

JONES VERNON

AESOP'S FABLES; A NEW
TRANSLATION

Jones Vernon

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Aesop

Aesop's Fables; a new translation

INTRODUCTION

Aesop embodies an epigram not uncommon in human history; his fame is all the more deserved because he never deserved it. The firm foundations of common sense, the shrewd shots at uncommon sense, that characterise all the Fables, belong not him but to humanity. In the earliest human history whatever is authentic is universal: and whatever is universal is anonymous. In such cases there is always some central man who had first the trouble of collecting them, and afterwards the fame of creating them. He had the fame; and, on the whole, he earned the fame. There must have been something great and human, something of the human future and the human past, in such a man: even if he only used it to rob the past or deceive the future. The story of Arthur may have been really connected with the most fighting Christianity of falling Rome or with the most heathen traditions hidden in the hills of Wales. But the word "Mappe" or "Malory" will always mean King Arthur; even though we find older and better origins than the Mabinogian; or write later and worse versions than the "Idylls of the King." The nursery fairy tales may have come out of Asia with the Indo-European race, now fortunately extinct; they may have been invented by some fine French lady or gentleman like Perrault: they may possibly even be what they profess to be. But we shall always call the best selection of such tales "Grimm's Tales": simply because it is the best collection.

The historical Aesop, in so far as he was historical, would seem to have been a Phrygian slave, or at least one not to be specially and symbolically adorned with the Phrygian cap of liberty. He lived, if he did live, about the sixth century before Christ, in the time of that Croesus whose story we love and suspect like everything else in Herodotus. There are also stories of deformity of feature and a ready ribaldry of tongue: stories which (as the celebrated Cardinal said) explain, though they do not excuse, his having been hurled over a high precipice at Delphi. It is for those who read the Fables to judge whether he was really thrown over the cliff for being ugly and offensive, or rather for being highly moral and correct. But there is no kind of doubt that the general legend of him may justly rank him with a race too easily forgotten in our modern comparisons: the race of the great philosophic slaves. Aesop may have been a fiction like Uncle Remus: he was also, like Uncle Remus, a fact. It is a fact that slaves in the old world could be worshipped like Aesop, or loved like Uncle Remus. It is odd to note that both the great slaves told their best stories about beasts and birds.

But whatever be fairly due to Aesop, the human tradition called Fables is not due to him. This had gone on long before any sarcastic freedman from Phrygia had or had not been flung off a precipice; this has remained long after. It is to our advantage, indeed, to realise the distinction; because it makes Aesop more obviously effective than any other fabulist. Grimm's Tales, glorious as they are, were collected by two German students. And if we find it hard to be certain of a German student, at least we know more about him than we know about a Phrygian slave. The truth is, of course, that Aesop's Fables are not Aesop's fables, any more than Grimm's Fairy Tales were ever Grimm's fairy tales. But the fable and the fairy tale are things utterly distinct. There are many elements of difference; but the plainest is plain enough. There can be no good fable with human beings in it. There can be no good fairy tale without them.

Aesop, or Babrius (or whatever his name was), understood that, for a fable, all the persons must be impersonal. They must be like abstractions in algebra, or like pieces in chess. The lion must always be stronger than the wolf, just as four is always double of two. The fox in a fable must move crooked, as the knight in chess must move crooked. The sheep in a fable must march on, as the pawn in chess must march on. The fable must not allow for the crooked captures of the pawn; it must not allow for what

Balzac called "the revolt of a sheep" *The fairy tale, on the other hand, absolutely revolves on the pivot of human personality. If no hero were there to fight the dragons, we should not even know that they were dragons. If no adventurer were cast on the undiscovered island – it would remain undiscovered. If the miller's third son does not find the enchanted garden where the seven princesses stand white and frozen – why, then, they will remain white and frozen and enchanted. If there is no personal prince to find the Sleeping Beauty she will simply sleep. Fables repose upon quite the opposite idea; that everything is itself, and will in any case speak for itself. The wolf will be always wolfish; the fox will be always foxy. Something of the same sort may have been meant by the animal worship, in which Egyptian and Indian and many other great peoples have combined. Men do not, I think, love beetles or cats or crocodiles with a wholly personal love; they salute them as expressions of that abstract and anonymous energy in nature which to any one is awful, and to an atheist must be frightful. So in all the fables that are or are not Aesop's all the animal forces drive like inanimate forces, like great rivers or growing trees. It is the limit and the loss of all such things that they cannot be anything but themselves: it is their tragedy that they could not lose their souls.*

This is the immortal justification of the Fable: that we could not teach the plainest truths so simply without turning men into chessmen. We cannot talk of such simple things without using animals that do not talk at all. Suppose, for a moment, that you turn the wolf into a wolfish baron, or the fox into a foxy diplomatist. You will at once remember that even barons are human, you will be unable to forget that even diplomatists are men. You will always be looking for that accidental good-humour that should go with the brutality of any brutal man; for that allowance for all delicate things, including virtue, that should exist in any good diplomatist. Once put a thing on two legs instead of four and pluck it of feathers and you cannot help asking for a human being, either heroic, as in the fairy tales, or unheroic, as in the modern novels.

