidence in favour of Prof. Consiglieri Pedroso’s conscientiousness as a collector and a reporter.

As he has postponed for a time his comments on the stories he has published, it may be useful to say a few words here as regards their principal themes. The group of folk-tales, which is most largely repre-

sented in the present collection, is that which treats of a supernatural spouse who is temporarily condemned to assume an unattractive appearance. For the sake of convenience it is often designated the Beauty and the Beast, or the Cupid and Psyche, group. To it belong five tales. No. 10, "The Maiden and the Beast," resembles that form of the story with which we are best acquainted, except in its termination; for in it the forgotten Beast dies, and soon afterwards the penitent Beauty does the same. No. 26, "The Prince who had the Head of a Horse," has remained more faithful to its leading idea, which is that of a transformation terminated by a wife's self-sacrificing pertinacity. The best-known form of the story is probably the Countess d'Aulnoy's "Prince Marcassin," an adaptation of one of Straparola's tales: one of the most interesting of its variants is the Calmuc legend of the Bird-husband, which forms the seventh of Jülg's *Kalmükische Märchen*. No. 20, "The Cabbage Stalk," resembles the Cupid and Psyche variant of the same theme, its supernatural hero being obliged to fly when he is looked at by candle-light at night, and three drops of grease fall upon him. Its main features bear a strong resemblance to those of the Sicilian "Re d'Amuri" (Pitre, No. 18), but it is also closely akin to such tales, current everywhere, as the Norse "King Valemon, the White Bear," and "East o' the Sun and

West o' the Moon." In Nos. 27 and 28 the Beast is not the husband but the wife, there being, as is usual, a feminine as well as a masculine form of the story. In the one case, a young man, in the most improbable manner, without the slightest compulsion, marries a spider; in the other, a youth weds something "which felt very cold and clammy," and which turns out to be "a little tick." In both of these stories the idea which lent an air of comparative probability to their eastern originals has been forgotten or misunderstood. In most of the Indian stories of this class, and their variants in other Asiatic lands, there exists the notion that a celestial being may be condemned to live on earth, generally cased in a bestial husk, but having the power of, at times, laying that husk aside, until the spell under which the fallen divinity labours is brought to an end by the destruction of the husk during the temporary absence of its celestial tenant.

The story of Cinderella occurs twice, Nos. 18 and 24, or three times if the "Katie Woodencloak" form of the tale in No. 16 is included. In the first and second of these the heroine is styled "the Hearth-Cat," because "she was fond of assisting the servant in the kitchen." In neither of them is it stated that she was assisted, as no doubt was the case, by her dead mother. In No. 18 a cow protects her, and in No. 24 a fish, which she had rescued from the frying-pan;

but the narrator was evidently unaware that these creatures had a maternal interest in the Hearth-Cat. The troubles of Maria do Pau, the heroine of No. 16, are very much the same as those of the German Allerleirauh, the Norse Katie Woodencloak, the English Catskin, the Scotch Rashie-Coat, and all the rest of her sister sufferers in divers lands—mysterious maidens of high degree, who to escape from an incestuous marriage voluntarily envelope themselves in a rough husk, represented in the present instance by a dress made of wood.

The widely-spread story to which the name of "The Supplanted Bride" may be given, in which the real bride is set on one side, and sometimes even put to death by a step-sister, or serving-maid, or some other impostor who assumes her place, appears four times. No. 2 begins with the Rapunzel's hair-ladder opening. The impostor is a negro woman, who transforms the heroine into a bird by running a pin into her head. No. 3 is the same narrative with a different opening, being the strange story of the three citrons, out of each of which when opened emerges "a most lovely maid," who immediately dies if she is not supplied with water to drink. The story is familiar to the South of Europe, and has even made its way to the North, being No. 66 of Asbjørnsen's Norse Tales ("Tales from the Fjeld," No. 25). In No. 9 the

supplanted bride loses not only her husband but her eyes. These, however, she recovers, obtaining them as the price of a nosegay. In No. 22 the supplanted heroine is a girl, whose mother, when dying, gives her a towel and a comb, on the application of which to her head pearls fall therefrom. Her supplanter contrives to have her thrown, in a state of trance, into the sea, where she is swallowed by a whale, from which, after a time, she emerges unhurt. In the first two variants there is a characteristic touch of ferocity at the close. When the true bride was asked what the prince ought to do to the impostor, "the maiden replied that he should kill her, and with her bones make bed-steps for her to climb into her bed, and with her skin to make a drum."

Another group of narratives, describing undeserved suffering, tell the story of what may be called "The Calumniated Wife," the innocent mother who is accused of having killed, and sometimes eaten, her beloved children. A specimen of this group occurs in No. 29. One of its characteristic features is the mention of three little blue stones, which bear witness to the truth of the victim's asseveration of innocence. A confidant somewhat resembling these blue stones is the stone talisman to which the heroine of No. 15, "The Maiden with the Rose on her Forehead," tells the story of her wrongs,—how she has