

The Lion and the Monkey

La Fontaine

French

Easy
1 min read

The lion, for his kingdom's sake,
In morals would some lessons take,
And therefore call'd, one summer's day,
The monkey, master of the arts,
An animal of brilliant parts,
To hear what he could say.
"Great king," the monkey thus began,
"To reign upon the wisest plan
Requires a prince to set his zeal,
And passion for the public weal,
Distinctly and quite high above
A certain feeling call'd self-love,
The parent of all vices,
In creatures of all sizes.
To will this feeling from one's breast away,
Is not the easy labour of a day;
By that your majesty august,
Will execute your royal trust,

From folly free and aught unjust.”

“Give me,” replied the king,

“Example of each thing.”

“Each species,” said the sage,—

“And I begin with ours,—

Exalts its own peculiar powers

Above sound reason’s gauge.

Meanwhile, all other kinds and tribes

As fools and blockheads it describes,

With other compliments as cheap.

But, on the other hand, the same

Self-love inspires a beast to heap

The highest pyramid of fame

For every one that bears his name;

Because he justly deems such praise

The easiest way himself to raise.

‘Tis my conclusion in the case,

That many a talent here below

Is but cabal, or sheer grimace,—

The art of seeming things to know—

An art in which perfection lies

More with the ignorant than wise.”

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