

TRACE

**Traditional Children's Stories for a common
Future**

The Monk and the Weasel



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[On the following day king Dabschelim commanded Bidpai to relate to him the fable of the man, who betrays too much haste and precipitation in his conduct, without bestowing any thoughts on the consequences which may ensue; and the philosopher began in the following manner:

The man who never pauses for a moment, in order to check the danger of an inconsiderate decision, and reap the benefit of a prudent and cautious hesitation in a matter in which he is engaged, will find occasion to repent of his folly when it is too late, and offer a parallel to the religious man, who in destroying the weasel, unknowingly killed his benefactor. How happened this? The monarch asked.]

It is told, continued the philosopher, of a religious man that he lived in the country of Georgiana, and had a wife to whom he was very much attached, and to whom he had been married a great many years, without any prospect of having a family. At length, when all hopes were nearly at an end, his wife became unexpectedly pregnant, and the husband in a transport of joy thanked Providence for its bounty to him, and prayed to heaven that the child might be a boy ; and he said to his wife. Rejoice with me, for I trust we shall have a son, who will prove the comfort and joy of our lives, and for whose education and instruction no pains or expense shall be spared.

The wife found fault with her husband for indulging in anticipations of the future, of which he could not possibly know anything; and reminding him of what happened to the religious man, who poured the honey and oil upon his own head, related to him, at his desire, the fable as follows.

A religious man was in the habit of receiving every day from the house of a merchant a certain quantity of oil and honey, of which having eaten as much as he wanted, he put the rest into a jar, which he hung on a nail in a corner of the room, hoping that the jar would in time be filled. Now as he was leaning back one day on his couch with a stick in his hand, and the jar suspended over his head, he thought of the high price of oil and honey, and said to himself, I will sell what is in this jar and buy with the money which I obtain for it ten goats, which producing each of them a young one every five months, in addition to the produce of the kids as soon as they begin to bear, it will not be long before there is a large flock. He continued to make his calculations and found

that he should at this rate in the course of two years have more than four hundred goats. At the expiration of this term I will buy, said he, a hundred black cattle, in the proportion of a bull or a cow for every four goats; I will then purchase land, and hire workmen to plough it with the beasts, and put it into tillage, so that before five years are passed, I shall no doubt have realized a great fortune by the sale of the milk which the cows will give, and of the produce of my land.

My next business will be to build a magnificent house, and engage a number of servants both male and female; and when my establishment is completed, I will marry the handsomest woman I can find, who in due time become a mother will present me with an heir to my possessions, who, as he advances in age, shall receive the best masters that can be procured; and if the progress which he makes in learning is equal to my reasonable expectations, I shall be amply repaid for the pains and expense which I have bestowed upon him ; but if, on the other hand, he disappoints my hopes, the rod which I have here shall be the instrument with which I will make him feel the displeasure of a justly offended parent.

At these words he suddenly raised the hand which held the stick towards the jar, and broke it, and the contents ran down upon his head and lace. And you see, added the wife in conclusion, from this story, how unfit it is to talk of any matter out of season, and of whose fortunate or unfortunate issue you are alike ignorant: and the religious man acknowledged the justice of the reproof.

At length his wife was brought to bed of a fine boy, to the great joy of his father, and after some days, when the time arrived for the wife to go through the ceremonies, which were commanded by her religion to take place after child-birth, she said to her husband, Remain with the child whilst I go to the bath, and when I have bathed, I will return. Then she left her husband and the boy, and went to the bath and she had scarcely quitted the house, before a messenger arrived from the king, desiring the presence of the religious man at court; and he could find nobody to leave with his son, except a tame weasel, which he had caught very young, sound brought up, and was as fond of as if it had been his own child. So the father left the weasel with his son, and shut the door of the house, and followed the messenger; and shortly after a snake came out from a hole in the room and approached the child, and as soon as

the weasel saw the snake, it sprang upon it and killed it, and tore it in pieces, and some traces of blood remained in its mouth.

On the return of the religious man, the weasel came up to him, as soon as he had opened the door, as if it wished to acquaint him with what it had done ; but the father observing the spots of blood upon the weasel, without listening for a moment to the voice of reason, concluded at once that it had strangled his child ; and without pausing for an instant to ascertain the fact, he struck it with the stick which he had in his hand on the head, and killed it.

Then he went towards the child, and found him alive and unhurt, and the snake was lying by him torn into pieces: and after this discovery, he reproached himself bitterly for the haste with which he had acted, and striking himself on the forehead, exclaimed: Would to heaven I had never been the father of this child, and I should have escaped the crime which I have committed!

At this moment his wife returned and seeing the state in which he was, asked him what had happened, and he acquainted her with the whole truth, speaking in high terms of the conduct of the weasel, and chaining himself with injustice for the ill return which he had made it for its services. These, replied his wife, are the fruits of haste.