But by using animals in this austere and arbitrary style as they are used on the shields of heraldry or the hieroglyphics of the ancients, men have really succeeded in handing down those tremendous truths that are called truisms. If the chivalric lion be red and rampant, it is rigidly red and rampant; if the sacred ibis stands anywhere on one leg, it stands on one leg for ever. In this language, like a large animal alphabet, are written some of the first philosophic certainties of men. As the child learns A for Ass or B for Bull or C for Cow, so man has learnt here to connect the simpler and stronger creatures with the simpler and stronger truths. That a flowing stream cannot befoul its own fountain, and that any one who says it does is a tyrant and a liar; that a mouse is too weak to fight a lion, but too strong for the cords that can hold a lion; that a fox who gets most out of a flat dish may easily get least out of a deep dish; that the crow whom the gods forbid to sing, the gods nevertheless provide with cheese; that when the goat insults from a mountain-top it is not the goat that insults, but the mountain: all these are deep truths deeply graven on the rocks wherever men have passed. It matters nothing how old they are, or how new; they are the alphabet of humanity, which like so many forms of primitive picture-writing employs any living symbol in preference to man. These ancient and universal tales are all of animals; as the latest discoveries in the oldest pre-historic caverns are all of animals. Man, in his simpler states, always felt that he himself was something too mysterious to be drawn. But the legend he carved under these cruder symbols was everywhere the same; and whether fables began with Aesop or began with Adam, whether they were German and mediæval as Reynard the Fox, or as French and Renaissance as La Fontaine, the upshot is everywhere essentially the same: that superiority is always insolent, because it is always accidental; that pride goes before a fall; and that there is such a thing as being too clever by half. You will not find any other legend but this written upon the rocks by any hand of man. There is every type and time of fable: but there is only one moral to the fable; because there is only one moral to everything.

G. K. CHESTERTON

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

A hungry Fox saw some fine bunches of Grapes hanging from a vine that was trained along a high trellis, and did his best to reach them by jumping as high as he could into the air. But it was all in vain, for they were just out of reach: so he gave up trying, and walked away with an air of dignity and unconcern, remarking, "I thought those Grapes were ripe, but I see now they are quite sour."

THE GOOSE THAT LAID THE GOLDEN EGGS

A Man and his Wife had the good fortune to possess a Goose which laid a Golden Egg every day. Lucky though they were, they soon began to think they were not getting rich fast enough, and, imagining the bird must be made of gold inside, they decided to kill it in order to secure the whole store of precious metal at once. But when they cut it open they found it was just like any other goose. Thus, they neither got rich all at once, as they had hoped, nor enjoyed any longer the daily addition to their wealth.

Much wants more and loses all.

THE CAT AND THE MICE

There was once a house that was overrun with Mice. A Cat heard of this, and said to herself, "That's the place for me," and off she went and took up her quarters in the house, and caught the Mice one by one and ate them. At last the Mice could stand it no longer, and they determined to take to their holes and stay there. "That's awkward," said the Cat to herself: "the only thing to do is to coax them out by a trick." So she considered a while, and then climbed up the wall and let herself hang down by her hind legs from a peg, and pretended to be dead. By and by a Mouse peeped out and saw the Cat hanging there. "Aha!" it cried, "you're very clever, madam, no doubt: but you may turn yourself into a bag of meal hanging there, if you like, yet you won't catch us coming anywhere near you."

If you are wise you won't be deceived by the innocent airs of those whom you have once found to be dangerous.

THE MISCHIEVOUS DOG

There was once a Dog who used to snap at people and bite them without any provocation, and who was a great nuisance to every one who came to his master's house. So his master fastened a bell round his neck to warn people of his presence. The Dog was very proud of the bell, and strutted about tinkling it with immense satisfaction. But an old dog came up to him and said, "The fewer airs you give yourself the better, my friend. You don't think, do you, that your bell was given you as a reward of merit? On the contrary, it is a badge of disgrace."

Notoriety is often mistaken for fame.

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER AND THE FULLER

There was once a Charcoal-burner who lived and worked by himself. A Fuller, however, happened to come and settle in the same neighbourhood; and the Charcoal-burner, having made his acquaintance and finding he was an agreeable sort of fellow, asked him if he would come and share his house: "We shall get to know one another better that way," he said, "and, beside, our household expenses will be diminished." The Fuller thanked him, but replied, "I couldn't think of it, sir: why, everything I take such pains to whiten would be blackened in no time by your charcoal."

THE MICE IN COUNCIL

Once upon a time all the Mice met together in Council, and discussed the best means of securing themselves against the attacks of the cat. After several suggestions had been debated, a Mouse of some standing and experience got up and said, "I think I have hit upon a plan which will ensure our safety in the future, provided you approve and carry it out. It is that we should fasten a bell round the neck of our enemy the cat, which will by its tinkling warn us of her approach." This proposal was warmly applauded, and it had been already decided to adopt it, when an old Mouse got upon his feet and said, "I agree with you all that the plan before us is an admirable one: but may I ask who is going to bell the cat?"

