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Folk-Lore Tales of Central Africa

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FOLK-LORE TALES OF CENTRAL AFRICA.

[COLLECTED IN NYASSALAND.]

STORY OF THE MAN WHO LIVED BY OVERREACHING OTHERS.

ONCE upon a time there was a great famine, and a certain man went to the forest, and found some figs, which he plucked and put into his bag. Having secured the figs he went on his way, and in his journey he came upon a man who was eating grass.

He said to him, "Why do you eat grass?"

The other replied, saying, "Because there is no food ; thou thyself seest that this is a time of hunger."

Then the deceiver said, "Here are some figs ; eat," and the other replied thanking him.

As the man who was eating the grass finished eating the figs, the deceiver turned and said, "Give me my figs."

To this the man replied, "Why did you give me your figs? Did I ask them of you?"

Then the two men disputed, the one saying that no man who is hungry would refuse to eat when food is offered to him, and the other only saying, "Give me my figs." After they had disputed a long time the man who had eaten the figs gave the other his fishing-net. So the dispute ended, and the man went on his way carrying the fishing-net.

It came to pass that while continuing his journey he came upon certain people who were trying to catch fish with their hands. Coming up to them he said, "Why are ye trying to catch fish with your hands?"

They replied, "We have no net, and the fish are defeating us."

The deceiver said, "Just try this net of mine."

They tried the net and caught a great many fishes.

Then the deceiver turned round and said, "Give me my net which I took from the man who was eating grass; the same who ate my figs. Give me my net; give me my net."

They gave him many fish, and he went on his way.

At length he came to a village, and saw some people who had nothing to serve as relish with their porridge, for they were dipping their porridge on the ulcers on their bodies.

The man said, "Why are ye doing thus?"

They replied, "Because we have no relish."

He said, "Here are some fish for you."

They thanked him, and took them, not knowing that he would turn again and ask for them. So, when they had eaten the fish he said, "Give me my fish; the fish which I took from the people who used my net; the net which I took from the man who ate my figs, even he who was eating grass. Give me my fish; give me my fish."

They brought some millet and gave to him, and he went on his way.

While he continued his journey he came upon some guinea-fowls eating white ants, and he said to them, "Why are you eating white ants?"

The guinea-fowls replied, saying, "They are our food."

The deceiver said, "Here is proper food."

The guinea-fowls said, "Give us that we may eat."

He poured it out, and they consumed it all.

When he saw that they had eaten the millet, he said, "Give me my millet; the millet which I took from the people who were dipping their porridge on their ulcers; the people who ate my fish; the fish which I took from the people who appropriated my net; the net which I took from the man who ate my figs, even he who was eating grass. Give me my millet; give me my millet."

The guinea-fowls took their wing-feathers and gave to him, and he went on his way.

As he journeyed further he came upon people who were decorated with the leaves of the maize-plant.

They said to him, "Give us feathers, so that we may decorate ourselves."

He gave them feathers, and they decorated themselves.

When he saw that they had finished decorating themselves, he said, "Give me my feathers; the feathers which I took from the guinea-fowls which ate my millet; the millet that I took from the people who dipped their porridge on their ulcers; the people who ate my fish; the fish which I took from the men who used my net; the net that I took from the man who ate my figs, even he who was eating grass."

They gave him a goat, which he secured, and went on his way.

He then came upon a village, and he said, "I wish to sleep here." The people agreed, and pointed him to a hut. He inquired, saying, "Where shall my goat sleep?"

The people said, "There is the goat-fold, with the other goats."

The man seemed perplexed, and then said, "It would be well that my goat should remain in the cattle-fold."

They agreed, and he secured his goat in the cattle-fold.

The deceiver went to the cattle-fold during night and took his goat, and thrust a stick into it, and the goat died.

And as morning dawned, all the people arose, and saw that the goat was dead.

The deceiver said, "Give me my goat; it has been killed by your cattle."

The people took a bullock and gave him, and he went away with it.

After he had journeyed to a distant part he cut off the beast's tail, and hid the carcase in the wood. He then planted the tail in the ground, and, holding on to the end,

he cried with a great cry, "Come ye to my help. My bullock has entered the ground."

