

Pestalozzi International

To nurture and develop

Pestalozzi's Fables (1797)

Pestalozzi wrote 239 'fables', nearly all very short and containing a striking or original truth about morality, education, society or politics. Many of them are animal fables and contain a clear moral message concerning the harm done by a human's animal nature to his or her spiritual nature. For more information about Pestalozzi's Fables please refer to <https://en.heinrich-pestalozzi.de/biography/tabulation/fables>

Here are some examples

The Grass and the Mushroom

The mushroom said to the grass, "I grow in an instant, but you take a whole year."

"True," replied the Grass, "whilst I am acquiring my value, you, in your uselessness, may come and go a hundred times."

A Fool's Fountain

The fountain of a poor, vain fool having run almost dry, he told his servant to stop the pipe when there was no one near, but to let it run on the approach of strangers.

"That will only make the fountain worse," answered the servant, "and there will often be no water just when it is most needed."

To which his master replied, "I can bear anything so long as people do not know that my fountain is dry."

The Oak and the Grass

Said the Grass to the Oak, under whose shade it grew, "I should thrive better in the open than under your shelter."

"Ungrateful one!" exclaimed the Oak, "You forget that every winter I cover you with my leaves."

"What!" cried the Grass, "Your proud branches rob me of sun, dew, and rain; your roots of the nourishment of the soil; and yet you would have me grateful for the forced alms of a few withered leaves, which serve rather to foster your own growth than prevent my decay!"

The Crumbling Rock

A rock, which for centuries had sheltered cattle from sun and rain, was crumbling with age. Day after day pieces broke off, and fell upon the animals, till at last they fled from the place where they had formerly loved to rest. But the old herdsman, half blind and half deaf, could not understand what had happened, and thought they had been bewitched by an enemy. It is sad to see the old shelters becoming dangerous ruins; sadder still to see the leader of the people failing to understand the danger.

The Interior of the Hill

A simpleton, seeing a hill covered with beautiful verdure, thought that it must be good earth right through; but a man who knew the place took him to a spot where the interior was exposed, and it was nothing but rock and gravel.

The hills of the earth, however green and fertile they may be, have nearly always a hard, barren subsoil. Similarly, men, however noble in heart and mind, are seldom without strata of rock and gravel in the flesh.

Even when outward appearances are most beautiful, and most rich in power, honour, and dignity, shut in below the surface are the vices of our nature. Hence, however high a man may be placed, he must give ear to the precept: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; for the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The Lime-Tree and the King

A King, who was standing alone under a lime-tree, was struck by the beauty of its foliage, and exclaimed: "Would that my subjects held to me as these leaves hold to thy branches!"

The Tree answered him; "I am for ever carrying the sap of my roots to each of my leaves."

A Simpleton's Judgment

Some magnificent poplars and a few scrubby, undersized oaks grew by the side of the same stream. Simple Simon therefore concluded that the poplar makes good wood, and the oak bad.

I know teachers who judge of their scholars, pastors of their flocks, and rulers of those they govern, with no more reason than Simple Simon judged of the merits of the oak and the poplar-tree.

One of the Bad Effects of Proverbs

"It is sad that, in spite of his feelings, a man so often finds himself obliged to be unkind to his horses!" said a kind-hearted waggoner one day, compelled to hurry his overburdened beasts. And then gradually he got into the habit of repeating the words with as little thought as Good-morning or Good-night, till at last they became a proverb amongst the waggoners of the country; and now, any wretched fellow who ill-treats his horses or his oxen, excuses himself with: "It cannot be otherwise; a waggoner must be unkind in spite of his feelings."

The Feeling of Equality

A shepherd, who fed his sheep rather poorly but all alike, found that, as a rule, they were satisfied. But one day he picked out a dozen for better treatment, and from that moment there was discontent in the flock, and many ewes died of vexation.

The Limit of Equality

A Dwarf said to a Giant: "I have the same rights as you."

"True, my friend," replied the Giant; "but you could not walk in my shoes."

Why Jupiter made the Lion King

The animals stood before Jupiter's throne awaiting his decree, most of them believing and hoping that the elephant would be appointed. The lion had as domineering an air as though he were king already, but the elephant moved quietly to and fro with the greatest unconcern.

Suddenly the voice of the lord of the thunder was heard: "The lion is king."

"My choice surprises you," said Jupiter to the others, who were standing open-mouthed with astonishment; "you must learn, then, that the elephant needs you not, having intelligence and talents enough to be self-sufficing; but the lion has need of you, and as he is able, at the same time, to make himself respected, I appoint him to be king."

How the Animals Understand Liberty

King Lion one day asked his subjects what they meant when they talked of liberty.

Said the ox: "I should think it is the most desirable liberty to be never fastened to the yoke, but always to the manger."

Said the monkey: "I shall never think myself free so long as I have a tail and a hairy skin. Without these disadvantages I should be quite free, for I should be a man."

Said the draught horse: "I feel free when my harness is taken off, and I have nothing at all to carry."

Said the carriage horse: "When I am magnificently harnessed, and drag a fine carriage for a short distance, I sometimes feel freer than the noble lord behind me."

Said the ass: "To be free is never to have either sack or basket upon your back."

Said the sloth: "If, when I have devoured all the leaves on my branch, somebody would be good enough to carry me to another and put me within reach of the leaves I so much enjoy, I should be free indeed."

Said the fox: "And I should be free if my prey did not cost me so much fear, cunning, and patience."

A man overheard all this and cried: "Surely none but animals can wish for this sort of liberty." He was right: every wish for such liberty as is only fit for animals stifles in a man's soul all true sense of liberty.