

The Foolish Quack

(Folk Tale)

One evening, as the sun was setting, some travellers stayed to rest under a clump of trees, and, loosening their camels, set them to graze. It happened that one of the animals entered a melon-field, and that a melon stuck in its throat. The owner, seeing this and fearing to lose the animal, tied a blanket round its throat, and then struck the place with all his might. Instantly the melon broke in the throat of the camel, and it was then easily swallowed.

A certain man who had just come up, looking on and observing this proceeding, shouldered his bundle, and, going to the next village, pretended that he was a doctor.

"But what can you cure?" asked the villagers.

"I can cure the goitre," answered the quack.

An old woman, whose throat was swollen to a frightful size, exclaimed: "O my son, if you could only cure my goitre, I would bless you for evermore!"

"Certainly," answered the man, "here, bring me a blanket and a good-sized mallet."

As soon as they were brought, he tied up the woman's throat, and struck the swollen part with so much force that the poor old creature instantly expired.

"Ah," cried the people, "this fellow is a villain!"

So they seized him, being minded to carry him before the king. One of them, however, said: "She was a very old woman, who must have died shortly in any case. Let us therefore compel the wretch to dig her grave, and then we can beat him and let him go." So they took him and set him to work, but the ground was so stiff and hard that he made slow progress.

"If you do not dig it," said they, "before the king you shall go, and then you will be hanged."

Thus exhorted the unfortunate man, in the greatest fear, laboured away with all his might; and at last, when the villagers saw that he had finished his task and buried the victim of his mistaken treatment, they beat him well and let him go.

Uninfluenced by the severity of his punishment, the man mounted his camel and went on to the next village, and again gave himself out as a great doctor.

"And what can you cure?" said someone.

"I can cure goitre," answered he.

This time it was an old man who offered himself for treatment. But the pretended doctor said: "Look here, good people. I shall do my best to cure this case; but remember, if I am so unfortunate as to kill him, I am not to be compelled to dig the man's grave."

"A pretty sort of doctor you must be!" cried they, "before you begin your treatment,

you are talking of digging the patient's grave! Away with you; we shall have nothing to do with you."

Hearing this, the pretended doctor began to say to himself: "What an extraordinary thing this is! My best plan surely is to return to the camel-men and tell them they have not shown me the right way to cure this disease. Perhaps they will advise me."

When he had overtaken them, he cried: "What foolish men you must be! I met an old woman who suffered from goitre just like your camel, and I tied a blanket round her neck and struck her with a mallet, but, instead of recovering like your camel, she died, and instead of getting a fee I was compelled to dig her grave!"

"It is not we who are stupid," answered the camel-men, "but you. We are not stupid at all. These animals are camels of prodigious size and strength. How was a feeble old woman to stand the blow of a mallet? No; it is you, and you only, who are stupid."

One of the men now stepped forward, saying to his friends: "You remain quiet, and leave this fellow to me." Then, addressing himself to the newcomer, he cried: "Hear you, sir, these men do not understand the matter at all. I can set it all right for you in a minute." Saying this, he lifted a heavy stick, bound with iron rings, and struck a camel which was feeding off the leaves of a wild plum-tree. The stolid creature, scarcely feeling the blow, merely moved a step or two forward. "You observe," said the man, "the effect of this treatment on the camel. Now observe its effect on a human being!" He then struck the man himself a similar blow, which felled him to the earth like a log. When consciousness returned, this bewildered victim inquired: "Why, sir, this cruel usage?"

"Do you not perceive?" answered the camel-man. "I wished to show you that what is good for camels is not good for poor old men and women."

"Ah," said the wretched man, "I now begin to see my error. Never, never again shall I set myself up for a doctor!"

(Translated by Rev. Charles Swynnerton, F.S.A. author of 'The Adventures of Raja Rasalu'.)

Theme

What is good for camels is not good for old men and women. The story reveals the foolishness of a quack that applied the cure of a camel to an old woman who died instantly and he got the punishment.

Reading Notes

goitre	morbid swelling in thyroid gland (in the neck)
mallet	hammer with a wooden head
being minded	with the intention

stiff	hard
exhorted	urged
prodigious	enormous

EXERCISES

1. Choose the correct answer.

- i. Where did the travellers stay?
 - a) in an inn
 - b) in a jungle
 - c) in a haveli
 - d) under a clump of trees
- ii. Why did the camel fall ill?
 - a) by heat stroke
 - b) by infection
 - c) when a melon stuck in its throat
 - d) by poison
- iii. What did a quack claim to cure?
 - a) fever
 - b) goitre
 - c) headache
 - d) injury
- iv. What had happened to the throat of an old woman?
 - a) infectious
 - b) swollen
 - c) wounded
 - d) paining
- v. What punishment did the villagers propose on the death of the old woman?
 - a) to pay the damages
 - b) to be persecuted
 - c) to dig her grave
 - d) to be imprisoned
- vi. How was the quack treated when he had dug the grave?
 - a) honoured
 - b) rewarded
 - c) beaten well
 - d) fined
- vii. What was the effect of punishment on the quack?
 - a) uninfluenced
 - b) influenced
 - c) left the profession
 - d) returned disgusted
- viii. What was the condition the quack suggested before treating an old man?
 - a) to lay the old man on the bed
 - b) not to be compelled to dig the grave
 - c) not to be made responsible for the death of the man
 - d) to have the fee first

- ix. Why did the quack return to the camel-men instead of continuing his profession?
- to befool them
 - to enquire the cause of death of an old woman
 - to blame them
 - to get his luggage
- x. Who was proved stupid?
- the camel-men
 - old woman
 - the quack
 - a villager

2. Mark the sentences true or false.

- With the blow of mallet the melon broke in the throat of the camel.
- The camel swallowed the broken melon and felt all right.
- The quack cured the old woman.
- The quack was compelled to dig the grave.
- The villagers of next village refused to get the old man treated.
- The quack returned to the camel-men to tell them that they had shown the right way to cure the disease.
- The camel can bear the blow of a mallet but not the old man.
- There was little effect of the blow of a whip on the camel.