All the people gathered together, and they pulled upon the tail, and it broke.

The deceiver then said, "Ye have pulled off my bullock's tail. Make ye haste and bring your hoes, and dig down and recover my bullock."

They did so, and digged down, but came not upon the beast.

The deceiver then said, "Just so! Give me my bullock, because ye have pulled off its tail."

They gave him forty cattle.

The story is ended.

THE STORY OF A TSHEWA HUNTER.

A certain Tshewa had a musical bow. It came to pass on a certain day that he went to hunt the reed-buck. He came upon reed-buck and struck at one with his arrow. He went home with it.

He then roasted it and ate it, and was filled.

Another day he went to hunt on the mountain, and while hunting he came upon a lioness with a young cub in a cavern on the mountain. He went and called the people, saying, "Let us go, ye people, that ye may seize it."

They went and got their shields and spears, but some went and took guns. Then they went all of them to the mountain to take the cub.

They arrived at the mountain, and said, "Show us where thou sawest the lioness and cub."

He replied, "Climb ye also the mountain, and ye will see the great cave where they are."

They climbed the mountain and saw a very large cavern, whereupon they all made a great noise, firing guns and beating shields, at which the lioness was affrighted and fled away.

They then took the cub and carried it home with them,

at the same time jeering at their friend, and saying, "Thou, master, who sawest the lioness with a young cub on the mountain, wast afraid to seize it, and came and called us. We went to the hill and seized the cub of the lioness. Bring out meat that we may eat plentifully over this lioness' cub."

So he gave them forty hoes, and they were satisfied ; but they knew that he wished to get the lioness' cub so that he might have abundance of meat to eat.

The young lion ate heartily, and soon grew to a great size.

It came to pass on a certain day that he went with his lion to hunt buffalo. He went to the swamps, and came upon a large herd of buffalo.

He said to the lion, "My lion, how is it that thou dost not seize the buffalo? If thou dost not seize them I will kill thee."

So the lion roared, and the buffalo were affrighted, and he seized three. The others fled for fear and escaped.

He then called the lion and said, "Stay here, and I will go and call the people." So he went to call the people.

And it came to pass, while he was going to call the people, some people came up behind him and said, "See, here is a lion that has killed three buffalo." The lion roared.

Then they said, "Let us carry away the meat." The lion roared greatly when he saw that they were to carry off the buffalo meat, and he seized and killed a great many of them.

Then the man came up, and the people whom he had called, and when they saw the people lying dead around, they said, "This lion of yours will not cease till he has killed all the people."

The owner of the lion replied, "Yes, indeed, but I will slay the lion lest he kill the people and bring law-suits upon me."

So he went and flayed the buffalo, and took the liver of

one and cut it in two, and threw the two pieces, one by one, to the lion, which took them at once and ate them.

And it came to pass, when they were returning home, the master of the lion said to the people, "Pass ye on leading the way, and the lion will follow behind. As for me I will follow after the lion and will slay it, because it killed the people. I was saying to myself that it would hunt buffalo for me."

So they went, and the lion, not being on the alert as they journeyed, was pierced with an arrow by its owner. It turned round, and when it saw who had pierced it, it made bounds and grappled with its master, but was killed eventually by a blow from an axe. It fell down and died.

Its master skinned it, and carried the skin home with him.

The people said, "So it is with those who are made full. Even wild beasts may change again. Those who are made full may bite those who fill them." All said, "It is bad, very bad, to bring up wild beasts."

They ate their meat.

It is finished.

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO WAS A DECEIVER.

A man went to a certain village and met with some girls, and inquired of them, saying, "Where are you going?"

The girls replied and said, "We are going to a marriage. Do you wish to accompany us?"

The man agreed to go with them, and they all went on together.

So when they came to the village whither they were going, they all entered the cattle-fold and engaged in a dance, and at the close of the day they separated to their several sleeping-huts.

And it came to pass next morning that they all went to the reeds and remained there. The heads of the village prepared for the marriage-feast by killing several beasts.

