

## **E. HELPFUL ANIMALS**

In some of the versions of the tales of extraordinary companions, particularly in North Africa, these peculiar helpers are animals. Though no one has ever taken the trouble to count all the occurrences, it is likely that, considering folktales all over the world, an even more important part is played by animal helpers than by human or supernatural. Such animals appear as actors in a large number of tales everywhere and they are substituted by story-tellers for human helpers with considerable freedom. In some tales, the role these animals is so important as to form the actual center of interest.

Such is true of *The Animal Brothers-in-Law* (Type 552), a story made popular in literary circles in the seventeenth century by Basile carried on in the eighteenth by Musäus in his sophisticated retelling of folktales. A bankrupt man, in return for safety and money, promises his three daughters in marriage to three animals. Frequently these animals are a bear, an eagle, and a whale. Or it may be that the three girls themselves, despairing of marriage, say that they will marry anyone, even if it is an animal. In either case the animals take the girls as wives and leave with them. The brother of the girls visits his sisters, and he discovers that the animals periodically become men. The brothers-in-law, out of kindness, give him a part of their bodies, the eagle a feather, the bear a hair, and the whale a scale. These he can use to call on them for help. The brother now goes on his adventures and succeeds, by calling, at the proper moment, on his animal brothers-in-law.

The story up to this point is well integrated and justifies its being thought of as an independent tale. But from here on we may enter into any one of several adventure stories where the timely aid of the animal helpers is appropriate. The hero may use them in saving a princess from a monster, as in the *Dragon Rescue* tale, or in defeating the ogre with his life in an egg (Types 300, 302, 303), or occasionally in recovering the castle, wife, and magic objects which have been stolen from him (Type 560). Essentially, then, the story of *The Animal Brothers-in-Law* serves as an elaborate introduction which may be attached rather freely to suitable adventure stories.

Aside from those versions obviously dependent upon the literary work of Musäus or Basile, this tale is known in the more distinctly oral tradition of every part of Europe, though its occurrence is strangely inconsistent. It seems most popular in the Baltic states and in Russia. Its distribution is continuous from Ireland to the Caucasus and Palestine. At least one version

has been carried by the French to America, where it is told among the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia.

A special form of this tale, popular in Norway but hardly known outside (Type 552B),(10) has the father of the girls visit them. He sees the animals produce food by magic. When he attempts to imitate them, he not only fails but gets into trouble and is sometimes killed.(11)

(10). A similar story in Russian is listed by Andrejev (Ukazatd' Skazoénik) as Type No. 299•.

(11). This motif of the unsuccessful imitation of the production of food by magic seems to have been invented independently in this tale and in a group of American Indian stories (see J2425).