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The Animals and the Plague

Aesop

Once upon a time a severe plague raged among the animals. Many died, and those who lived were so ill, that they cared for neither food nor drink, and dragged themselves about listlessly. No longer could a fat young hen tempt Master Fox to dinner, nor a tender lamb rouse greedy Sir Wolf's appetite.

At last the Lion decided to call a council. When all the animals were gathered together he arose and said:

"Dear friends, I believe the gods have sent this plague upon us as a punishment for our sins. Therefore, the most guilty one of us must be offered in sacrifice. Perhaps we may thus obtain forgiveness and cure for all.

"I will confess all my sins first. I admit that I have been very greedy and have devoured many sheep. They had done me no harm. I have eaten goats and bulls and stags. To tell the truth, I even ate up a shepherd now and then.

"Now, if I am the most guilty, I am ready to be sacrificed. But I think it best that each one confess his sins as I have done. Then we can decide in all justice who is the most guilty."

"Your majesty," said the Fox, "you are too good. Can it be a crime to eat sheep, such stupid mutton heads? No, no, your majesty. You have done them great honor by eating them up.

"And so far as shepherds are concerned, we all know they belong to that puny race that pretends to be our masters."

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