

**THE TORTOISE AND
THE GEESE**



THE LION LEAPED INTO THE WELL

**THE TORTOISE
AND THE GEESE
AND OTHER FABLES
OF BIDPAI**

RETOLD BY

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To

EDWIN BRYANT BRIDGMAN

THIS BOOK OF FABLES
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TRUSTING THAT HE LIKE KING DABSCHÉLIM
WILL COUNT IT AMONG HIS
TREASURES

INTRODUCTION

The Fables of Bidpai are an Eastern heritage from the centuries antedating the birth of Christ, and like all the works of early literature, they have come down to us out of obscure origins, enshrouded in traditions. History forbears even to certify that the reputed author of these tales existed, but tradition has inscribed him as a sage of India, who lived about the year 300 B. C. More than this, she records him as the bravest of all the philosophers of his generation, standing silent before King Dabschélim. He was led into the august presence of his Majesty by the sincere desire to bring wisdom to a foolish ruler. The royal personage scanned his face and bade him break his silence. Bidpai fearlessly performed his task, reaping as his reward a prison cell and fettered hands. Here he lay forgotten until one day the King, tormented by some unusual problem, bethought himself of the sage. Summoning him from his dungeon, he once again bade him share his wisdom with him. The reward this time was an elevation as high as his degradation had been low. He was given the kingdom to rule.

An era of great prosperity now set in for Dabschélim, darkened only by the thought of the briefness of mortal life. Wanted to look to Bidpai for the solution of all difficulties, he turned to him now, beseeching him to write down his words of wisdom and leave them as a lasting monument to him, Dabschélim. Thus it was that the sage, providing himself with food and parchment ample for a year, retired with one disciple into a closed room in the far part of the palace. At the end of twelve months the philosopher and his scribe issued, pale-faced, from their retreat; a great assemblage of the savants of the Empire was called; and standing in their midst facing Dabschélim, Bidpai read his fables, in which he had ingeniously inculcated all his moral wisdom. The King's delight was boundless. He told Bidpai to ask what he wished and it should be granted him. The sage requested only that the book should be carefully guarded in India, and the greatest precaution taken that it should not fall into the hands of the Persians.

All lovers of classics cannot but be glad that in spite of Bidpai's request the Book of Fables was eventually borne out of the Indian treasure house. A Persian physician, traveling in India in search of herbs whose sap should impart life again to the dead, returned to his native land with Bidpai's Fables. He set about translating them into Pehlevi, the language of Persia at that time. Their migration had begun. Starting in Sanscrit, they have passed into Pehlevi, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and on into the modern tongues, finding their

greatest vogue in Europe in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries.

It is rather singular that these fables have been so long treasured by scholars almost exclusively. La Fontaine was quick to seize upon them and incorporate them into his collection of fables, but English-speaking children have been given little opportunity to know them. In this small selection from the Fables of Bidpai only a scant portion of his wisdom and his humor is offered, but it is sincerely hoped that herein lies sufficient to awaken in our children a love for this Indian Sage that shall increase with the years until the name of Bidpai be ranked in their affections close to that of Æsop.

MAUDE BARROWS DUTTON

NEW YORK CITY.

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THE TORTOISE AND THE GESE

A TORTOISE and two Geese lived together in a pond for many years. At last there came a drought and dried up the pond. Then the Geese said to one another,—

“We must seek a new home quickly, for we cannot live without water. Let us say farewell to the Tortoise and start at once.”

When the Tortoise heard that they were going, he trembled with fear, and besought them by their friendship not to desert him.

“Alas,” the Geese replied, “there is no help for it. If we stay here, we shall all three die, and we cannot take you with us, for you cannot fly.”

Still the Tortoise begged so hard not to be left behind that the Geese finally said,—

“Dear Friend, if you will promise not to speak a word on the journey, we will take you with us. But know beforehand, that if you open your mouth to say one single word, you will be in instant danger of losing your life.”

“Have no fear,” replied the Tortoise, “but that I will be silent until you give me leave to speak again. I



AND THEY LAUGHED LOUD AND LONG

THE TORTOISE AND THE GEESE

would rather never open my mouth again than be left to die alone here in the dried-up pond.”

So the Geese brought a stout stick and bade the Tortoise grasp it firmly in the middle by his mouth. Then they took hold of either end and flew off with him. They had gone several miles in safety, when their course lay over a village. As the country people saw this curious sight of a Tortoise being carried by two Geese, they began to laugh and cry out,—

“Oh, did you ever see such a funny sight in all your life!” And they laughed loud and long.

The Tortoise grew more and more indignant. At last he could stand their jeering no longer. “You stupid . . .” he snapped, but before he could say more he had fallen to the ground and was dashed to pieces.

THE FOX, THE HEN, AND THE DRUM

A Fox, who was out in search of food, discovered a Hen scratching for worms at the foot of a tree. He hid himself in a bush near by, and was about to spring out and seize her, when a strange tapping sound fell upon his ears; for in that same tree there was a Drum, and when the wind blew, the branches beat against it.