THE BAT AND THE WEASELS

A Bat fell to the ground and was caught by a Weasel, and was just going to be killed and eaten when it begged to be let go. The Weasel said he couldn't do that because he was an enemy of all birds on principle. "Oh, but," said the Bat, "I'm not a bird at all: I'm a mouse." "So you are," said the Weasel, "now I come to look at you"; and he let it go. Some time after this the Bat was caught in just the same way by another Weasel, and, as before, begged for its life. "No," said the Weasel, "I never let a mouse go by any chance." "But I'm not a mouse," said the Bat; "I'm a bird." "Why, so you are," said the Weasel; and he too let the Bat go.

Look and see which way the wind blows before you commit yourself.

THE DOG AND THE SOW

A Dog and a Sow were arguing and each claimed that its own young ones were finer than those of any other animal. "Well," said the Sow at last, "mine can see, at any rate, when they come into the world: but yours are born blind."

THE FOX AND THE CROW

A Crow was sitting on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a Fox observed her and set his wits to work to discover some way of getting the cheese. Coming and standing under the tree he looked up and said, "What a noble bird I see above me! Her beauty is without equal, the hue of her plumage exquisite. If only her voice is as sweet as her looks are fair, she ought without doubt to be Queen of the Birds." The Crow was hugely flattered by this, and just to show the Fox that she could sing she gave a loud caw. Down came the cheese, of course, and the Fox, snatching it up, said, "You have a voice, madam, I see: what you want is wits."

THE HORSE AND THE GROOM

There was once a Groom who used to spend long hours clipping and combing the Horse of which he had charge, but who daily stole a portion of his allowance of oats, and sold it for his own profit. The Horse gradually got into worse and worse condition, and at last cried to the Groom, "If you really want me to look sleek and well, you must comb me less and feed me more."

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

A Wolf came upon a Lamb straying from the flock, and felt some compunction about taking the life of so helpless a creature without some plausible excuse; so he cast about for a grievance and said at last, "Last year, sirrah, you grossly insulted me." "That is impossible, sir," bleated the Lamb, "for I wasn't born then." "Well," retorted the Wolf, "you feed in my pastures." "That cannot be," replied the Lamb, "for I have never yet tasted grass." "You drink from my spring, then," continued the Wolf. "Indeed, sir," said the poor Lamb, "I have never yet drunk anything but my mother's milk." "Well, anyhow," said the Wolf, "I'm not going without my dinner": and he sprang upon the Lamb and devoured it without more ado.

THE PEACOCK AND THE CRANE

A Peacock taunted a Crane with the dullness of her plumage. "Look at my brilliant colours," said she, "and see how much finer they are than your poor feathers." "I am not denying," replied the Crane, "that yours are far gayer than mine; but when it comes to flying I can soar into the clouds, whereas you are confined to the earth like any dunghill cock."

THE CAT AND THE BIRDS

A Cat heard that the Birds in an aviary were ailing. So he got himself up as a doctor, and, taking with him a set of the instruments proper to his profession, presented himself at the door, and inquired after the health of the Birds. "We shall do very well," they replied, without letting him in, "when we've seen the last of you."

A villain may disguise himself, but he will not deceive the wise.

THE SPENDTHRIFT AND THE SWALLOW

A Spendthrift, who had wasted his fortune, and had nothing left but the clothes in which he stood, saw a Swallow one fine day in early spring. Thinking that summer had come, and that he could now do without his coat, he went and sold it for what it would fetch. A change, however, took place in the weather, and there came a sharp frost which killed the unfortunate Swallow. When the Spendthrift saw its dead body he cried, "Miserable bird! Thanks to you I am perishing of cold myself."

One swallow does not make summer.

THE OLD WOMAN AND THE DOCTOR

An Old Woman became almost totally blind from a disease of the eyes, and, after consulting a Doctor, made an agreement with him in the presence of witnesses that she should pay him a high fee if he cured her, while if he failed he was to receive nothing. The Doctor accordingly prescribed a course of treatment, and every time he paid her a visit he took away with him some article out of the house, until at last, when he visited her for the last time, and the cure was complete, there was nothing left. When the Old Woman saw that the house was empty she refused to pay him his fee; and, after repeated refusals on her part, he sued her before the magistrates for payment of her debt. On being brought into court she was ready with her defence. "The claimant," said she, "has stated the facts about our agreement correctly. I undertook to pay him a fee if he cured me, and he, on his part, promised to charge nothing if he failed. Now, he says I am cured; but I say that I am blinder than ever, and I can prove what I say. When my eyes were bad I could at any rate see well enough to be aware that my house contained a certain amount of furniture and other things; but now, when according to him I am cured, I am entirely unable to see anything there at all."

THE MOON AND HER MOTHER

The Moon once begged her Mother to make her a gown. "How can I?" replied she; "there's no fitting your figure. At one time you're a New Moon, and at another you're a Full Moon; and between whiles you're neither one nor the other."

