

The commencement of the next is so different that we give it at length.

THE SEVEN-HEADED SERPENT. ✓

LIKE many others in the world, there was a mother with her three sons. The eldest said to her that he wished to go from country to country, until he should find a situation as servant, and that she should give him a cake.

He sets out. While he is going through a forest he meets an old woman, who asks him for a morsel of his cake.* He says to her, "No!" that he would prefer to throw it into the muddy clay. And the lad asks her if she knows of a servant's place. She says, "No." He goes on from forest to forest, until the night overtakes him. There comes to him a bear. He says to him,

"Ant of the earth! who has given you permission to come here?"

"Who should give it me? I have taken it myself."

And the bear devours him.

The second son asks his mother to give him a cake, for he wishes to go as a servant, like his brother. She gives him one, and he goes away like his brother. He meets an old woman, who says to him,

"Give me a little of your cake."

"I prefer to throw it into this muddy clay rather than to give you any of it."

He asks her if she knows of a servant's place. She replies, "No." And on he goes, on, on, on, deeper into the forest. He meets a huge bear. He says to him,

"Ant of the earth! Who has given you permission to come here?"

* I have a dim recollection of having read something very similar to this either in a Slavonic or a Dalmatian tale.

"Who should give it me? I have taken it myself."

And the bear devours him.

The third son asks his mother to give him a cake, for he wishes to go off, like his brothers. He sets off, and walks on, and on, and on. And he finds an old woman. She asks him,

"Where are you going?"

"I want a situation as servant."

"Give me a little bit of your cake."

"Here! Take the whole as well, if you like."

"No, no! A little bit is enough for me."

And he asks her if she knows of a servant's place. She says to him,

"Yes; you will find it far beyond the forest. But you will meet an enemy here; but I will give you a stick, with the touch of which you may kill him."*

He goes on, and on, and on. There comes to him a bear, and says to him,

"Ant of the ground! Who has given you permission to come here?"

"Who has given it me? I have taken it myself."

The lad gives him a little blow with his stick, and the bear gives a howl—

"Oy, oy, oy!—spare my life! Oy, oy, oy!—spare my life!"

But he said to him,

"Tell me, then, how many you are in the place where you live?"

"Seven."

He gives him another blow, and he falls stark dead.

He goes on, on, on, until he finds a palace. He goes in, and asks,

"Do you want a servant?"

* This incident is in the translation of a tale by Chambers, called "Rouge Etin," in Brucyre's "Contes de la Grande Bretagne," p. 64. See notes *ad loc.*

They say to him,

“Yes, yes; our shepherd has gone away, and we want one.”

They send him to bed; and the next day they give him a fine flock of sheep, and tell him not to go on the mountain, because it is full of large and savage animals, and to pay great attention, because the sheep always want to go there. The next day he goes off with his sheep, and all of them run away to this mountain, because the herbage was very good there. Our shepherd had, fortunately, not forgotten his stick, for at that moment there appeared before him a terrible bear.

“Who has given you permission to come here?”

“I have taken it myself.”

“I must eat you.”

He approaches, but our shepherd gives him a little blow with his stick, and he begins to cry out,

“Oy, oy, oy!—spare my life!”

“Tell me, then, how many you are where you live?”

“We were seven yesterday, but to-day we are only six, with me.”

He gives him another blow, and he falls stark dead. And the shepherd hides him as well as he can in a hedge, and then he returns home with his sheep, well filled. That evening the sheep gave him a great deal of milk, and he made fine cheeses with it.* The master and mistress were delighted to have such a servant. The next day he goes off again. As soon as he opened the stable-door the sheep start off running to the good pasture and fine herbage, and the same things (happen again). At the end of a moment there appears a bear, who asks him why he comes there into those parts. Our shepherd, with his stick, gives him a little blow on the neck, and the bear begins to cry,

“Ay, ay, ay!—spare my life!”

* In the Pyrénées the ewes are usually milked, and either “caillé”—a kind of clotted cream—or cheese is made of the milk. The sheep for milking are often put in a stable, or fold, for the night.

He asks him,

“How many are you there where you live?”

“We were seven, but at present we are five with me.”

