Folk Tale No. 253

There once lived a rich merchant who had a son named Ivan. The old man decided: I will take my son overseas and put him to learn the language of birds. He put him to study. Three years later the old man came for his son. "Pay in advance for the tuition, then you may take him," says the teacher; but the merchant had meanwhile grown poor and had nothing to pay. "Father," said the son to him, "ask to have me visit you; I will get you money." The father asked, and it was granted. They go along the road, along the broad road. "Listen, father," says Ivan the merchant's son, "I will turn into a horse; take me to the fair and sell me for three hundred rubles." No sooner said than done. A noble boyar bought the horse, wanted to see its mettle, mounted, and began to spur it. The horse reared, threw off the rider, and galloped into the open field. "Catch him, catch him!" cries the boyar to his grooms. But how do you catch the wild wind in the field, the bright falcon in the heavens?

The merchant ransomed his son, and they set off home; they sail upon the blue sea, and above them flies a flock of geese honking so loudly. "What are the geese saying?" asks the father. "I don't know," answers the son. Another flock of swans flies by, crying even louder. "What are the swans saying?" asks the father. "I don't know," answers the son. The merchant grew angry: he had studied so long and knew nothing! In vexation he pushed him into the sea and sailed on. And Ivan the merchant's son was carried far, far away by the waves and washed ashore at the land of the thirtieth kingdom. He went to the local tsar's palace and asked to enter his service. Not long, not short a time passed, and he became dearer to the tsar than his own child, and dear to the tsarevna as well. The tsar married him to his daughter, and Ivan the merchant's son became Ivan the Tsarevich.

And his father had come to such a pass that he became a beggar and wandered the world asking alms. He wandered through many towns and at last found his way to the thirtieth kingdom. Ivan the Tsarevich saw him from the window and ordered him brought to the palace, fed and given drink, and put to bed. In the evening the tsarevich had washed his feet in a golden basin, and the water remained in it. At night the old man grew thirsty, did not dare to ask, and drank from the basin. The tsarevich heard and asks: "Who is rummaging there?" — "It is I, father! I came to drink some water." — "What are you doing! I washed my feet in that water!" And it came back to the tsarevich how he had sailed with his father upon the sea and what the geese and swans had been saying; he began to question the poor old man, learned who he was, and says: "Do you remember, old man, how you sailed with

your son upon the blue sea and asked him what the geese and swans were talking about? They said this: Ivan the merchant's son's feet are to be washed, and his father is to drink the water! For I am your son!" The old man was frightened and would have fallen at his feet, but the tsarevich would not allow it; they embraced and wept for joy. "But how is it, my son, that you did not drown?" asked the father. "What do you take me for! I did not study to drown, but to marry a tsarevna."