The girls were then called back, and again engaged in dancing until the meat had been divided.

When each party had received their share of the meat, it was carried away to the hut of the girls. Then the girls ordered the man who had come with them to go and cook their share. He did so, cooking it in two pots, outside the hut. Meantime all the young women and girls were in the hut.

Then the man feigned illness, and lay down. One of the girls went out, and seeing him lying down, inquired, "What is it?"

He replied, saying, "My head is very painful."

But he did this merely feigning sickness; he told lies.

The girl entered the hut where the others were, and the man got up and uncovered the pots in which the meat was being cooked, and ate it all, until only the bones remained uneaten. Then he lay down again.

Afterwards three of the girls went out and asked him saying, "Is the meat now prepared?" To this he replied, "I do not know; I have not seen it."

The girls then went and uncovered the pots which contained the meat, and behold! there were only bones to be seen. They all wondered greatly, and cried out, "The meat is all eaten—there remain only the bones."

Thereupon they inquired of the man, "Where is the meat?"

He replied, "I do not know. I was lying down, and I fell asleep."

The girls went and told the others who were in the hut, saying, "Come out, the meat is all eaten."

They came out, and bade good-bye to the men and women and the young men of the village. They said, "Remain well. They have eaten all our meat."

The people wondered greatly, and replied, "Good-bye: go well. Salute your people at home."

So the girls went out of the village, and went on their way home, singing as they went. The man also went with them.

They went on and crossed a river. The man there turned aside, saying, "I am going this way. Go ye well."

While they were departing from him he stood and called to them, saying, "Hear ye!"

The girls said, "Let us listen; the man is calling after us."

The man said, "I ate your meat."

The girls replied, "Oh, dear! we have been keeping company with a bad man—a very bad man; he ate all our meat."

So they went home and saluted their people.

The end.

THE STORY OF THE CONEY.

It came to pass on a certain day that the coney was living in the bush, and was eating grass. He got up and went and stayed in a certain village.

On a certain day he said, "I am desirous of taking a girl to wife."

The people agreed, saying, "Take her; but you must first go and show your skill in hunting game."

So the coney agreed, saying, "It is meet that I should first go and hunt game before I take the girl."

He went off to hunt game, and at length arrived in the forest. There he saw a garden of millet. He went into the garden and ate all the millet. He was filled, and went to the river and drank water. Then he went away home and saw a person.

He said to this person, "Go to your garden yonder; I came upon dogs eating your millet." The coney arrived at the village.

The people said to him, "How are you so full?"

The coney said, "I am full with honey."

But the people said, "Let us go and see our garden of millet." They also said, "You must go with us to see it also."

The coney answered and said, "Nay, I am not desirous of going with you."

But the people said, "You must go and exercise your skill on behalf of your mother-in-law."

The coney replied, "I am very tired."

The people said, "Nonsense! Let us go and watch with your mother-in-law." So he went with them.

They went on and came to the garden, and saw that the footprints were like those of the coney. They said, "Who was treading here? It was thou, coney."

The coney denied, saying, "It was not I."

The people said, "Why do you deny it, seeing that the footprints are the same as your own?"

The coney answered, "I came upon dogs eating the millet, and I drove them out."

Then there started forth one of the girls and affirmed, saying, "It was thyself who ate our mother's millet. Why do you deny it? At home we asked thee, saying, 'How art thou so full, coney?' But thou denied, saying, 'I am full with honey.' Thou merely deniest it, but thou didst eat our millet."

All the people said, "Bad son-in-law, it is so; but go thou and drive out the wild cats that are living in our tree yonder, where we wish to eat fruit."

So the coney went away, saying, "As for me, when I arrive at the tree, how shall I drive out the wild cats, for they are very fierce?" So he went on, weeping.

At length he arrived at the tree, and considered how he might catch the young wild cats.

He shouted to the young cats, "Hear, ye young cats! Here is honey; send out your father and mother that they may eat." Thus did the coney, thinking that it was a kind of poison which, if they ate it, would kill them.

So the old cats with their young ones came out of the tree. They said, "Here is the honey which the coney has given us." So they ate of the tree (poison), but they came not upon the fruit.

