

**Of that which happened to a King and Three Impostors.**

**by**

**Prince Don Juan Manuel (1282-1347)**

**Translated by James York M.D.**

Published by the Ex-classics Project, 2016  
<http://www.exclassics.com>

Public Domain

# **Of that which happened to a King and Three Impostors.**

**by**

**Prince Don Juan Manuel (1282-1347)**

*From Count Lucanor, or the Fifty Pleasant Stories of Patronio. Translated by James York M.D. Gibbings & Co.l, London, 1889*

COUNT LUCANOR, conversing at another time with Patronio, his adviser, said:-

"Patronio, a man came to me and told me something, giving me to understand it would be of great advantage to me if I followed his suggestions; but he said no man must be informed of the secret that I must trust in him, and, more than this, affirmed that if I should confide it to any man in the world I should place not only my property but my life in danger. And as I know no man able to detect a fraud so quickly as yourself I pray you give me your opinion in this case."

"My lord," said Patronio, "in order that you may know how to act under these circumstances, it would please me to be permitted to inform you what happened to a King and three impostors."

The Count requested to know what that was.

"My lord," said Patronio, "three impostors came to a King, and told him they were cloth-weavers, and could fabricate a cloth of so peculiar a nature that a legitimate son of his father could see the cloth; but if he were illegitimate, though believed to be legitimate, he could not see it.

"Now the King was much pleased at this, thinking that by this means he would be able to distinguish the men in his kingdom who were legitimate sons of their supposed fathers from those who were not, and so be enabled to increase his treasures, for among the Moors only legitimate children inherit their father's property; and for this end he ordered a palace to be appropriated to the manufacture of this cloth. And these men, in order to convince him that they had no intention of deceiving him, agreed to be shut up in this palace until the cloth was manufactured, which satisfied the King.

"When they were supplied with a large quantity of gold, silver, silk, and many other things, they entered the palace, and, putting their looms in order, gave it to be understood that they were working all day at the cloth.

"After some days, one of them came to the King and told him the cloth was commenced, that it was the most curious thing in the world, describing the design and construction; he then prayed the King to favour them with a visit, but begged he would come alone. The King was much pleased, but wishing to have the opinion of some one first, sent the Lord Chamberlain to see it, in order to know if they were deceiving him. When the Lord Chamberlain saw the workmen, and heard all they had to say, he dared not admit he could not see the cloth, and when he returned to the King he stated that he had seen it; the King sent yet another, who gave the same

report. When they whom he had sent declared that they had seen the cloth he determined to go himself.

"On entering the palace and seeing the men at work, who began to describe the texture and relate the origin of the invention as also the design and colour, in which they all appeared to agree, although in reality they were not working; when the King saw how they appeared to work, and heard the character of the cloth so minutely described, and yet could not see it, although those he had sent had seen it, he began to feel very uneasy, fearing he might not be the son of the King, who was supposed to be his father, and that if he acknowledged he could not see the cloth he might lose his kingdom; under this impression he commenced praising the fabric, describing its peculiarities after the manner of the workmen.

"On the return to his palace he related to his people how good and marvellous was the cloth, yet at the same time suspected something wrong.

"At the end of two or three days the King requested his Alguacil (or officer of justice) to go and see the cloth. When the Alguacil entered and saw the workmen, who, as before, described the figures and pattern of the cloth, knowing that the King had been to see it, and yet could not see it himself, he thought he certainly could not be the legitimate son of his father, and therefore could not see it. He, however, feared if he was to declare that he could not see it he would lose his honourable position; to avoid this mischance he commenced praising the cloth even more vehemently than the others.

"When the Alguacil returned to the King and told him that he had seen the cloth, and that it was the most extraordinary production in the world, the King was much disconcerted; for he thought that if the Alguacil had seen the cloth, which he was unable to see, there could no longer be a doubt that he was not the legitimate son of the King, as was generally supposed, he therefore did not hesitate to praise the excellency of the cloth and the skill of the workmen who were able to make it.

"On another day he sent one of his Councillors, and it happened to him as to the King and the others of whom I have spoken; and in this manner and for this reason they deceived the King and many others, for no one dared to say he could not see the cloth.

"Things went on thus until there came a great feast, when all requested the King to be dressed in some of the cloth; so the workmen, being ordered, brought some rolled up in a very fine linen and inquired of the King how much of it he wished them to cut off; so the King gave orders how much and how to make it up.

"Now when the clothes were made and the feast day had arrived the weavers brought them to the King, informing his Majesty that his dress was made of the cloth as he had directed, the King all this time not daring to say he could not see it.

"When the King had professed to dress himself in this suit he mounted on horseback and rode into the city; but fortunately for him it was summer time. The people seeing his Majesty come in this manner were much surprised; but knowing that those who could not see this cloth would be considered illegitimate sons of their fathers, kept their surprise to themselves, fearing the dishonour consequent upon such a declaration. Not so, however, with a negro, who happened to notice the King thus equipped; for he, having nothing to lose, came to him and said, 'Sire, to me it matters not whose son I am, therefore I tell you that you are riding without any clothes.' On this the King commenced beating him, saying that he was not the legitimate son of his

supposed father, and therefore it was that he could not see the cloth. But no sooner had the negro said this, than others were convinced of its truth, and said the same; until, at last, the King and all with him lost their fear of declaring the truth, and saw through the trick of which these impostors had made them the victims. When the weavers were sought for they were found to have fled, taking with them all they had received from the King by their imposition.

"Now you, Count Lucanor, since that man of whom you speak forbids your trusting to any one, and demands your entire confidence, be careful you are not deceived; for, you ought to know very well that he can have no reason for seeking your advantage more than his own; nor has he more reason to serve you than have those who are indebted to you and are already in your service."

Count Lucanor found this to be good advice, so adopted it.

And Don Juan, also seeing that it was a good example, wrote it in this book and made these lines, which say as follows:-

Who counsels thee to secrecy with friends  
Seeks to entrap thee for his own base ends.

#### **NOTE.**

This story, so quaintly and graphically written, stands alone in the interest of its details, neither the Short Mantle, which figures under the title of the "Manteau mal Taillé," in the Fabliaux of the thirteenth century, nor the "Enchanted Bowl" of Ariosto, nor indeed any of the romance writers of that age contain any subject wherein the various passions and interests which move mankind are so well delineated.

The false promises made by the impostors, arising out of want and desperation, recall to mind the old Spanish proverb, "Cuando el Corsario promete misas y cera, con mal anda la galera; (The galley is in a bad way when the Corsair promises masses and candles)."

**THE END**