

English.

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THIRD READER LITERATURE LESSONS.

THE FARMER AND THE FOX.

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THIS fable by J. A. Froude, the historian, is one that children find hard to understand, simply because it deals with matters beyond the circle of their life. Socialism does not enter naturally into their thoughts, and some children who live in a world of childlike dreams are much slower to take in the idea of this extract than others whose ears are open to the talk of their elders and who glean from their parents or newspapers many ideas beyond their own circle of thought. It seems almost like forcing the growth of their worldliness to give them the cruel facts, and we hesitate as we open the book. "Shall we allow them to read it without explanation?" or "Shall we tell them that there are men who prey upon society as the fox upon the poultry yard, men whom other men feel inclined to remove from the earth for the safety of the rest of humanity. Will it benefit them to learn of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest? What shall we say as to the right of one man or set of men to remove from this earth the being who has failed to live up to the standard of law?" But the lesson is marked as a "Literature Lesson" and we must do something and cease hesitating, for there is an examining committee who may see fit to enquire about "The Farmer and the Fox" and our children may not be able to answer their enquiries creditably. So begin; read the lesson, through with spirit, letting the logic and reasoning tell; then in a first lesson ask for questions or give meanings of words. Explain that it is a fable, an illustration of something, using the Fox as a representative of one thing, the Farmer of another, the Poultry-yard of still another. The Farmer guarding the Poultry-yard, the Fox stealing in; the Government watching the interests of the Nation, the Demagogue seeking prey; explain as simply as possible, using illustrations in strikes, in the events of the present day when anarchists and socialistic agitators are so plentiful, but pray avoid tincturing the childish mind with bitterness and rancor; rather fail to make it clear than impress it too well. Let us draw from it something to help on the development of good sound principles, rather seek to develop the character of the children to an avoidance of the Fox-like traits.

Second day. Some one reads. Teacher questions:—"Whom does the Farmer represent?"—"The Fox?"—"The Poultry-yard?"—"What had the Fox done to the Farmer's poultry-yard, do you suppose?"—"What words tell you that?"—"What had happened to the Fox?"—"What did the Farmer think of doing?"—"Why did he think that would be a good thing to do?"—"Why does the Government hang men? or imprison them?"

The answer received, the teacher directs one pupil to read the next paragraph, the class imagining the scene. "What had the Farmer threatened to do?"—"Where in this paragraph do you find that the fox is a crafty animal, fit to be a symbol of cunning men?"—"What other fable have you read about a cunning fox?"—"Now, see how cunningly he goes about deceiving the Farmer. What does he first try to make the Farmer understand? Tell it in your own words."—"Why does he use the rabbit-skin to show the uselessness of the Farmer's experiment?" The Farmer does not notice the Fox's threat of the other Foxes dining at his expense before they went home, and answers the first part of his speech, and says he will hang him for his misdeeds then, if it will not frighten the rest of his kind."—"How does the Fox try to get out of that?" Explain and apply the speech of the Fox. Many children use a similar excuse to justify their faults; they hear it, probably, from their infancy at home. Their parents' remarks on the disposition and tempers of their children are by no means unnoticed by the little ones who listen so innocently to them. Impress the truth that everyone is a builder of character and can overcome inherited tendencies. Tell a story and have them write it, of some of the great men who overcame, such as Adam Clarke, Demosthenes, Walter Scott, Elihu Burrit, and scores of others.

The Farmer is a man of one idea, he does not attempt to argue on the subject of the inherited tendencies of the Fox, he simply returns to his point, "You stole my geese," or "You are a thief and deserve to be hanged." This shows that facts are stronger than arguments. The user of the greatest number of words is not always the strongest in a debate. "How does the Fox feel about the Farmer's cleverness?" "What do you think?"

The next appeal is to the heart of the Farmer. The argument against capital punishment comes in here; some child will want to express an opinion. Do not dwell on it; pass naturally to the next part. "What did the Fox want the Farmer to do?" "Would it be fair play to the Farmer that he should feed the Fox as well as keep himself." The following story aptly illustrates the position of many men who complain against the rich. A certain working man was talking very bitterly about the riches of the wealthy men and the poverty of the working classes. "I think," said he, "that there should be an equal division of the money of the world, so that every man might have an equal share." "Did you ever hear how much money there would be then for each man?" said a person standing by. "There would just be, so I am told, \$400 a piece." "You don't say so!" exclaimed the first man, "Why, I rather think I don't want any division then. I have \$500 now, in the bank; I suppose I should have to lose \$100, if there was a division." His opinion changed when it was his money that was to be given away. The logic of the Fox is the logic of the criminal and the tramp, the logic that keeps the world poor, for every man who makes two blades of grass grow where there was but one before, enriches the world just so much. The boy who grows up saying "I can't help it," defrauds the world of just as much as he might have made of himself, while the boy who lives to do his best is a helper to every one about him and the world in general. The schoolroom often explains to an observer the reason of the unemployed, of the failures of men, for there are in every schoolroom the embryo of the tramp, the statesman, the energetic business man, the difficult to keep busy, the lax, the unambitious, the chronic grumbler, and all the varying types of grown-up humanity that go to make up the puzzle of modern society.