They said, "Give us the honey that we may eat it." It was given, and they ate it, and as they ate they found it contained bitter water.

They asked, "What kind of food is this? It is like salt."

They ate, and all of them died.

When the coney came upon them he found they were all dead. He exclaimed, "Just so! Now I have delivered myself, because my mother-in-law sent me to drive out the wild cats."

He then went to his mother-in-law and said, "I have killed the wild cats. Let us go and see them."

So they all went and came to the place, and found them even dead. The coney then said, "Give me now my wife, seeing that I am a man of power, having killed the wild cats."

They said, "Not so; thou art a bad man, because thou didst eat all our millet."

So they drove him away.

The coney went away, nevertheless his heart was full of anger because they had refused him his wife. He was also full of sorrow, and he took a rope of bark and bound (hanged) himself so that he died.

THE STORY OF THE MAN AND THE REED-BUCK.

It came to pass, a man was cultivating his garden. He sowed millet, which sprang up and grew well, and was ripe. Then came the time for reaping, and he went away to reap the millet.

It came to pass the next morning that he found his garden destroyed, for one-half of it was reaped.

Then said the owner of the garden, "Who has reaped one-half of my garden? I will go and inquire at my village."

He came home and inquired, but all there denied having done so.

Then he began to "smell out" a certain person, and said, "It was thou who reaped my garden."

But this man drank *umuteyu* and vomited, so his accuser paid him in cattle to the number of five.

So the morning after he went to his garden and found it reaped still more. He "smelt out" another person, and he also drank *umuteyu*, and vomited likewise. He also was paid five cattle.

Again he went out to his garden and found it still more reaped. So he "smelt out" all the people, but [they having drunk *umuteyu* and vomited] he took all the goods he possessed and paid them. There remained only his children and his wives, these only—his cattle and his goats, and all his goods, he had parted with in paying the people.

So he said, "I will not do this. I will lie in my garden and catch the thief."

It came to pass, indeed, that, as he watched, the reed-buck came and danced in the middle of the garden, saying, "The people hereabouts reap with a knife, but, as for us, we reap with the mouth—we reap with the mouth, picking, picking."

So the man seized the reed-buck, and said, "So, then, thou hast done away with all my goods. Why so? Thou art the thief who hast reaped my garden."

And the reed-buck answered, saying, "Pardon me, father, and I, even I, will repay you all your goods."

So the man listened, and said, "Well, let us go."

He took a bark-rope, and said, "I will bind thee."

The reed-buck said, "Do not bind me with a bark-rope, but bind me with a rope of grass instead. If you bind me with a bark-rope I will break it."

So the man was a fool, and listened to the reed-buck. He took grass and made a rope, and bound the reed-buck, and went on his way with it.

And it came to pass that they came to a deep ravine, and the reed-buck stood and considered, and then, by a bound, broke the grass rope, clearing the ravine, and land-

ing on the other side. He laughed greatly at the owner of the garden, saying, "I have overreached you, by your taking grass to bind me."

The reed-buck passed on, laughing at the man.

THE STORY OF THE TRAVELLER.

He went about among the villages of the people. He went to one village, and lighted upon the men in the cattle-fold. He entered the fold, and sat down.

The men said to him, "We see thee." He replied, saying, "Yes."

They asked him, saying, "Where do you come from?" to which he answered, "I merely wander about, for no purpose."

So he saluted them, bidding them adieu, and went out into the forest. He was afraid of men, and went about in the woods where there were no villages.

In the morning he went on, and came upon some men hoeing their gardens. They had beer with them, and, besides the men in the gardens, there were youths, girls, and young boys.

He sat down.

They saluted him, saying, "We see thee," to which salutation he responded.

Then he took a hoe, and began to hoe in the garden. But it so happened that the hoe-handle was broken.

He exclaimed, "Oh, dear! the handle of the hoe is broken."

But so did he act on purpose, for he was coveting the hoe.

Then he spoke to the owners of the hoe, saying, "The handle of the hoe is broken; give me an axe, and I will go into the wood and form another handle."

