

The Hare and the Tortoise

A hare was making fun of the tortoise one day for being so slow. “Do you ever get anywhere?” he asked with a mocking laugh.

“Yes,” replied the tortoise, “and I get there sooner than you think. I’ll run you a race and prove it.” The hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the tortoise, but for the fun of the thing, he agreed. So the fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off. The hare was soon far out of sight and to make the tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try to race with a hare, lay down beside the course to take a nap until the tortoise should catch up. The tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily and, after a time, passed the place where the hare was sleeping. But the hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the tortoise was near the goal. The hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the tortoise in time.

Moral: Slow and steady wins the race.

Hercules and the Wagoner

A farmer was driving his wagon along a miry country road after a heavy rain. The horses could hardly drag the load through the deep mud, and at last they came to a standstill when one of the wheels sank to the hub in a rut. The farmer climbed down from his seat and stood beside the wagon looking at it but without making the least effort to get it out of the rut. All he did was to curse his bad luck and call loudly on Hercules to come to his aid. Then Hercules really did appear, saying, “Put your shoulder to the wheel, man, and urge on your horses. Do you think you can move the wagon by simply looking at it and whining about it? Hercules will not help unless you make some effort to help yourself.” And when the farmer put his shoulder to the wheel and urged on the horses, the wagon moved very readily. Soon the farmer was riding along in great content and with a good lesson learned.

Moral: Self-help is often the best help.

The Wolf and the House Dog

There was once a wolf who got very little to eat because the dogs of the village were so wide awake and watchful. He was really nothing but skin and bones, and it made him very downhearted to think of it. One night, this wolf happened to fall in with a fine fat house dog who had wandered a little too far from home. The wolf would gladly have eaten him then and there, but the house dog looked strong enough to leave his marks should he try it. So the wolf spoke very humbly to the dog, complimenting him on his fine appearance. "You can be as well-fed as I am if you want to," replied the dog. "Leave the woods; there you live miserably. Why, you have to fight hard for every bite you get. Follow my example and you will get along beautifully."

"What must I do?" asked the wolf.

"Hardly anything," answered the house dog. "Chase people who carry canes, bark at beggars, and fawn on the people of the house. In return, you will get tidbits of every kind: chicken bones, choice bits of meat, sugar, cake, and much more beside, not to speak of kind words and caresses."

The wolf had such a beautiful vision of his coming happiness that he almost wept. But just then, he noticed that the hair on the dog's neck was worn and the skin was chafed. "What is that on your neck?"

"Nothing at all," replied the dog.

"What nothing!"

"Oh, just a trifle!"

"But please tell me."

"Perhaps you see the mark of the collar to which my chain is fastened."

"What? A chain!" cried the wolf. "Don't you go wherever you please?"

"Not always. But what's the difference?" replied the dog.

"All the difference in the world! I don't care a rap for your feasts and I wouldn't take all the tender young lambs in the world at that price." And away ran the wolf to the woods.

Moral: There is nothing worth so much as liberty.

The Swallow and the Other Birds

It happened that a countryman was sowing some hemp seeds in a field where a swallow and some other birds were hopping about picking up their food. “Beware of that man,” warned the swallow.

“Why, what is he doing?” said the others.

“That is hemp seed he is sowing; be careful to pick up every one of the seeds or else you will repent.” The birds paid no heed to the swallow’s words, and by and by the hemp grew up and was made into cord, and of the cords nets were made, and many a bird that had despised the swallow’s advice was caught in nets made out of that very hemp. “What did I tell you?” said the swallow.

Moral: It’s not wise to dismiss advice without considering it.

The Crow and the Pitcher

In a spell of dry weather, when the birds could find very little to drink, a thirsty crow found a pitcher with a little water in it. But the pitcher was high and had a narrow neck and no matter how he tried, the crow could not reach the water. The poor thing felt as if he must die of thirst. Then an idea came to him. Picking up some small pebbles, he dropped them into the pitcher one by one. With each pebble, the water rose a little higher until at last, it was near enough so he could drink.

Moral: In a tight spot, a good use of our wits may help us out.