

THE LANGUAGE OF ANIMALS BULGARIAN FOLK-TALE

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THE LANGUAGE OF ANIMALS^[0]

A certain man had a shepherd, who served him faithfully and honestly for many years. This shepherd, when he was once upon a time following the sheep, heard a whistling on the hill, and, not knowing what it was, went off to see. When he got to the place, there was a conflagration, and in the middle of it a serpent was squeaking. When he saw this, he waited to see how the serpent would act, for all around it was burning, and the fire had almost come close to it. When the serpent saw him, it screamed: 'Dear shepherd, do a good action: take me out of this fire.' The shepherd took pity on its words, and reached it his crook, and it crawled out upon it. When it had crawled out, it coiled itself round his neck. When the shepherd saw this, he was frightened, and said: 'Indeed you are a wretch! Is that the way you are going to thank me for rescuing you? So runs the proverb: "Do good, and find evil."' The serpent answered him: 'Don't fear: I shall do you no harm; only carry me to my father; my father is the emperor of the serpents.' The shepherd begged pardon, and excused himself: 'I can't carry you to your father, because I have no one to leave in charge of my sheep.' The serpent said to him: 'Don't fear for your sheep; nothing will happen to them; only carry me to my father, and go quickly.' Then there was no help for it, so he started with it over the hill. When he came to a door, which was formed of nothing but serpents intertwined, and went up to it, the serpent which was coiled round his neck gave a whistle, and the serpents, which had twined themselves into the form of a door, immediately untwined, and made way for them to enter. As the shepherd and the serpent entered the palace, the serpent called to the shepherd: 'Stop! let me tell you something: when you come into my father's palace, he will promise you what you desire, silver and gold; but don't you accept anything, only ask him to give

you such a tongue that you will be able to understand all animals. He will not give you this readily, but at last grant it you he will.’ The shepherd went with it into its father’s palace, and its father, on seeing it, shed tears, and asked it: ‘Hey, my son, where have you been till now?’ It replied, and told him everything in order: what had taken place, and how it had taken place, and how the shepherd had rescued it. Then the emperor of the serpents turned to the shepherd, and said to him: ‘Come, my son, what do you wish me to give you in recompense for rescuing my child?’ The shepherd replied to him: ‘Nothing else, only give me such a tongue that I can understand all animals.’ The emperor of the serpents said to him: ‘That is not a proper gift for you, my son, because, if I give you anything of the kind, you will betray yourself in somebody’s presence by boasting of it, and then you will die immediately; ask something else.’ The shepherd replied to him: ‘I wish for nothing else. If you will give it me, give it; if not, farewell!’ He turned to go; but the emperor of the serpents cried out: ‘Stay! Return! If you ask this, come, that I may give it you. Open your mouth.’ The shepherd opened his mouth, and the emperor of the serpents spat into it, and told him to spit also into his mouth. And thus they spat thrice into each other’s mouths. When this was done, the emperor of the serpents said to the shepherd: ‘Now you have the tongue which you desired; go, and farewell! But it is not permitted you to tell anybody, because, if you do, you will die. I am telling you the truth.’ The shepherd then departed. As he went over the hill, he understood the conversation of the birds, and, so to speak, of everything in the world. When he came to his sheep, he found them correct in number, and sat down to rest. But scarcely had he lain down, when two crows flew up, perched on a tree hard by him, and began to converse in their language: ‘If that shepherd knew that just where that black lamb lies a vault full of silver and gold is buried in the ground, he would take its contents.’ When he heard this, he went and told his master, and he brought a cart, and they broke open the door of the vault, and took out its valuable contents. His master was a righteous man, and said to him: ‘Well, my son, this is all yours; the Lord has given it you. Go, provide a house, get married, and live comfortably.’ The shepherd took the property, went away, provided a house, got married, and lived very comfortably. This shepherd, after a little time, became so rich and prosperous that there was nobody richer than he in his own or the neighbouring villages. He had shepherds, cowherds, swineherds, grooms, and everything on a handsome scale. Once upon a time this shepherd

ordered his wife on New Year's Eve to provide wine, brandy, and everything requisite, and to go the next morning to his cattle, to take the provisions to the herdsmen, that they, too, might enjoy themselves. His wife obeyed him, and did as her husband ordered her.

The next day they got up, got ready, and went. When they arrived where the cattle were, the master said to his shepherds: 'Lads, assemble together, and sit down to eat and drink your fill, and I will watch the cattle to-night.' This was done; they assembled together, and he went out to sleep by the cattle. In the course of the night, after some time, the wolves began to howl and speak in their language, and the dogs to bark and speak in theirs. The wolves said: 'Can we capture any young cattle?' The dogs answered in their language: 'Come in, that we, too, may eat our fill of flesh.' But among the dogs there was one old dog, who had only two teeth left. This dog spoke and answered the wolves: 'In faith, as long as these two teeth of mine last, you shan't come near to do harm to my master.' In the morning, when it dawned, the master called the herdsmen, and told them to kill all the dogs except that old one. His servants began to implore him: 'Don't, master! Why? It's a sin.' But he said to them: 'Do just as I ordered you, and not otherwise.'

Then he and his wife mounted their horses and went off. His wife rode a mare, and he a horse. As they went, the master's horse outstripped the wife's mare, and began to say to her in their language: 'Go quicker; why do you hang back?' The mare's reply in defence of her lagging pace was so amusing that the man laughed out loud, turned his head, and looked behind him with a smile. His wife observed him smiling, whipped her mare to catch him up, and then asked him to tell her why he smiled. He said to her: 'Well, suppose I did? Something came into my head.' This answer did not satisfy her, but she began to worry him to tell her why he smiled. He said this and that to her to get out of it, but the more he said to get out of it, the more did she worry him. At length he said to her that, if he told her, he would die immediately. But she had no dread of her husband's dying, and went on worrying him: 'There is no alternative, but tell me you must.' When they got home, they dismounted from their horses, and as soon as they had done so, her husband ordered a grave to be dug for him. It was dug, and he lay down in it, and said to his wife: 'Did you not press me to tell you why I smiled? Come now, that I may tell you; but I shall die immediately.' On saying this, he gave one more look round him, and

observed that the old dog had come from the cattle. Seeing this, he told his wife to give him a piece of bread. She gave it him, but the dog would not even look at it, but shed tears and wept; but the cock, seeing it, ran up and began to peck it. The dog was angry, and said: 'As if *you'd* die hungry! Don't you see that our master is going to die?' 'What a fool he is! Let him die! Whose fault is it? I have a hundred wives. When I find a grain of millet, I call them all to me, and finally eat it myself. If one of them gets cross at this, I give her one or two pecks, and she lowers her tail; but this man isn't equal to keeping one in order.' When the man heard the cock say this, he jumped up at once out of the grave, seized a stick, chased his wife over hill and dale, and at last settled her completely, so that it never entered her head any more to ask him why he smiled.

[0] Gadinski yazyk. Konstantin Pavlof. ↑

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