Now the Fox was exceedingly hungry, and reasoned thus:—

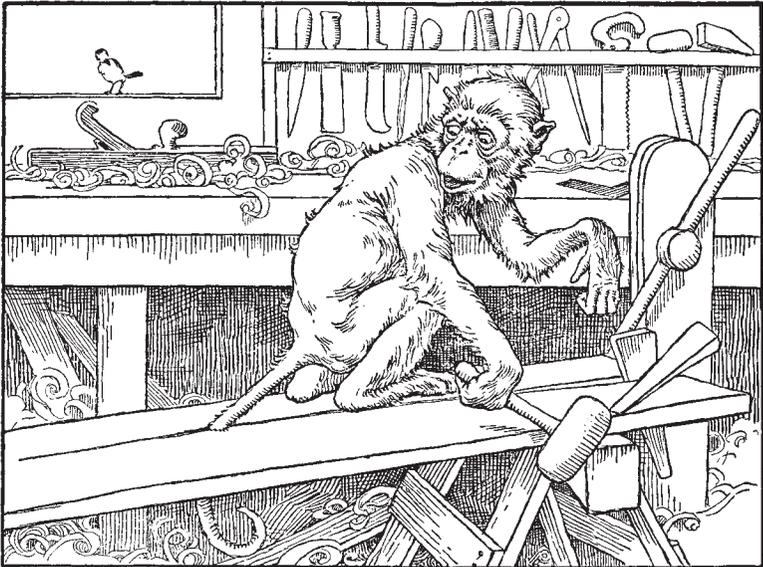
“A noise as loud as that must be made by a fowl much larger than this Hen. I will, therefore, let her go, and will bring down that larger bird for my supper.”

Without further thought he rushed out of the bush with a noise that put the Hen to flight, and, after many vain efforts, scrambled up the tree. High among the leaves he found the Drum, and fell upon it tooth and claw. He soon had it open, only to see that it was filled with nothing more or less than empty air. The Fox hung his tail.

“What a stupid wretch I am!” he groaned. “Because of my own greediness, I must now go supperless to bed.”

THE CARPENTER AND THE APE

AN APE one day sat watching a Carpenter who was splitting a piece of wood with two wedges. First the Carpenter drove the smaller wedge into the crack, so as to keep it open, and then when the crack was wide enough, he hammered in the larger wedge and pulled the first one out. At noon the Carpenter went home to dinner, and the Ape now thought that he would try



CAUGHT THE APE'S TAIL BETWEEN THEM

THE TORTOISE AND THE GEESE

his hand at splitting boards. As he took his seat on the Carpenter's bench, his long tail slipped into the crack in the board. The Ape did not notice this, but set to work. The first wedge he drove in exactly as he had seen the Carpenter do. But then he forgot, and pulled it out before he had driven in the second one. The two sides of the board instantly sprang together, and caught the Ape's tail between them. The poor prisoner had now nothing to do but sit there groaning with pain until the Carpenter's return, when he was given a sound beating and told that he had suffered justly for meddling with other people's business.

THE POOR MAN AND THE FLASK OF OIL

THERE was once a Poor Man, who lived in a house next to a wealthy Merchant who sold oil and honey. As the Merchant was a kind neighbor, he one day sent a flask of oil to the Poor Man. The Poor Man was delighted, and put it carefully away on the top shelf. One evening, as he was gazing at it, he said half aloud,—

“I wonder how much oil there is in that bottle. There is a large quantity. If I should sell it, I could buy five sheep. Every year I should have lambs, and before long I should own a flock. Then I should sell some of the sheep, and be rich enough to marry a wife. Perhaps we might have a son. And what a fine boy he would be! So tall, strong, and obedient! But if he should disobey me,” and he raised the staff which he held in his hand, “I should punish him thus!” and he swung the staff over his head and brought it heavily to the ground, knocking, as he did so, the flask off the shelf so that the oil ran over him from head to foot.

THE RICH MAN AND THE BUNDLE OF WOOD

THERE was once a man, who, although he was very rich, was also very stingy. In the winter when the peasants brought him wood to buy, he would give them only half their price.

One day, as he was purchasing a large bundle of wood from a Poor Man, a Priest came by. He saw the few pennies that the Rich Man had thrown at the Poor Man's feet, and he could not help saying,—

“My Rich Brother, can you not be more generous than this? Do you not see that this Poor Woodsman has brought you a large bundle of wood, and you are sending him away with only a penny or two? How can he buy bread enough to keep himself and his family from starving with such small wages?”

But the Rich Man was greatly vexed at the Priest's words. “What is it to me that the man is poor?” he cried, and he drove both the Poor Man and the Priest from his door.

That very night, this same bundle of sticks caught fire and the Rich Man's house and barn burned to the ground. Thus he awoke the next morning to find himself

THE RICH MAN AND THE BUNDLE OF WOOD

as poor as the poorest wood-chopper from whom he had ever bought wood.