MERCURY AND THE WOODMAN

A Woodman was felling a tree on the bank of a river, when his axe, glancing off the trunk, flew out of his hands and fell into the water. As he stood by the water's edge lamenting his loss, Mercury appeared and asked him the reason for his grief; and on learning what had happened, out of pity for his distress he dived into the river and, bringing up a golden axe, asked him if that was the one he had lost. The Woodman replied that it was not, and Mercury then dived a second time, and, bringing up a silver axe, asked if that was his. "No, that is not mine either," said the Woodman. Once more Mercury dived into the river, and brought up the missing axe. The Woodman was overjoyed at recovering his property, and thanked his benefactor warmly; and the latter was so pleased with his honesty that he made him a present of the other two axes. When the Woodman told the story to his companions, one of these was filled with envy of his good fortune and determined to try his luck for himself. So he went and began to fell a tree at the edge of the river, and presently contrived to let his axe drop into the water. Mercury appeared as before, and, on learning that his axe had fallen in, he dived and brought up a golden axe, as he had done on the previous occasion. Without waiting to be asked whether it was his or not the fellow cried, "That's mine, that's mine," and stretched out his hand eagerly for the prize: but Mercury was so disgusted at his dishonesty that he not only declined to give him the golden axe, but also refused to recover for him the one he had let fall into the stream.

Honesty is the best policy.

THE ASS, THE FOX, AND THE LION

An Ass and a Fox went into partnership and sallied out to forage for food together. They hadn't gone far before they saw a Lion coming their way, at which they were both dreadfully frightened. But the Fox thought he saw a way of saving his own skin, and went boldly up to the Lion and whispered in his ear, "I'll manage that you shall get hold of the Ass without the trouble of stalking him, if you'll promise to let me go free." The Lion agreed to this, and the Fox then rejoined his companion and contrived before long to lead him by a hidden pit, which some hunter had dug as a trap for wild animals, and into which he fell. When the Lion saw that the Ass was safely caught and couldn't get away, it was to the Fox that he first turned his attention, and he soon finished him off, and then at his leisure proceeded to feast upon the Ass.

Betray a friend, and you'll often find you have ruined yourself.

THE LION AND THE MOUSE

A Lion asleep in his lair was waked up by a Mouse running over his face. Losing his temper he seized it with his paw and was about to kill it. The Mouse, terrified, piteously entreated him to spare its life. "Please let me go," it cried, "and one day I will repay you for your kindness." The idea of so insignificant a creature ever being able to do anything for him amused the Lion so much that he laughed aloud, and good-humouredly let it go. But the Mouse's chance came, after all. One day the Lion got entangled in a net which had been spread for game by some hunters, and the Mouse heard and recognised his roars of anger and ran to the spot. Without more ado it set to work to gnaw the ropes with its teeth, and succeeded before long in setting the Lion free. "There!" said the Mouse, "you laughed at me when I promised I would repay you: but now you see, even a Mouse can help a Lion."

THE CROW AND THE PITCHER

A thirsty Crow found a Pitcher with some water in it, but so little was there that, try as she might, she could not reach it with her beak, and it seemed as though she would die of thirst within sight of the remedy. At last she hit upon a clever plan. She began dropping pebbles into the Pitcher, and with each pebble the water rose a little higher until at last it reached the brim, and the knowing bird was enabled to quench her thirst.

Necessity is the mother of invention.

THE BOYS AND THE FROGS

Some mischievous Boys were playing on the edge of a pond, and, catching sight of some Frogs swimming about in the shallow water, they began to amuse themselves by pelting them with stones, and they killed several of them. At last one of the Frogs put his head out of the water and said, "Oh, stop! stop! I beg of you: what is sport to you is death to us."

THE NORTH WIND AND THE SUN

A dispute arose between the North Wind and the Sun, each claiming that he was stronger than the other. At last they agreed to try their powers upon a traveller, to see which could soonest strip him of his cloak. The North Wind had the first try; and, gathering up all his force for the attack, he came whirling furiously down upon the man, and caught up his cloak as though he would wrest it from him by one single effort: but the harder he blew, the more closely the man wrapped it round himself. Then came the turn of the Sun. At first he beamed gently upon the traveller, who soon unclasped his cloak and walked on with it hanging loosely about his shoulders: then he shone forth in his full strength, and the man, before he had gone many steps, was glad to throw his cloak right off and complete his journey more lightly clad.

Persuasion is better than force

THE MISTRESS AND HER SERVANTS

A Widow, thrifty and industrious, had two servants, whom she kept pretty hard at work. They were not allowed to lie long abed in the mornings, but the old lady had them up and doing as soon as the cock crew. They disliked intensely having to get up at such an hour, especially in winter-time: and they thought that if it were not for the cock waking up their Mistress so horribly early, they could sleep longer. So they caught it and wrung its neck. But they weren't prepared for the consequences. For what happened was that their Mistress, not hearing the cock crow as usual, waked them up earlier than ever, and set them to work in the middle of the night.

THE GOODS AND THE ILLS

There was a time in the youth of the world when Goods and Ills entered equally into the concerns of men, so that the Goods did not prevail to make them altogether blessed, nor the Ills to make them wholly miserable. But owing to the foolishness of mankind the Ills multiplied greatly in number and increased in strength, until it seemed as though they would deprive the Goods of all share in human affairs, and banish them from the earth. The latter, therefore, betook themselves to heaven and complained to Jupiter of the treatment they had received, at the same time praying him to grant them protection from the Ills, and to advise them concerning the manner of their intercourse with men. Jupiter granted their request for protection, and decreed that for the future they should not go among men openly in a body, and so be liable to attack from the hostile Ills, but singly and unobserved, and at infrequent and unexpected intervals. Hence it is that the earth is full of Ills, for they come and go as they please and are never far away; while Goods, alas! come one by one only, and have to travel all the way from heaven, so that they are very seldom seen.

