

Was Aesop a Voluntaryist?

Guest post by Carl Watner. Originally published in The Voluntaryist, February 1988.

Many of us are probably familiar with the *Fables*, written by Aesop (620-560 B.C.), the Greek slave. It has been years since I read them, but recently a subscriber to *The Voluntaryist* suggested that I look at some of them. The following are two taken from the Joseph Jacobs edition of *The Fables of Aesop*, first published in 1894, and reprinted by Schocken Books (New York: 1966).

Make up your own mind: Was Aesop a voluntaryist? One hint: When a selection of the *Fables* was translated into Chinese in 1840, they became favorite reading with government officials, until a high dignitary said, "This is clearly directed against us, and ordered Aesop to be included in the Chinese *Index Epurgatorius*."

The Frogs Desiring A King

The Frogs were living as happy as could be in a marshy swamp that just suited them; they went splashing about caring for nobody and nobody troubling with them. But some of them thought that this was not right, that they should have a king and a proper constitution, so they determined to send up a petition to Jove to give them what they wanted. "Mighty Jove," they cried, "send unto us a king that will rule over us and keep us in order." Jove laughed at their croaking, and threw down into the swamp a huge Log, which came down – kerplash – into the swamp. The Frogs were frightened out of their lives by the commotion made in their midst, and all rushed to the bank to look at the horrible monster; but after a time, seeing that it did not move, one or two of the boldest of them ventured out towards the Log, and even dared to touch it; still it did not move. Then the greatest hero of the Frogs jumped upon the Log and commenced dancing up and down upon it, thereupon all the Frogs came down and did the same; and for some time the Frogs went about their business every day without taking the slightest notice of their new King Log lying in their midst. But this did not suit them, so they sent another petition to Jove, and said to him: "We want a real king; one that will really rule over us." How this made Jove angry, so he sent among them a big Stork that soon set to work gobbling them all up. Then the Frogs repented when too late.

"Better no rule than cruel rule."

The Dog And The Wolf

A gaunt wolf was almost dead with hunger when he happened to meet a House-dog who was passing by. "Ah, Cousin," said the Dog, "I knew how it would be; your irregular life will

soon be the ruin of you. Why do you not work steadily as I do, and get your food regularly given to you?"

"I would have no objection," said the Wolf, "if I could only get a place."

"I will easily arrange that for you," said the Dog; "come with me to my master and you shall share my work."

So the Wolf and the Dog went towards the town together. On the way there the Wolf noticed that the hair on a certain part of the Dog's neck was very much worn away, so he asked him how that had come about.

"Oh, it is nothing," said the Dog. "That is only the place where the collar is put on at night to keep me chained up; it chafes a bit, but one soon gets used to it."

"Is that all?" said the Wolf. "Then goodbye to you, Master Dog."

"Better to starve free than to be a fat slave."