

C. FAITHFUL SERVANT

(The folktale -Stith Thompson - pp 111-113)

One of the most interesting of all folktales, Faithful John (Type 516), is concerned with the fidelity of a servant, though sometimes instead of the servant some versions may tell of a brother, a foster brother, or a faithful friend.⁽¹¹⁾ The tale, which has been given definite study by Rosch,⁽¹²⁾ is about a prince who is reared with the servant who is to be his later helper, a boy of nearly the same age but of lower social standing. In the absence of his father the hero disregards the advice of his helper and enters a forbidden chamber. There he sees the portrait of a beautiful maiden, his future bride, and he is overcome with love for her and resolves to win her. Through the cleverness of his helper he succeeds, either by enticing her aboard a merchant ship, by stealing into her presence in women's clothes, or by securing access to her through an underground passage; or the servant may woo her on behalf of the prince. On the return journey the prince and his bride undergo three perils which have been contrived either by the father of the princess or by the hero's own father or stepmother. A considerable variety exists in the nature of the perils mentioned in the different versions of the tale. The couple may undergo danger because of poisoned food or clothing, or when they meet robbers or encounter a drowning person, or when they cross a stream or pass through a certain door. The last of the perils is the entrance of a snake into the bedchamber of the bridal pair. The faithful servant learns of these perils, usually through the conversation of birds, and strives to prevent them. In warding off the danger from the snake he touches the prince's sleeping wife and he is immediately accused of treachery toward his master. Since those who told him about the perils forbade him absolutely to speak of them, he must either maintain silence or disobey them. He explains the situation to his master and justifies his conduct, but he is immediately turned to stone because of his disobedience. The only way the faithful servant can be restored to life is through the blood of the prince's own children. This sacrifice is eventually made and the servant is restored. The children are then resuscitated.

This story is of rather frequent occurrence in all countries from Portugal to India. Rösch considers that the kernel of the story is the attempt on the part of the servant to save his master and the misunderstanding that results. Stories of this kind have been recorded in India for the last two thousand years. In this connection Rösch considers significant such tales as that of the faithful but misunderstood dog who is killed when he tries to save his master's child from a snake.⁽¹³⁾ There are also stories of a faithful but misunderstood minister of state. More fully developed forms of the tale appear also in India, especially in the *Ocean of Story*, of the late eleventh century and in some recent oral versions. Rösch studies in some detail the relationship of this story with the romance of *Amis and Amiloun*, which has the turning to stone and the disenchantment by the blood of the children. He concludes that the story of Faithful John was developed from material coming originally from India and from the *Amis and Amiloun* motifs, and that this composition took place in Hungary. He explains the striking similarity in the Portuguese and Hindu tales by supposing that they were carried directly by Portuguese colonists from India to Portugal.

Kaarle Krohn (14) after examination of the same material, comes to radically different conclusions. He obviously thinks of the tale as very old in its relatively complete form. He suggests that it spread westward all the way from India to Portugal throughout all the intervening countries and that the form found in India and in Portugal (but not between) represents the original form of the story as it spread over the whole area. Variants in between are to be explained as later developments. The Amis and Amiloun tale he thinks of as a specialized literary treatment of Faithful John and not as a source of the folktale. Krohn's conclusions seem much more reasonable than Rösh's, since it assumes a greater age for the fully developed tale and adequate time for its dissemination and special developments.

In the tales of the Grateful Dead Man (Types 505-508) we have seen that the hero is rewarded by securing the services of a faithful servant who is none other than the grateful dead man himself. In nearly all of these tales one of the chief of these services of this faithful servant is the overcoming of difficulties in the way of the hero's successful marriage. One of these tales, not hitherto mentioned, seems to have developed in Russia, from which a few versions have spread to countries immediately adjacent. Because of the resemblance to the Germanic story of Brunhilde it is sometimes called by that name. In this tale of The Strong Woman as Bride (Type 519) a prince and his faithful and extraordinary companion woo a bride who is beautiful, strong, and warlike, and who will have as a husband no man who is not her equal in strength. The prince must wield her gigantic weapons and ride her untamed steed. By substitution of his companion, this is accomplished. On the bridal night she lays her feet and hands on the prince and almost stifles him. He asks permission to go outside and in the darkness the helper substitutes himself and overcomes the princess. The rest of the story concerns the princess's revenge after she discovers the betrayal. She cuts off the feet of the helper and drives forth the prince, who becomes a swineherd. The lamed helper joins a blind man and they assist each other. They overcome a giant and compel him to show healing water. The helper, with his feet restored, returns and compels the restoration of his master.(16)

(11). The faithful friend, sometimes a "blood brother," appears in The Two Brothers (Type 303); see also Motifs P311, P312.

(12). Der getreue Johannes.

(13). For a discussion of this incident and others relating to it, see Motif B331.

(14). Übersicht, pp. 82ff.

(16). Sec A. von Löwis of Menar, Die Brünhildsage in Russland (Leipzig, 1923).