

This Fable is Intended for You

Hans Christian Andersen

Wise men of ancient times ingeniously discovered how to tell people the truth without being blunt to their faces. You see, they held a magic mirror before the people, in which all sorts of animals and various wondrous things appeared, producing amusing as well as instructive pictures. They called these fables, and whatever wise or foolish deeds the animals performed, the people were to imagine themselves in their places and thereby think, "This fable is intended for you!" In this way no one's feelings were hurt. Let us give you an example.

There were two high mountains, and at the top of each stood a castle. In the valley below ran a hungry dog, sniffing along the ground as if in search of mice or quail. Suddenly a trumpet sounded from one of the castles, to announce that mealtime was approaching. The dog immediately started running up the mountain, hoping to get his share; but when he was halfway up, the trumpeter ceased blowing, and a trumpet from the other castle commenced. "Up here," thought the dog, "they will have finished eating before I arrive, but over there they are just getting ready to eat." So he ran down, and up the other mountain. But now the first trumpet started again, while the second stopped. The dog ran down again, and up again; and this he continued until both trumpets stopped blowing, and the meals were over in both castles.

Now guess what the wise men of ancient times would have said about this fable, and who the fool could be who runs himself ragged without gaining anything, either here or there?