THE HARES AND THE FROGS

The Hares once gathered together and lamented the unhappiness of their lot, exposed as they were to dangers on all sides and lacking the strength and the courage to hold their own. Men, dogs, birds and beasts of prey were all their enemies, and killed and devoured them daily: and sooner than endure such persecution any longer, they one and all determined to end their miserable lives. Thus resolved and desperate, they rushed in a body towards a neighbouring pool, intending to drown themselves. On the bank were sitting a number of Frogs, who, when they heard the noise of the Hares as they ran, with one accord leaped into the water and hid themselves in the depths. Then one of the older Hares who was wiser than the rest cried out to his companions, "Stop, my friends, take heart; don't let us destroy ourselves after all: see, here are creatures who are afraid of us, and who must, therefore, be still more timid than ourselves."

THE FOX AND THE STORK

A Fox invited a Stork to dinner, at which the only fare provided was a large flat dish of soup. The Fox lapped it up with great relish, but the Stork with her long bill tried in vain to partake of the savoury broth. Her evident distress caused the sly Fox much amusement. But not long after the Stork invited him in turn, and set before him a pitcher with a long and narrow neck, into which she could get her bill with ease. Thus, while she enjoyed her dinner, the Fox sat by hungry and helpless, for it was impossible for him to reach the tempting contents of the vessel.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

A Wolf resolved to disguise himself in order that he might prey upon a flock of sheep without fear of detection. So he clothed himself in a sheepskin, and slipped among the sheep when they were out at pasture. He completely deceived the shepherd, and when the flock was penned for the night he was shut in with the rest. But that very night as it happened, the shepherd, requiring a supply of mutton for the table, laid hands on the Wolf in mistake for a Sheep, and killed him with his knife on the spot.

THE STAG IN THE OX-STALL

A Stag, chased from his lair by the hounds, took refuge in a farmyard, and, entering a stable where a number of oxen were stalled, thrust himself under a pile of hay in a vacant stall, where he lay concealed, all but the tips of his horns. Presently one of the Oxen said to him, "What has induced you to come in here? Aren't you aware of the risk you are running of being captured by the herdsmen?" To which he replied, "Pray let me stay for the present. When night comes I shall easily escape under cover of the dark." In the course of the afternoon more than one of the farm-hands came in, to attend to the wants of the cattle, but not one of them noticed the presence of the Stag, who accordingly began to congratulate himself on his escape and to express his gratitude to the Oxen. "We wish you well," said the one who had spoken before, "but you are not out of danger yet. If the master comes, you will certainly be found out, for nothing ever escapes his keen eyes." Presently, sure enough, in he came, and made a great to-do about the way the Oxen were kept. "The beasts are starving," he cried; "here, give them more hay, and put plenty of litter under them." As he spoke, he seized an armful himself from the pile where the Stag lay concealed, and at once detected him. Calling his men, he had him seized at once and killed for the table.

THE MILKMAID AND HER PAIL

A farmer's daughter had been out to milk the cows, and was returning to the dairy carrying her pail of milk upon her head. As she walked along, she fell a-musing after this fashion: "The milk in this pail will provide me with cream, which I will make into butter and take to market to sell. With the money I will buy a number of eggs, and these, when hatched, will produce chickens, and by and by I shall have quite a large poultry-yard. Then I shall sell some of my fowls, and with the money which they will bring in I will buy myself a new gown, which I shall wear when I go to the fair; and all the young fellows will admire it, and come and make love to me, but I shall toss my head and have nothing to say to them." Forgetting all about the pail, and suiting the action to the word, she tossed her head. Down went the pail, all the milk was spilled, and all her fine castles in the air vanished in a moment!

Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.

THE DOLPHINS, THE WHALES, AND THE SPRAT

The Dolphins quarrelled with the Whales, and before very long they began fighting with one another. The battle was very fierce, and had lasted some time without any sign of coming to an end, when a Sprat thought that perhaps he could stop it; so he stepped in and tried to persuade them to give up fighting and make friends. But one of the Dolphins said to him contemptuously, "We would rather go on fighting till we're all killed than be reconciled by a Sprat like you!"

THE FOX AND THE MONKEY

A Fox and a Monkey were on the road together, and fell into a dispute as to which of the two was the better born. They kept it up for some time, till they came to a place where the road passed through a cemetery full of monuments, when the Monkey stopped and looked about him and gave a great sigh. "Why do you sigh?" said the Fox. The Monkey pointed to the tombs and replied, "All the monuments that you see here were put up in honour of my forefathers, who in their day were eminent men." The Fox was speechless for a moment, but quickly recovering he said, "Oh! don't stop at any lie, sir; you're quite safe: I'm sure none of your ancestors will rise up and expose you."

Boasters brag most when they cannot be detected.