They gave him an axe, and he took it, together with the hoe, and went away to cut a stick and to make a handle. He went on, cutting as he went, the owners not knowing

that he was going away, but thinking that, as they heard the sound of hewing trees, he was indeed working.

He continued doing so, cutting sticks as he went; he went off with the hoe and the axe.

At length the people heard no more the sound of cutting trees, for he had gone far into the forest, and had run away with the hoe.

They were surprised when they found that he had gone out of sight, like the setting sun.

Then the people said to each other, "This man has deceived us."

They quarrelled among themselves thereupon, but the man he continued to go beyond them.

As he went on, he lighted upon a village in the forest, where there resided an old woman and her children, together with the cattle, sheep, and goats, which the children tended.

So he said, "Grandmother, I wish to stay with thee here."

The old woman agreed, as also did her children.

So he remained in that place for the space of five days.

One day he said to the old woman, "Let us play."

The old woman replied, "I will play with thee."

So he said, "Take water, and bring it with a very big pot, and I will show thee."

The old woman brought water and a big pot.

He got firewood and made a large fire, and put the pot on the hearth, and poured the water into it.

When the water was warm, he said, "Now I will go into the water; and when I say, 'Grandmother, pull me out,' you must pull me out at once. Then you will go into the pot, and when you say, 'My child, pull me out!' I will pull thee out at once."

So did he, day after day, and the grandmother did so too.

But it happened on a certain day that he said, "I will kill this old woman."

So when the cattle, sheep, and goats had gone out to pasture, he made water warm in the pot. He himself began the play by going into the water.

He said, "Grandmother, pull me out!"

She pulled him out.

Then the old woman entered the water.

She cried, "My child, pull me out!"

But the traveller waited, and the water became so hot as to burn. The old woman continued to cry, "My child, pull me out."

He said, "Nay, grandmother; it is broth."

She said, "Oh, dear! you might pull me out."

He again said, "It is broth; I do not want to pull you out."

So he did, and killed the grandmother.

Then he took the flesh and cooked porridge. He cooked much porridge, and took it upon his head to the children.

The children returned, and he brought them the flesh and porridge. They ate of it.

There was there a young child, who spoke out, saying, "I have eaten the big toe of our mother."

But the elder children rebuked him, saying, "It is not that of our mother. Do you want another [toe]?"

Thereupon the young child affirmed strongly, saying, "Indeed, it is."

They ate and finished the food.

The young child re-affirmed, "I have eaten the big toe of our mother."

Now the traveller rose up, and said, "My child, I am going into the forest, but I will return again."

When he had gone some distance, he turned round, and said, "I have killed your grandmother; ye have eaten her flesh."

Then the young boy said, "Did I not tell you, but ye listened not, but rebuked me for saying it?"

They all cried, and lamented sorely.

It is so when you bring in a man who is not known, but who, in his wandering about, only looks to steal the things of the people.

THE STORY OF TANGALEMILINGO.

There went out some boys to hunt game.

It came to pass when they reached the forest, that they came upon game in abundance. They hunted and killed much game, including coneys, reed-buck, guinea-fowl partridge, and bush-buck.

And they said, "Let us go to our resting-place, and there prepare the meat."

So they arrived, and sat down there.

There came also to the place where they were, other people, who were hunters likewise. They all remained in one place; they cut firewood, and made a fire.

Then came a leopard and snatched up part of the reed-buck meat which they had.

Thereupon the men spread themselves out, in order to hunt the leopard. Meanwhile, there came an eland, which ate all the game.

So when the men had pursued the leopard without success, they decided to return.

When they arrived at the resting-place, they found all the game gone.

They said, "The meat is eaten by whom?"

They searched very diligently, but they found no one. There remained behind one young person only.

And it came to pass, when they were searching for the game, that an eland came down and ate the young person.

The men having failed to find the man who took the game, returned, and found the young person amissing. This young person had a knife in a sheath on his arm.

When they found the child gone, they sought for him but found him not.

Then they said, "Let us go home, now that the child is gone amissing, and since some people have taken our game. We have not seen the child, nor the person who took him."

