

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN

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OF FABLES AND PARABLES

DEAR FRIENDS:



—From an 18th-century Hermetic Book



Most of the great religions of the world supported their moral and ethical teachings by parables, myths, or legends. In the course of time, it came to be assumed that these fantasies were accepted literally and that our forefathers were given to mythology. Even when the facts became more or less evident, an elaborate body of emblemata became popular in the literary world, and skilled artists found ways of pictorializing the vices and virtues of humankind.

During the Renaissance many scholars of good repute issued collections of moralisms combining symbolic pictures with appropriate textual elaborations.

Up to recently children's books were popular to clarify the uncertainties of the young mind. Such productions as Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstock, and Puss in Boots invited parental commentaries. Good always conquered, evil was overcome and defeated, and the heroes and heroines lived happily ever after. The texts were imaginary, but the essential meanings were true. Bearing upon this subject, Francis Bacon wrote in Book 11 of Advancement of Learning ". . . In those ages strange and unusual; the understandings of men were not so capable of that subtilty, unless such discourses, by resemblances and examples, were brought down to sense. Wherefore in those first ages all were full of Fables, and of Parables, and of Enigmas, and of Similitudes of all sorts. Hence the Symbols of Pythagoras, the Enigmas of Sphynx; and the Fables of Aesop; and the like. So the Apophthegmes of the Ancients were likewise expressed by similitudes. And as Hieroglyphicks were before letters, so Parables were before Arguments," (As quoted in (Baconian Jottings Then and Now.)

Bacon also clearly indicates that hieroglyphical writing was intended for the transmission of ideas and not merely conveniences of conversation. Words are names used for the transmission of thoughts, and abuses of the vocabulary deprive the mind of its rightful significance. The New Testament includes a number of parables intended to picture forth to the mind examples of Christian benevolence. Greek dramas were built around sacred

themes and oriental epics such as the Gesar Khan are still important contributions to the improvement of character. As the miracle plays lost their vitality public morality showed symptoms of decline.

The McGuffey Reader acquainted small children with prevailing religious convictions. The admonitions were not always inspiring, but they had a tendency to prevent little boys and girls from falling into evil ways. At present books suitable for eager young minds are not plentiful for education begins with television. Any resemblance to classic myths and fables or spiritual parables seldom appears on the tube. Those who have not yet learned to read and write are fascinated by Star Wars and the Planet of the Apes. Such exposures contribute less than nothing toward the integration of the personality or the enrichment of the mortal mind.

Bacon, in his little book, *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, reveals clearly how the myths and legends of old times can enrich the consciousness of a modern philosopher-scientist. He describes the myth of Cassandra as "the story of divination." Narcissus as the "tragedy of self-love." In the same vein, Orpheus stands for philosophy, whereas Cupid is a veiled account of the atom. Prometheus indicates the sorry state of man, the sphinx stands for science, and Metis bears witness to the virtue of good counsel.

The rebus is more than a conundrum; it is a challenge through the acceptance of which the individual can discover the resources of the human mind. Every question that is answered confronts the intellect with a future challenge. Overwhelmed by the vastness of space the human being loses sight of the wonders and lessons in things near and simple. With all our learning we must never lose sight of our heritage of good counsel as set forth in tablets of clay, inscriptions on stone, and the strange writings on papyrus and vellum. We remember again Bacon's words, "I had rather believe all the fables in the legends, the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind."

His Lordship believed that it was wiser to build new works on well established and long-proven foundations than to attempt to construct a vast superstructure the footings of which are not proven. Bacon has been accredited with the most legally trained mind that ever was directed to the advancements of science and philosophy. He wrote with the skill of a well-trained attorney; his every word was so carefully selected that even now it is virtually impossible to refute his statements. His great writings such as *The Advancement of Learning* and *The New Organ of Science* inspired and contributed to advancements in many fields both sacred and secular. He proved to his own satisfaction that there is no conflict between religion and science, and many able minds still agree with him.

A line of Lord Bacon's taken from his Essays is not often quoted in the corridors of higher learning, "If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world." This is the proper thinking for a High Chancellor, an enlightened educator, a practical industrialist, or the prelate of a world-wide religion. It is important that knowledge should bind up wounds and not add to them. Education that divides, promotes hostilities, justifies ruthless competition, or breeds prejudices, must be considered a false doctrine. Bacon contributed to the revision of the common law of England and it is strongly suspected that he played a part in the preparation of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. His universal interests inspired the foundation of the Royal Society of London which was dedicated to his memory and extended its activities to almost every field of human endeavor.

At the time of the founding of the Royal Society, Bacon was described as a "second Moses" leading the children of the world from the desert of ignorance into the promised land of universal education. When we realize that it is perfectly possible for a deeply religious person to be an outstanding scientist, philosopher, and scholar, there seems to be very little justification for our present effort to advance the dignities of mankind without recognizing the importance of spiritual insights. The answer seems to be that the modern generation is deliberately avoiding religious commitments, not because they interfere with progress, rather because humanity cannot solve the dilemmas which it faces today without a reformation of conduct. Every day there is new evidence that without enlightened religion to guide both leaders and their followers no security is possible. Bacon was very right when he stated firmly that the motive behind progress must be a sincere desire to unite humanity through mutual service, the increase of knowledge, and a realization that the greatest wisdom is to recognize the Supreme Power which must always be our hope and our salvation.

Most sincerely yours,

*Manly P. Hall*

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