THE ASS AND THE LAP-DOG

There was once a man who had an Ass and a Lap-dog. The Ass was housed in the stable with plenty of oats and hay to eat and was as well off as an ass could be. The little Dog was made a great pet of by his master, who fondled him and often let him lie in his lap; and if he went out to dinner, he would bring back a tit-bit or two to give him when he ran to meet him on his return. The Ass had, it is true, a good deal of work to do, carting or grinding the corn, or carrying the burdens of the farm: and ere long he became very jealous, contrasting his own life of labour with the ease and idleness of the Lap-dog. At last one day he broke his halter, and frisking into the house just as his master sat down to dinner, he pranced and capered about, mimicking the frolics of the little favourite, upsetting the table and smashing the crockery with his clumsy efforts. Not content with that, he even tried to jump on his master's lap, as he had so often seen the dog allowed to do. At that the servants, seeing the danger their master was in, belaboured the silly Ass with sticks and cudgels, and drove him back to his stable half dead with his beating. "Alas!" he cried, "all this I have brought on myself. Why could I not be satisfied with my natural and honourable position, without wishing to imitate the ridiculous antics of that useless little Lap-dog?"

THE FIR-TREE AND THE BRAMBLE

A Fir-tree was boasting to a Bramble, and said, somewhat contemptuously, "You poor creature, you are of no use whatever. Now, look at me: I am useful for all sorts of things, particularly when men build houses; they can't do without me then." But the Bramble replied, "Ah, that's all very well: but you wait till they come with axes and saws to cut you down, and then you'll wish you were a Bramble and not a Fir."

Better poverty without a care than wealth with its many obligations.

THE FROGS' COMPLAINT AGAINST THE SUN

Once upon a time the Sun was about to take to himself a wife. The Frogs in terror all raised their voices to the skies, and Jupiter, disturbed by the noise, asked them what they were croaking about. They replied, "The Sun is bad enough even while he is single, drying up our marshes with his heat as he does. But what will become of us if he marries and begets other Suns?"

THE DOG, THE COCK, AND THE FOX

A Dog and a Cock became great friends, and agreed to travel together. At nightfall the Cock flew up into the branches of a tree to roost, while the Dog curled himself up inside the trunk, which was hollow. At break of day the Cock woke up and crew, as usual. A Fox heard, and, wishing to make a breakfast of him, came and stood under the tree and begged him to come down. "I should so like," said he, "to make the acquaintance of one who has such a beautiful voice." The Cock replied, "Would you just wake my porter who sleeps at the foot of the tree? He'll open the door and let you in." The Fox accordingly rapped on the trunk, when out rushed the Dog and tore him in pieces.

THE GNAT AND THE BULL

A Gnat alighted on one of the horns of a Bull, and remained sitting there for a considerable time. When it had rested sufficiently and was about to fly away, it said to the Bull, "Do you mind if I go now?" The Bull merely raised his eyes and remarked, without interest, "It's all one to me; I didn't notice when you came, and I shan't know when you go away."

We may often be of more consequence in our own eyes than in the eyes of our neighbours.

THE BEAR AND THE TRAVELLERS

Two Travellers were on the road together, when a Bear suddenly appeared on the scene. Before he observed them, one made for a tree at the side of the road, and climbed up into the branches and hid there. The other was not so nimble as his companion; and, as he could not escape, he threw himself on the ground and pretended to be dead. The Bear came up and sniffed all round him, but he kept perfectly still and held his breath: for they say that a bear will not touch a dead body. The Bear took him for a corpse, and went away. When the coast was clear, the Traveller in the tree came down, and asked the other what it was the Bear had whispered to him when he put his mouth to his ear. The other replied, "He told me never again to travel with a friend who deserts you at the first sign of danger."

Misfortune tests the sincerity of friendship.

THE SLAVE AND THE LION

A Slave ran away from his master, by whom he had been most cruelly treated, and, in order to avoid capture, betook himself into the desert. As he wandered about in search of food and shelter, he came to a cave, which he entered and found to be unoccupied. Really, however, it was a Lion's den, and almost immediately, to the horror of the wretched fugitive, the Lion himself appeared. The man gave himself up for lost: but, to his utter astonishment, the Lion, instead of springing upon him and devouring him, came and fawned upon him, at the same time whining and lifting up his paw. Observing it to be much swollen and inflamed, he examined it and found a large thorn embedded in the ball of the foot. He accordingly removed it and dressed the wound as well as he could: and in course of time it healed up completely. The Lion's gratitude was unbounded; he looked upon the man as his friend, and they shared the cave for some time together. A day came, however, when the Slave began to long for the society of his fellow-men, and he bade farewell to the Lion and returned to the town. Here he was presently recognised and carried off in chains to his former master, who resolved to make an example of him, and ordered that he should be thrown to the beasts at the next public spectacle in the theatre. On the fatal day the beasts were loosed into the arena, and among the rest a Lion of huge bulk and ferocious aspect; and then the wretched Slave was cast in among them. What was the amazement of the spectators, when the Lion after one glance bounded up to him and lay down at his feet with every expression of affection and delight! It was his old friend of the cave! The audience clamoured that the Slave's life should be spared: and the governor of the town, marvelling at such gratitude and fidelity in a beast, decreed that both should receive their liberty.

THE FLEA AND THE MAN

A Flea bit a Man, and bit him again, and again, till he could stand it no longer, but made a thorough search for it, and at last succeeded in catching it. Holding it between his finger and thumb, he said – or rather shouted, so angry was he – "Who are you, pray, you wretched little creature, that you make so free with my person?" The Flea, terrified, whimpered in a weak little voice, "Oh, sir! pray let me go; don't kill me! I am such a little thing that I can't do you much harm." But the Man laughed and said, "I am going to kill you now, at once: whatever is bad has got to be destroyed, no matter how slight the harm it does."

