The Tale of The Eloquent Peasant

There was a man, Hunanup by name, a peasant of Sechet-hemat, and he had a wife,......by name. Then said this peasant to his wife: "Behold, I am going down to Egypt to bring back bread for my children. Go in and measure the grain that we still have in our storehouse,............bushel." Then he measured for her eight bushels of grain. Then this peasant said to his wife: "Behold, two bushels of grain shall be left for bread for you and the children. But make for me the six bushels into bread and beer for each of the days that I shall be on the road." Then this peasant went down to Egypt after he had loaded his asses with all the good produce of Sechet-hemat.

This peasant set out and journeyed southward to Ehnas. He came to a point opposite Per-fefi, north of Medenit, and found there a man standing on the bank, Dehuti-necht by name, who was the son of a man named Iseri, who was one of the serfs of the chief steward, Meruitensi.

Then said this Dehuti-necht, when he saw the asses of this peasant which appealed to his covetousness: "Oh that some good god would help me to rob this peasant of his goods!"

The house of Dehuti-necht stood close to the side of the path, which was narrow, not wide. It was about the width of a ............-cloth, and upon one side of it was the water and upon the other side was growing grain. Then said Dehitu-necht to his servant: "Hasten and bring me a shawl from the house!" And it was brought at once. Then he spread this shawl upon the middle of the road, and it extended, one edge to the water, and the other to the grain.

The peasant came along the path which was the common highway. Then said Dehuti-necht: "Look out, peasant, do not trample on my clothes!" The peasant answered: "I will do as you wish; I will go in the right way!" As he was turning to the upper side, Dehuti-necht said: "Does my grain serve you as a road?" Then said the peasant: "I am going in the right way. The bank is steep and the path lies near the grain and you have stopped up the road ahead with your clothes. Will you, then, not let me go by?" Upon that one of the asses took a mouthful of grain. Then said Dehuti-necht: "See, I Will take away your ass because it has eaten my grain."

Then the peasant said: "I am going in the right way. As one side was made mpassable I have led my ass along the other, and will you seize it because it has taken a mouthful of grain? But I know the lord of this property; it belongs to the chief steward, Meruitensi. It is he who punishes every robber in this whole land. Shall I, then, be robbed in his domain?"

Then said Dehuti-necht: "Is it not a proverb which the people employ: >The name of the poor is only known on account of his lord?' It is I who speak to you, but the chief steward of whom you think." Then he took a rod from a green tamarisk and beat all his limbs with it, and seized his asses and drove them into his compound.

Thereupon the peasant wept loudly on account of the pain of what had been done to him. Dehuti-necht said to him: "Don't cry so loud, peasant, or you shall go to the city of the dead." The peasant said: "You beat me and steal my goods, and will you also take the wail away from my mouth? O Silence-maker! Give me my goods again! May I never cease to cry out, if you fear!"
The peasant consumed four days, during which he besought Dehuti-necht, but he did not grant him his rights. Then this peasant went to the south, to Ehnas to implore the chief steward, Meruitensi. He met him as he was coming out of the canal-door of his compound to embark in his boat. Thereupon the peasant said: "Oh let me lay before you this affair. Permit one of your trusted servants to come to me, that I may send him to you concerning it." Then the steward Meruitensi, sent one of his servants to him, and he sent back by him an account of the whole affair. Then the chief steward, Meruitensi, laid the case of Dehuti-necht before his attendant officials, and they said to him: "Lord, it is presumably a case of one of your peasants who has gone against another peasant near him. Behold, it is customary with peasants to so conduct themselves toward others who are near them. Shall we beat Dehuti-necht for a little natron and a little salt? Command him to restore it and he will restore it."