And he gives him a little blow, and he falls stiff and dead. And in five days he kills all the bears in the same way; and when he saw the last one come, he was frightened to see a beast so immense and so fearful, and which came dragging himself along, he was so old. He says to him,

“Why have you come into these parts?”

And at the same time the shepherd gives him a little blow. He begins to cry out to him to spare his life, and that he would give him great riches and beautiful apartments, and that they should live together. He spares his life, and sends the flock back to the house. They go through hedges and hedges, and “through the fairies’ holes,”* and arrive at last at a fine palace. There they find the table set out with every kind of food and drink. There were also servants to attend on them, and there were also horses all ready saddled, and with harness of gold and silver. There was nothing but riches there. After having passed some days there like that, our shepherd said to himself that it would be better to be master and owner of all that fortune. So he gives a blow to the bear, and kills him stark dead.

After having dressed himself splendidly, he gets on horseback, and goes from country to country, and comes to a city, and hears the bells sounding, dilin-don, dilin-don, and all the people are in excitement. He asks, “What is the matter?” They tell him how that there is in the mountain a serpent with seven heads, and that one person must be given to him every day. This serpent has seven heads. They draw lots to know who must be given to the serpent. The lot had fallen on the king’s daughter, and every one was in grief and distress, and all were going, with the king at their

* For the “fairies’ holes,” see Introduction to the “Tales of the Lamiñak,” p. 48.

head, to accompany her to the mountain. They left her at the foot of the mountain, and she went on mounting alone to the top. This young man goes after her, and says to her,

“ I will accompany you.”

The king's daughter says to him,

“ Turn back, I beg you. I do not wish you to risk your life because of me.”

He says to her,

“ Have no fear for me. I have a charm of might.”

At the same time they hear an extraordinary noise and hissing, and he sees the serpent coming like the lightning. As our man has his stick with him, he gives him a little blow on one of his heads, and one by one the seven heads fall off, and our princess is saved.

In order to go to the mountain, she was dressed in her most beautiful robes. She had seven of them on. He took a little piece from each of the seven robes, and he likewise takes the tongue from each of the heads, and puts them in these little pieces of silk. He then takes the king's daughter on his horse, and descends the mountain. The daughter goes home to her father, and our gentleman to the bear's house. The news that the seven-headed serpent is killed spreads quickly. The king had promised his daughter, and the half of his kingdom, to the man who should have killed him. The serpent was killed, as we have said. Three charcoal-burners, passing by on the mountain, see the serpent, and take the seven heads, and go to the king, asking to have a reward. But, as they were three, they were in a difficulty; and they were sent away until the council was assembled, and to see if any other person would come. As nobody appeared, they were going to draw lots who should be the husband of the king's daughter. There was great excitement that day, and there was also a great stir when this young man arrived in the city. He asks what it is. They tell him what it is. He was splendidly dressed, and had a magnificent horse. He asks to see the king, and, as he was handsomely dressed, he is received immediately.

He asks if the seven heads of the serpent had seven tongues in them ; and they cannot find them. Then he shows the seven tongues. He sends, too, for the princess' seven robes, and he shows the seven pieces that are wanting, as well as the seven tongues. When they see that, all exclaim—

“ This is the true saviour of the king's daughter ! ”

And they are married.

The three charcoal-burners, after having been dressed in a coat of sulphur, were burnt alive in the midst of the market-place.

Our gentleman and lady lived very happily, sometimes at her father's house and at other times at their own bear's-house ; and, as they had lived well, they died happily. Then I was there, and now I am here.

Our next tale will show the serpent in a new character, and might have been included under the variations of “ Beauty and the Beast.”

THE SERPENT IN THE WOOD.

LIKE many others in the world, there was a widower who had three daughters. One day the eldest said to her father, that she must go and see the country. She walked on for two hours, and saw some men cutting furze, and others mowing hay.

She returned to the house, astonished at having seen such wonderful things. She told her father what wonderful things she had seen, and her father replied :

“ Men cutting furze ! Men mowing hay ! ! ”

The second daughter asks, too, to go like her sister, and she returned after having seen the same things. And the third daughter said that she ought to go, too.

“ Child, what will you see ? ”

“ I, like my sisters, something or other.”