

The Tortoise, and How This Little Creature Started a Small Boy on Humane Path



He Held the Upraised Stick in His Hand for Some Time, Wondering What It Could Mean.

There is a small creature that many boys like to tease, even when they do not mean to be unkind or cruel, and that is the small tortoise; they love to poke him with a stick to see him thrust his head in and out of his shell. This is unkind treatment, although boys may not realize it.

I know a man who, as a boy, liked to watch turtles; he would sit for a long time and study their habits, and he became so interested in them that one Summer he made a special study of them and examined each turtle that he came across. He found that within five miles of where he lived, in New York State, that there were forty-nine varieties of turtles. So you see that even though turtles may all look nearly alike to us when we glance at them, they are not all alike any more than all boys and girls are alike just because they are boys and girls; their markings are different and their habits differ in many respects.

There was a little boy four years of age, whose name was Theodore Parker. He lived with his parents on a large farm. One day, in the Spring of the year, he went with his father some distance from the house. His father sent him home alone across the fields, and on the way he passed a pond of water near which grew a rare plant that was in full bloom. The flowers were so beautiful that Theodore went close to look at them, and at the roots of the plant, in the shallow water, he saw a tiny, spotted tortoise. He lifted the stick that he held in his hand to strike the tortoise. He had never killed any creature, but he had seen other boys kill birds and squirrels for "sport," as they called it, so his first impulse was to kill the little tortoise with his stick. When he raised his

arm to strike, Theodore felt as if something held his arm so that he could not strike, and he heard a voice within him say, quite clear and loud, "It is wrong." He was so surprised that he held the upraised stick in his hand for some time, wondering what it could mean.

Theodore did not strike the tortoise, but he ran to the house very quickly and told the tale to his mother and asked her why he could not hit the tortoise and where the voice came from that told him it was wrong. His mother told Theodore that it was the voice of God in his soul or conscience, and that if he would always listen to it and obey it when he heard it, that it would speak clearer and clearer, and always guide him to do the right thing. She told him further that if he did not obey the voice that it would stop trying to make itself heard, and that he would have nothing to guide him when he needed it all through his life.

Theodore Parker grew to be a very great and good man, and he was noted for his love for animals. He believed that animals should be given the love and care equal to that of human beings, as their suffering under neglect or cruelty is very great and their response to love and kindness never fails.

Each of us has within us a conscience just as Theodore had, and it speaks to us; all we need to do to make it speak louder and louder is to listen to it and obey it when it does speak.

As to the tortoise, because this small animal is slow in its movements and to us seems so useless, we are apt not to give it the consideration that we give to other animals as pets, but I have known of more than one pet tortoise that had interesting habits. A tortoise is a land turtle, and it will interest you to know that turtles lay their eggs in the sand and cover them with sand, where the hot sun shines on them and hatches them; the little turtles dig their way out of the sand when they are hatched. Some kinds live altogether on green food, while others eat insects and worms. Some of the water turtles grow to be very large and weigh hundreds of pounds. They live to be very, very old, and out in the Sandwich Islands some of these very old, large turtles walk on the streets and children ride on their backs.

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