"How does the Fox succeed in his reasoning with the Farmer?" "What do you think he means by 'a dog'?" "When the Fox finds he has failed with the Farmer what does he do next?" "How does the Farmer answer him?" "What does he compare the Fox to?" "How does he treat them?" "Why?" "Why was he going to hang the Fox?" "What would be the result if the Farmer or the Government were too kindhearted to be strict?"

Review. Explain: suffered severely, succeeded, threatened, hard pinches, good turn, dine at your expense, rogue, fine talk, responsibility, repent, notion, education neglected, logic, unchristian vengeance, revenge, importance, persuade, hinder. (Note that some people try to correct the expression "try and persuade," which is very good English). Tell the story. What do you learn from it? What sort of persons talk like the Fox? Tell a story of someone who overcame great difficulties, mental, moral or circumstantial, and became noted as a benefactor of his race. What are you going to do, be a helper or a drawback to the world? Write the story as a dialogue. Re-write portions in various ways to express same meaning. Why does this story follow the story of "Bruce and the Spider?" Who is like the Fox in any lesson you have read? Who is the opposite in character?

These are sample questions which will suggest themselves to a person who seeks to make moral training out of this lesson.

Love for the parent or teacher provides the strongest safeguard against wrong-doing.—*Sully*.

The purpose of discipline is to build up character, not to keep order to make good teaching possible.—*Balliet*.

Those teachers who are looking for some profitable occupation during the summer will do well to get agent's terms from the Equitable Savings, Loan and Building Association, whose advertisement appears in another column. A post-card will get the desired information.

SUNDRY AMERICANISMS.

The following, which we clipped from the correspondence columns of the *New York Nation* a few months ago, will be interesting to students of our mother tongue.

The following passage is transcribed from p. 32 of Colonel T. W. Higginson's *Hints on Writing and Speech-making*, which has only just fallen in my way:

"To be sure, the inelegancies with which we are chiefly reproached are not distinctively American: Burke uses 'pretty considerable'; Miss Burney says, 'I trembled a few'; the English Bible says 'reckon'; Locke has 'guess,' and Southey, 'realize,' in the exact sense [*sic*] in which one sometimes hears them [*sic*] used colloquially here. Nevertheless, such improprieties are, of course, to be avoided; but whatever good Americanisms exist, let us hold to them, by all means."

On the expressions impugned above I purpose to comment briefly.

Pretty considerable, found in Fielding, Smollett and Burke, is countenanced by Hallam also: "Of *pretty considerable* value." Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1750).

"A *pretty considerable* estate." Smollett, *Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760).

"The booty was *pretty considerable*." *Id.*, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771).

"To the faculty of law was joined a *pretty considerable* proportion of the faculty of medicine." Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), p. 64 (2nd ed.).

"Divisions soon arose among themselves about the use of the English service, in which a *pretty considerable* party was disposed to make alterations." Hallam, *Constitutional History* (1827), vol. i., p. 168 (ed. 1842).

The quotations from Fielding and Smollett, the references of which are defective, are taken from marginal notes entered, by me, in the first edition of Mr. Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms*, upwards of forty years ago.

Burke's *pretty considerable*—and equally that of Hallam and the rest—there is no good reason to find grave fault with; but, from the general way in which it is spoken of by Col. Higginson, it might be thought that English authority was producible for such blamable locutions as "he is *pretty considerable* of an orator" and "*pretty considerable* disappointed," familiar in some parts of the United States.

Not irrelevant, in connexion with *pretty considerable*, are these quotations:

"I attempted to fatten two middle-sized bacon-hogs with carrots; after having been two months, or near the matter, in the sty, I found that, as they were young, they had grown *pretty considerably*, but continued as lean as when I put them up." Burke, (1770), *Correspondence* (1844), vol. i., p. 246.

"*Pretty considerably* shocked." Miss C. M. Yonge, *Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), ch. xxv.

"I found myself, on the day after my return, '*pretty considerably* tired,' to borrow a phrase from our American friends." Mr. J. W. Bowden (1836), in Cardinal Newman's *Letters* (1891), vol. ii., p. 182.

Burke would, certainly, not have done amiss, if only for simplicity, in preferring a *good deal* to *pretty considerably*, and "our American friends" would better have preferred *not a little* to it. For all that, their phrase is passable, except on the view that, irrespectively of circumstances, it is reasonable and seasonable to be rigorously exacting in point of taste.

A *few for a little*, occurs in Miss Burney's *Diary* (1778); and it should have been noted that she clearly intended it as mere slang, just as it is in Murphy's *Citizen* (1761): "Mind me, when I . . . throw my eyes about a *few*." And here may be mentioned, as interesting obsolescences, Milton's "fit audience find, though *few*"; "a *few* company," which Swift wrote in 1711; and also the Scotch and provincial English "a *few* broth."

Reckon, in the sense of 'consider,' 'deem,' 'make account,' of 'count on it,' or of 'surmise,' 'suspect,' is not now very common, as a literary term; and yet no vulgarity attaches to its quaintness. The Bible revisionists, among whom were Americans, have not dislodged it from *Romans* viii., 18. In conversation, it is quite as current in England as it is in our own country, and is, observedly, in better repute there than here. No judicious British critic, one may be positive, would censure the colloquialism, "I *reckon* he is at home," which, yet, Dr.