



The Bell Of Atri

Once upon a time a good and wise king ruled in the city of Atri. He wished all his people to be happy.

In order that justice might be done to every one, he ordered a great bell to be hung in a tower. Tied to the bell was a strong rope, so long that it reached nearly to the ground.

"I have placed the bell in the center of my city," said the king, "so that it will be near all the people. The rope I have made long, so that even a little child can reach it."

Then the king gave out this order: "If there be any one among my people who feels that he has not been justly treated, let him ring this bell. Then, whether he be old or young, rich or poor, his story shall be heard."

The bell of justice had hung in its place for many years. Many times it had been rung by the poor and needy, and justice had been done. At length the old rope became worn with use and age. When it was taken down, another rope, long enough and strong enough, could not be found. So the king had to send away for one.

"What if some one should need help while the rope is down?" cried the people. "We must find something to take its place."

So one of the men cut a long grapevine and fastened it to the great bell. It was in the springtime, and green shoots and leaves hung from the grapevine rope.

Near Atri, there lived a rich old soldier. This soldier owned a horse that had been with him through many battles. The horse had grown old and lame, and was no longer able to work. So his cruel master turned him out into the streets to get his living as best he could.

"If you cannot find enough to eat, then you may die," said the miser; "you are of no use to me."

The old horse went limping along; he grew thinner and thinner. At length he limped up to the tower where the bell of justice hung. His dim eyes saw the green shoots and the fresh leaves of the grapevine. Thinking they were good to eat, he gave a pull at the vine.

"Ding-dong! ding-dong!" said the great bell. The people came running from all sides.

"Who is calling for justice?" they cried.

There stood the old horse, chewing on the grapevine.

"Ding-dong! ding-dong!" rang the great bell.

"Whose horse is this?" asked the judges, as they came running up. Then the story of the old horse was told.

The judges sent for his cruel master. They ordered that he should build a warm barn, and that the faithful horse should have the best of hay and grain as long as he lived.

The people shouted for joy at this act of justice, but the miser hung his head in shame and led the old horse away. German Folk Tale