

# LINCOLN LORE

No. 58

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

May 19, 1930

## LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF  
THE LINCOLN  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY  
THE LINCOLN  
NATIONAL LIFE  
INSURANCE  
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

### AESOP'S FABLES

There are said to have been three books in the early Kentucky home of the Lincolns—the Bible, Dilworth's speller, and Aesop's Fables. The Bible belonged to the parents; the speller was undoubtedly purchased for the oldest child and then passed on to her brother; but it would appear that Aesop's Fables was Abraham Lincoln's very own. Tradition says it was a gift from his mother.

There is no doubt but what the preface, and other collateral material in the editions of both the Bible and Dilworth's speller used by Lincoln, exerted a great influence over him. This is especially true with reference to Aesop's Fables.

The early American edition of this book, which we have reason to believe Abraham read, contains besides the two hundred fables a lengthy "application" appended to each story. The moral set forth in these precepts is often much more impressive than the parables themselves.

The preface to this particular edition in hand is of special interest. Several pages are used in setting forth some of the traditions about Aesop himself, and a further discussion deals with the purpose of a fable. The editor of the book quotes the following excerpts from Addison: "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body, and by the one health is preserved, strengthened, and invigorated; by the other, virtue (which is the health of the mind) is kept alive and confirmed, but as exercise becomes tedious and painful when we make use of it only as a means of health, so reading is too apt to grow uneasy and burdensome when we apply ourselves to it only for our improvement. For this reason the virtue which we gather from a fable or an allegory is like the health we get by hunting; as we are engaged in an agreeable pursuit that draws us on with pleasure, and makes us sensible of the fatigue that accompanies it."

The editor continues in his preface by condemning the work of Lestrangle whose translations of the fables he seems to feel are insipid, coarse, and uncouth in style and diction. He says Lestrangle claims that his edition was for "the use and instruction of children who, being as it were mere blank paper, are ready indifferently for any opinion, good or bad." After severely criticizing Lestrangle's religious and

political ideas, the editor continues with this paragraph: "What sort of children, therefore, are the blank paper upon which such morality as this ought to be written? Not the children of America, I hope, for they are born with free blood in their veins and suck in liberty with their very milk. This they should be taught to love and cherish above all things, and upon occasion, to defend and vindicate it, as it is the glory of their country, the greatest blessing of their lives, and the peculiar happy privilege in which they excel all the world besides. . . . But let the minds of our charming youth be forever educated and improved in that spirit of truth and liberty for the support of which their ancestors have bravely exhausted so much blood and treasure."

### SELECTED FABLES OF AESOP

AND OTHER FABULISTS

IN THREE BOOKS

By R. DODSLEY

Is not the earth with various living creatures, and the air replenished; and all those at thy command to come and play before thee? Knowest thou not their language and their ways? They also know, and reason not contemptible; with these find pastime. *Paradise Lost* p. 8; 1-370.

A NEW EDITION  
LONDON

Printed for J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall 1773  
Price bound three shillings.

The excerpts which follow present one complete fable and its application also many applications from several fables. They may be somewhat responsible for the political, religious, moral, and social ideals which we find in Lincoln.

Aesop at play. An Athenian one day found Aesop at play with a company of little boys, at their childish diversions, and begun to jeer and laugh at him for it. The old fellow, who was too much of a wag himself to suffer others to ridicule him, took a bow unstrung, and laid it upon the ground. Then calling the sensorious Athenian—"Now, philosopher," says he, "expound this riddle if you can and tell us what the unstrung bow implies." The man, after raking his brains and scratching his pate about it a considerable time to no purpose, at last gave it up, and declared he knew not what to make of it. "Why," says Aesop, laughing, "if you keep a bow always bent, it will break presently; but if you let it go back, it will be fitter for use when you want it."

### The Application

"The mind of man is like a bow, in this respect; for if it always be kept intent on business, it will either break, and be good for nothing; or lose that spring and energy which is required in one who would acquit himself with credit. But sports and diversion soothe and slaken it, and keep it in a condition to be exerted to the best advantage upon occasion."

The old man and his sons—"Nothing is more necessary towards completing and continuing the well being of mankind, than their entering into and preserving friendships and alliances. The safety of government depends chiefly upon this; and therefore it is weakened and exposed to its enemies, in proportion as it is divided by parties. *A kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.* And the same holds good among all the societies and corporations of men, from the great constitution of the nation, down to every little parochial vestry."

The cat and the mice—"Prudent folks never trust those a second time who have deceived them once."

The lion and the four bulls—"A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand and as undisputed a maxim as it is, it was however thought necessary to be urged to the attention of mankind by the best men that ever lived."

The crow and the pitcher—"A man of sagacity and penetration upon encountering a difficulty or two does not immediately despair, but if he cannot succeed one way, employs his wit and ingenuity another, and to avoid or get over an impediment makes no scruple of stepping out of the path of his forefathers."

The mule—"As a man truly great shines sufficiently bright of himself without wanting to be emblazoned by a splendid ancestry; so they whose lives are eclipsed by foulness of obscurity of showing to advantage look but the darker for being placed in the same line with their illustrious forefathers."

The fox and the ape—"A weak man should not aspire to be a king. To be qualified for such an office, an office of the last importance to mankind the person should be of a distinguished, prudent, and of most unblemished integrity, too honest to impose upon others, and too penetrating to be imposed upon. Thoroughly acquainted with the laws and genius of the realm he is to govern; grave but not passionate; good natured but not soft; aspiring at just esteem; despising vainglory; without superstition; without hypocrisy."

Note: The title page of the early American edition used as the basis of this presentation is missing. The one exhibited is from the copy in possession of George H. Hambrecht of Madison, Wisconsin.