The chief steward, Meruitensi, remained silent---he answered neither the officials nor the peasant. The peasant then came to entreat the chief steward Meruitensi, for the first time, and said: "Chief steward, my lord, you are greatest of the great, you are guide of all that which is not and which is. When you embark on the sea of truth, that you may go sailing upon it, then shall not the.........strip away your sail, then your ship shall not remain fast, then shall no misfortune happen to your mast then shall your spars not be broken, then shall you not be stranded---if you run fast aground, the waves shall not break upon you, then you shall not taste the impurities of the river, then you shall not behold the face of fear, the shy fish shall come to you, and you shall capture the fat birds. For you are the father of the orphan, the husband of the widow, the brother of the desolate, the garment of the motherless. Let me place your name in this land higher than all good laws: you guide without avarice, you great one free from meanness, who destroys deceit, who creates truthfulness. Throw the evil to the ground. I will speak hear me. Do justice, O you praised one, whom the praised ones praise. Remove my oppression: behold, I have a heavy weight to carry; behold, I am troubled of soul; examine me, I am in sorrow."

[Barton: Meruitensi is so pleased with the eloquence of the peasant that he passed him on to another officer and he to still another until he came before the king. Altogether the peasant made nine addresses. His eighth address follows.]

This peasant came to implore him for the eighth time, and said: "Chief steward, my lord, man falls on account of........... Greed is absent from a good merchant. His good commerce is.......... Your heart is greedily, it does not become you. You despoil: this is not praiseworthy for you........Your daily rations are in your house; your body is well filled. The officers, who are set as a protection against injustice,---a curse to the shameless are these officers, who are set as a bulwark against lies. Fear of you has not deterred me from supplicating you; if you think so, you have not known my heart. The Silent one, who turns to report to you his difficulties, is not afraid to present them to you. Your real estate is in the country, your bread is on your estate, your food is in the storehouse. Your officials give to you and you take it. Are you, then, not a robber? They plow for you........ for you to the plots of arable land. Do the truth for the sake of the Lord of Truth.You reed of a scribe, you roll of a book, you palette, you god Thoth, you ought to keep yourself far removed from injustice. You virtuous one, you should be virtuous, you virtuous one, you should be really virtuous. Further, truth is true to eternity. She goes with those who perform her to the region of the dead. He will be laid in the coffin and committed to the earth; ---his name will not perish from the earth, but men will remember him on account of
his property: so runs the right interpretation of the divine word.

"Does it then happen that the scales stand aslant? Or is it thinkable that the scales incline to one side? Behold, if I come not, if another comes, then you host opportunity to speak as one who answers, as one who addresses the silent, as one who responds to him who has not spoken to you. You have not been..........; You have not been sick. You have not fled, you have not departed. But you have not yet granted me any reply to this beautiful word which comes from the mouth of the sun-god himself: >Speak the truth; do the truth: for it is great, it is mighty, it is everlasting. It will obtain for you merit, and will lead you to veneration.' For does the scale stand aslant? It is their scale-pans that bear the objects, and in just scales there is no............. wanting."

[Barton: After a ninth speech on the part of the peasant, the tale concludes as follows.]

Then the chief steward, Meruitensi, sent two servants to bring him back. Thereupon the peasant feared that he would suffer thirst, as a punishment imposed upon him for what he had said. Then the peasant said.......... Then said the chief steward, Meruitensi: "Fear not, peasant! See, you shall remain with me."

Then said the peasant: "I live because I eat of your bread and drink your beer forever."

Then said the chief steward, Meruitensi: "Come out here........." Then he caused them to bring, written on a new roll, all the addresses of these days. The chief steward sent them to his majesty, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Neb-kau-re, the blessed, and they were more agreeable to the heart of his majesty than all that was in his land. His majesty said, "Pass sentence yourself my beloved son!" Then the chief steward, Meruitensi, caused two servants to go and bring a list of the household of Dehuti-necht from the government office, and his possessions were six persons, with a selection from his.........., from his barley, from his spelt, from his asses, from his swine, from his.......... [Barton: From this point on only a few words of the tale can be made out, but it appears from these that the goods selected from the estate of Dehuti-necht were given to the peasant and he was sent home rejoicing.]