Stith Thompson - The Folktale p 80-81

This same general pattern-acquisition of the magic medicines, healing of a princess, and reward-is also found in the very common story of The Two Travelers (Type 613). This tale has had such a long history and is spread over such immense areas that several ways of handling its main incidents have developed. The essential point of the first part of the story is that one of the companions is blinded. There are three ways of accounting for this mutilation. Two travelers (often brothers) dispute as to whether truth or falsehood is the better (or in some cases, which of their religions is the better), and they call on someone else, who is in league with the first, to act as judge. As a result of the loss of the wager, the second man permits himself to be blinded. The other openings of the tale are simpler. One traveler has the food and will not give any to his starving companion unless he permits himself to be blinded. In still other tales a traveler is robbed and blinded by his covetous companion.

In any case, the blinded man wanders about and settles himself down for the night, often in a tree where he can be safe from molestation. During the night he overhears a meeting of spirits or animals, and learns from them many valuable secrets. By using the secrets which he has heard, he first of all restores his own sight, cures a princess (sometimes a king), opens a dried-up well, brings a withered fruit tree to bearing, unearths a treasure, or performs other tasks for which he is richly rewarded. When his wicked companion hears of his good fortune and learns how he has acquired it, he himself attempts to deceive the spirits or animals in the same way. But instead they tear him to pieces, and the ends of justice are served.

As a literary story, this tale is not less than fifteen hundred years old. It is found in Chinese Buddhistic literature, in both Hindu and Jaina writings, and in Hebrew collections, all antedating the ninth century after Christ and some of them much earlier. It has appeared in such medieval collections as the Thousand and One Nights and the Libra de los Gatos and in novellistic tales of Basile in his Pentamerone. In spite of this very considerable literary history, which shows clearly enough the popularity and long standing of the tale throughout the Near East and even as far afield as China and Tibet, the story seems to have been accepted long ago into European and Asiatic folklore. As an oral story, it enjoys great popularity throughout the whole of Europe and Asia. Eleven modern oral versions have been reported from India, and it is known in Ceylon, Annam, and Korea. lt appears not only in North Africa, but in practically every area of central Africa. In America variants have been recorded from the Canadian and Missouri French, from the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia and the

Tepecanos of Mexico. A good Negro version, perhaps from Africa, has been taken down in Jamaica.

A tale of such wide acceptance naturally presents many problems to the scholar who attempts to unravel its history. Its rather remote and Oriental origin seems clear, and the general lines of development of the oral versions as worked out by Christiansen (15) are plausible. Some of the questions involved are, for example, whether the original tale concerned a dispute over religion or over good and evil, whether the secrets were learned from devils or animals, whether the travelers were originally brothers or not. Whatever be the final conclusion about these matters, the story does illustrate nearly every problem that concerns the student of a tale. It is a long road from The Two Travelers as it appears in the ancient literature of the Orient to the utterly unsophisticated story-telling of the Jamaica Negro.

(15). R. Th. Christiansen, The Tale of the Two Travellers, or the Blinded Man; see also:

A. Wesselski, Märchen des Mittelalters, 202, No. 14; K. Krohn, Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,

XXVI (1925),111ff:; M. Gaster, Studies and Texts in Folklore, II, 908ff.