Do not waste your pity on a scamp.

THE BEE AND JUPITER

A Queen Bee from Hymettus flew up to Olympus with some fresh honey from the hive as a present to Jupiter, who was so pleased with the gift that he promised to give her anything she liked to ask for. She said she would be very grateful if he would give stings to the bees, to kill people who robbed them of their honey. Jupiter was greatly displeased with this request, for he loved mankind: but he had given his word, so he said that stings they should have. The stings he gave them, however, were of such a kind that whenever a bee stings a man the sting is left in the wound and the bee dies.

Evil wishes, like fowls, come home to roost.

THE OAK AND THE REEDS

An Oak that grew on the bank of a river was uprooted by a severe gale of wind, and thrown across the stream. It fell among some Reeds growing by the water, and said to them, "How is it that you, who are so frail and slender, have managed to weather the storm, whereas I, with all my strength, have been torn up by the roots and hurled into the river?" "You were stubborn," came the reply, "and fought against the storm, which proved stronger than you: but we bow and yield to every breeze, and thus the gale passed harmlessly over our heads."

THE BLIND MAN AND THE CUB

There was once a Blind Man who had so fine a sense of touch that, when any animal was put into his hands, he could tell what it was merely by the feel of it. One day the Cub of a Wolf was put into his hands, and he was asked what it was. He felt it for some time, and then said, "Indeed, I am not sure whether it is a Wolf's Cub or a Fox's: but this I know – it would never do to trust it in a sheepfold."

Evil tendencies are early shown.

THE BOY AND THE SNAILS

A Farmer's Boy went looking for Snails, and, when he had picked up both his hands full, he set about making a fire at which to roast them; for he meant to eat them. When it got well alight and the Snails began to feel the heat, they gradually withdrew more and more into their shells with the hissing noise they always make when they do so. When the Boy heard it, he said, "You abandoned creatures, how can you find heart to whistle when your houses are burning?"

THE APES AND THE TWO TRAVELLERS

Two men were travelling together, one of whom never spoke the truth, whereas the other never told a lie: and they came in the course of their travels to the land of Apes. The King of the Apes, hearing of their arrival, ordered them to be brought before him; and by way of impressing them with his magnificence, he received them sitting on a throne, while the Apes, his subjects, were ranged in long rows on either side of him. When the Travellers came into his presence he asked them what they thought of him as a King. The lying Traveller said, "Sire, every one must see that you are a most noble and mighty monarch." "And what do you think of my subjects?" continued the King. "They," said the Traveller, "are in every way worthy of their royal master." The Ape was so delighted with his answer that he gave him a very handsome present. The other Traveller thought that if his companion was rewarded so splendidly for telling a lie, he himself would certainly receive a still greater reward for telling the truth; so, when the Ape turned to him and said, "And what, sir, is your opinion?" he replied, "I think you are a very fine Ape, and all your subjects are fine Apes too." The King of the Apes was so enraged at his reply that he ordered him to be taken away and clawed to death.

THE ASS AND HIS BURDENS

A Pedlar who owned an Ass one day bought a quantity of salt, and loaded up his beast with as much as he could bear. On the way home the Ass stumbled as he was crossing a stream and fell into the water. The salt got thoroughly wetted and much of it melted and drained away, so that, when he got on his legs again, the Ass found his load had become much less heavy. His master, however, drove him back to town and bought more salt, which he added to what remained in the panniers, and started out again. No sooner had they reached a stream than the Ass lay down in it, and rose, as before, with a much lighter load. But his master detected the trick, and turning back once more, bought a large number of sponges, and piled them on the back of the Ass. When they came to the stream the Ass again lay down: but this time, as the sponges soaked up large quantities of water, he found, when he got up on his legs, that he had a bigger burden to carry than ever.

You may play a good card once too often.

THE SHEPHERD'S BOY AND THE WOLF

A Shepherd's Boy was tending his flock near a village, and thought it would be great fun to hoax the villagers by pretending that a Wolf was attacking the sheep: so he shouted out, "Wolf! wolf!" and when the people came running up he laughed at them for their pains. He did this more than once, and every time the villagers found they had been hoaxed, for there was no Wolf at all. At last a Wolf really did come, and the Boy cried, "Wolf! wolf!" as loud as he could: but the people were so used to hearing him call that they took no notice of his cries for help. And so the Wolf had it all his own way, and killed off sheep after sheep at his leisure.

You cannot believe a liar even when he tells the truth.

THE FOX AND THE GOAT

A Fox fell into a well and was unable to get out again. By and by a thirsty Goat came by, and seeing the Fox in the well asked him if the water was good. "Good?" said the Fox, "it's the best water I ever tasted in all my life. Come down and try it yourself." The Goat thought of nothing but the prospect of quenching his thirst, and jumped in at once. When he had had enough to drink, he looked about, like the Fox, for some way of getting out, but could find none. Presently the Fox said, "I have an idea. You stand on your hind legs, and plant your forelegs firmly against the side of the well, and then I'll climb on to your back, and, from there, by stepping on your horns, I can get out. And when I'm out, I'll help you out too." The Goat did as he was requested, and the Fox climbed on to his back and so out of the well; and then he coolly walked away. The Goat called loudly after him and reminded him of his promise to help him out: but the Fox merely turned and said, "If you had as much sense in your head as you have hair in your beard you wouldn't have got into the well without making certain that you could get out again."