3. Answer the following questions.

- What is a clump of trees?
- What was stuck in the camel's throat?
- What did the quack pretend to cure?
- What did the quack do with the old woman?
- What was the result of the cure?
- What was the punishment inflicted upon the quack by the villagers?
- For whom did the quack dig the grave?
- What did the quack do in the next village?
- Why didn't the villagers let the old man get cured?
- Why did the quack come back to the camel-men?

4. Answer the following questions in 50 - 100 words.

- How did the camel-men cure their camel?
- How did the quack try to cure the old woman?
- How did the quack come to realize his error?
- How did the camel-man prove the stupidity of the quack?

v. What lesson does the story teach?

5. Use the correct forms of the verbs (given in brackets) in the following sentences.

i. Some travellers (stay) to rest under a clump of trees.

ii. The owner (see) this and (fear) to lose the animal.

iii. A man (look) on and (observe) the proceeding.

iv. He (tie) up the woman's throat.

v. They (seize) him to carry him before the king.

vi. The man (labour) away with all his might.

vii. He (finish) his task and (bury) the victim.

viii. The man (mount) his camel and (go) to the next village.

ix. I (meet) an old woman who (suffer) from goitre.

x. When consciousness (return), this bewildered victim (inquire).

6. Use the following phrasal verbs in your sentences.

i. break in

ii. break out

iii. break off

iv. break down

7. Punctuate the following lines.

do you not perceive answered the camel-man i wished to show you that what is good for camels is not therefore good for poor old men and women

8. Read the passage and answer the questions given at the end.

One of the men now stepped forward, saying to his friends: "You remain quiet, and leave this fellow to me." Then, addressing himself to the newcomer, he cried: "Hear you, sir, these men do not understand the matter at all. I can set it all right for you in a minute." Saying this, he lifted a heavy stick, bound with iron rings, and struck a camel which was feeding off the leaves of a wild plum-tree. The stolid creature, scarcely feeling the blow, merely moved a step or two forward. "You observe," said the man, "the effect of this treatment on the camel. Now observe its effect on a human being!" He then struck the man himself a similar blow, which felled him to the earth like a log. When consciousness returned, this bewildered victim inquired: "Why, sir, this cruel usage?"

i. Who addressed the newcomer?

ii. With what did he strike the camel and what was the effect of it?

iii. What was the effect of the same act on the man?

iv. What lesson do you get from the passage?

A Mild Attack of Locusts

(Doris Lessing)

“Look, look, there they are!”

Out ran Margaret to join them, looking at the hills. Out came the servants from the kitchen. They all stood and gazed. Over the rocky levels of the mountain was a streak of rust coloured air, Locusts. There they came.

At once Richard shouted at the cookboy. Old Stephen yelled at the houseboy. The cookboy ran to beat the old ploughshare, hanging from a tree branch, that was used to summon labourers at moments of crisis. The houseboy ran off to the store to collect tin cans, any old bit of metal. The farm was ringing with the clamour of the gong; and they could see the labourers come pouring out of the compound, pointing at the hills and shouting excitedly. Soon they had all come up to the house, and Richard and old Stephen were giving them orders – hurry, hurry, hurry.

And off they ran again, the two white men with them and in a few minutes Margaret could see the smoke of fires rising from all around the farmlands. Piles of wood and grass had been prepared there. There were seven patches of bared soil, yellow colour and pink, where the new mealies were just showing, making a film of bright green; and around each drifted up thick clouds of smoke. They were throwing wet leaves on to the fires now, to make it acid and black. Margaret was watching the hills. Now there was a long, low cloud advancing, rust colour still, swelling forward and out as she looked. The telephone was ringing. Neighbours – quick, quick, there come the locusts. Old Smith had had his crop eaten to the ground. Quick, get your fires started. For of course, while every farmer hoped the locusts would overlook his farm and go on to the next, it was only fair to warn each other; one must play fair. Everywhere, fifty miles over the countryside, the smoke was rising from myriads of fires. Margaret answered the telephone calls, and between calls she stood watching the locusts. The air was darkening. A strange darkness, for the sun was blazing – it was like the darkness of a veldt fire, when the air gets thick with smoke. The sunlight comes down distorted, a thick, hot orange. Oppressive it was, too, with the heaviness of a storm. The locusts were coming fast. Now half the sky was darkened. Behind the reddish veils in front, which were the advance guards of the swarm, the main swarm showed in dense black cloud, reaching almost to the sun itself.

Margaret was wondering what she could do to help. She did not know. Then up came old Stephen from the lands. “We’re finished, Margaret, finished! Those beggars can eat every leaf and blade off the farm in half an hour! And it is only early afternoon – if we can make enough smoke, make enough noise till the sun goes down, they’ll settle somewhere else perhaps....” And then: “Get the kettle going. It’s thirsty work, this.”

Looking out, all the trees were queer and still, clotted with insects, their boughs