So they started off, and went home.

As they were nearing their village, they cried loudly, making a song, saying :

"We will report Tangalemilingo ;
They have taken him.
He has been taken by the water-people.
Cock, thou art a fowl, a fowl merely,
We will be killed.
We will report Tangalemilingo, Tangalemilingo,
They have taken him.
He has been taken by the water-people.
Cock, thou art a fowl, a fowl merely."

So they arrived home.

But there was Tangalemilingo. When he saw that he was in the eland's stomach, he drew out his knife, and cut the eland's stomach in two.

So he escaped, the eland not killing him. So now no man kills the eland, as at one time it was Tangalemilingo.

Then Tangalemilingo also made a song, saying :

"Believe ye, believe ye,
He who disappeared, drinks the children's milk.
He walks on the paths,
He stands at the gate."

So he arrived at his home, and the women were very glad, and rejoiced. They sang songs, and killed cattle to praise [the spirit] who had brought out the child.

THE STORY OF THE DOINGS OF CAKIDE.

It happened that Cakide was going about seeking food. He failed to find it.

He said, "See, the game is all very large, and as for me, I am much smaller than all ; even the coney is larger than I. So, then, how can I catch game? I am much smaller than all the beasts, and I will therefore die of hunger. Where shall I go? Ah! I will go to the homes of people and search for fowls, and eat their flesh and be filled."

Having considered thus, he went to the villages of the people, and came upon one which was outside, separated from the others, where there were no bushes, but where there were many fowls. He heard the hens cackling when they laid eggs, and the cocks crowing.

He said, "Ha, ha! there they go! This village is in an open place, and how shall I catch the fowls? Let me go and seek another village."

So he went and searched for another village, and found one, but it also was in an open place, and all the fowls remained hid in the village.

Cakide wondered greatly, and said, "Is it really thus? Just so! I will see where there is a village with bushes around it."

He went on and on, and at length a cock crowed. He said, "Here a cock is crowing."

He remained quiet, and again the cock crowed. So he went in the direction of the sound, and came where the cock was. The village was surrounded by bushes, and so Cakide was happy, and said, "Now I will catch these fowls easily."

In that village there was a very great number of fowls. He went on the path and lay down there. The fowls now approached him. Cakide trembled, and the fowls were affrighted, and fled into the village and entered their houses.

Cakide wondered greatly, and said, "After this I will take

care not to tremble, for when I am shaking the fowls run away."

So Cakide fell upon a device, and lay down, feigning death, and opening wide his mouth so that he might seize the fowls in an instant, they not having time to cry out.

So Cakide did so, and feigned to be dead. The fowls came nearer and nearer, picking corn on the path, and Cakide was very still. As they approached nearer he seized a cock in his mouth, holding it tightly in an instant. It did not cry out.

So he went off with the fowl, and ate it and was filled. He said to himself, "See now, before this I was dying of hunger, but to-day I am full. The fowls are many, and I will now grow fat and grow big."

He finished eating the fowl.

And the owners of the fowls began to wonder that their fowls were disappearing. They spoke about it to their children, who said, "We do not know, we never heard them crying out, and we know not what is eating them up. When they are going in that direction we have seen them flying away. Perhaps there are people who are beating them."

The children further said to the old people, "Lie ye at all the paths yonder, so that ye may see what is doing away with your fowls."

So the old people did so, according to the word of the children.

At length Cakide came, and the people continued hid while he came near to them. Cakide then lay down and appeared as if dead.

The people said, "There goes the evil person who has made away with our fowls."

Cakide heard their words, and ran away, for the people were coming upon him.

Then they took dogs and sent them after him. The dogs ran after him, overtook him, and seized him. Cakide cried greatly.

Then came the people, saying, "So then, old rascal, you have done away with our fowls."

So they danced around him. The children danced around him, saying, "Did we not tell you? now ye have caught him. There is the rascal; ye have caught him." The young men also came around, and the old men and girls, together with all the women, young and old, and they ridiculed him greatly.

When they had done thus, they killed him. He died on account of his thieving, for there was no one to deliver him.

D. ELMSLIE.