Look before your leap.

THE FISHERMAN AND THE SPRAT

A Fisherman cast his net into the sea, and when he drew it up again it contained nothing but a single Sprat that begged to be put back into the water. "I'm only a little fish now," it said, "but I shall grow big one day, and then if you come and catch me again I shall be of some use to you." But the Fisherman replied, "Oh, no, I shall keep you now I've got you: if I put you back, should I ever see you again? Not likely!"

THE BOASTING TRAVELLER

A Man once went abroad on his travels, and when he came home he had wonderful tales to tell of the things he had done in foreign countries. Among other things, he said he had taken part in a jumping-match at Rhodes, and had done a wonderful jump which no one could beat. "Just go to Rhodes and ask them," he said; "every one will tell you it's true." But one of those who were listening said, "If you can jump as well as all that, we needn't go to Rhodes to prove it. Let's just imagine this is Rhodes for a minute: and now – jump!"

Deeds, not words.

THE CRAB AND HIS MOTHER

An Old Crab said to her son, "Why do you walk sideways like that, my son? You ought to walk straight." The Young Crab replied, "Show me how, dear mother, and I'll follow your example." The Old Crab tried, but tried in vain, and then saw how foolish she had been to find fault with her child.

Example is better than precept.

THE ASS AND HIS SHADOW

A certain man hired an Ass for a journey in summertime, and started out with the owner following behind to drive the beast. By and by, in the heat of the day, they stopped to rest, and the traveller wanted to lie down in the Ass's Shadow; but the owner, who himself wished to be out of the sun, wouldn't let him do that; for he said he had hired the Ass only, and not his Shadow: the other maintained that his bargain secured him complete control of the Ass for the time being. From words they came to blows; and while they were belabouring each other the Ass took to his heels and was soon out of sight.

THE FARMER AND HIS SONS

A Farmer, being at death's door, and desiring to impart to his Sons a secret of much moment, called them round him and said, "My sons, I am shortly about to die; I would have you know, therefore, that in my vineyard there lies a hidden treasure. Dig, and you will find it." As soon as their father was dead, the Sons took spade and fork and turned up the soil of the vineyard over and over again, in their search for the treasure which they supposed to lie buried there. They found none, however: but the vines, after so thorough a digging, produced a crop such as had never before been seen.

THE DOG AND THE COOK

A rich man once invited a number of his friends and acquaintances to a banquet. His dog thought it would be a good opportunity to invite another Dog, a friend of his; so he went to him and said, "My master is giving a feast: there'll be a fine spread, so come and dine with me to-night." The Dog thus invited came, and when he saw the preparations being made in the kitchen he said to himself, "My word, I'm in luck: I'll take care to eat enough to-night to last me two or three days." At the same time he wagged his tail briskly, by way of showing his friend how delighted he was to have been asked. But just then the Cook caught sight of him, and, in his annoyance at seeing a strange Dog in the kitchen, caught him up by the hind legs and threw him out of the window. He had a nasty fall, and limped away as quickly as he could, howling dismally. Presently some other dogs met him, and said, "Well, what sort of a dinner did you get?" To which he replied, "I had a splendid time: the wine was so good, and I drank so much of it, that I really don't remember how I got out of the house!"

Be shy of favours bestowed at the expense of others.

THE MONKEY AS KING

At a gathering of all the animals the Monkey danced and delighted them so much that they made him their King. The Fox, however, was very much disgusted at the promotion of the Monkey: so having one day found a trap with a piece of meat in it, he took the Monkey there and said to him, "Here is a dainty morsel I have found, sire; I did not take it myself, because I thought it ought to be reserved for you, our King. Will you be pleased to accept it?" The Monkey made at once for the meat and got caught in the trap. Then he bitterly reproached the Fox for leading him into danger; but the Fox only laughed and said, "O Monkey, you call yourself King of the Beasts and haven't more sense than to be taken in like that!"

THE THIEVES AND THE COCK

Some Thieves broke into a house, and found nothing worth taking except a Cock, which they seized and carried off with them. When they were preparing their supper, one of them caught up the Cock, and was about to wring his neck, when he cried out for mercy and said, "Pray do not kill me: you will find me a most useful bird, for I rouse honest men to their work in the morning by my crowing." But the Thief replied with some heat, "Yes, I know you do, making it still harder for us to get a livelihood. Into the pot you go!"

THE FARMER AND FORTUNE

A Farmer was ploughing one day on his farm when he turned up a pot of golden coins with his plough. He was overjoyed at his discovery, and from that time forth made an offering daily at the shrine of the Goddess of the Earth. Fortune was displeased at this, and came to him and said, "My man, why do you give Earth the credit for the gift which I bestowed upon you? You never thought of thanking me for your good luck; but should you be unlucky enough to lose what you have gained I know very well that I, Fortune, should then come in for all the blame."

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