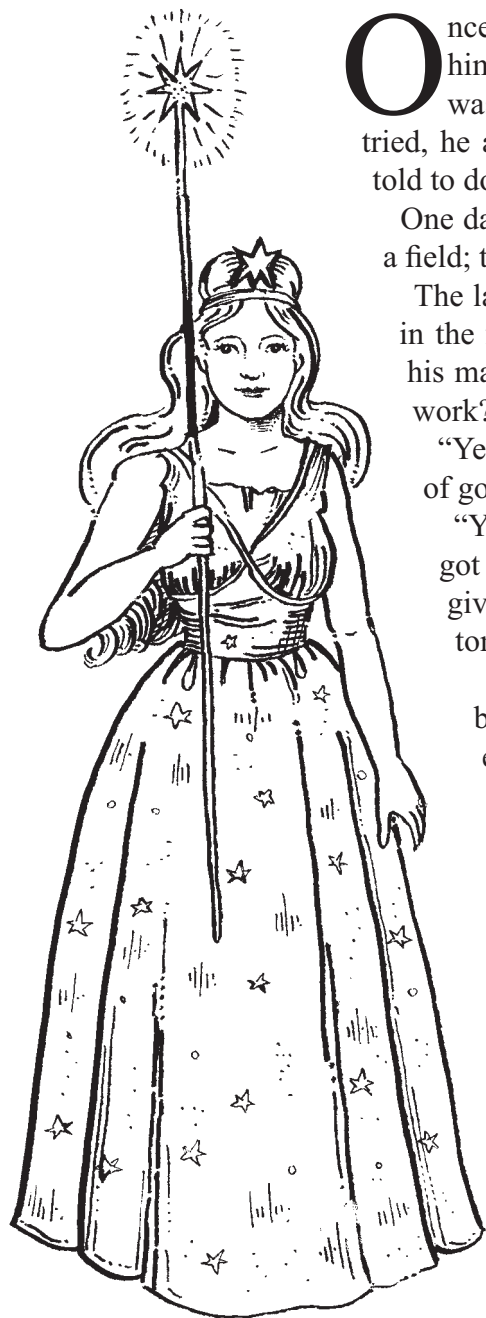


# LEARNING AND WISDOM



Once upon a time there was a lad who hired himself out as a servant to a small farm. He was very slow-witted and however hard he tried, he always acted contrary to whatever he was told to do.

One day his master said: "Yesterday we prepared a field; today you must sow it with buckwheat."

The lad took a sack of potatoes and sowed them in the field. When he came back in the evening, his master said: "Well Jean, have you done your work?"

"Yes master," he replied. "I have sown plenty of good 'taties."

"You simpleton!" cried the farmer. "You have got it all topsy turvy. I don't know why I don't give you a good thrashing. You must be off tomorrow morning."

Next day the poor lad tied his clothes into a bundle, then he fastened the bundle onto the end of a stick and set out. As he passed by a forest, he saw a sparrowhawk chasing a little goldfinch. He picked up a stone and threw it at the sparrowhawk which fell to the ground. The goldfinch landed on a bush, and the next moment it changed into a lady, beautiful as a fairy.

"My poor Jean, you did well to kill the sparrowhawk that was chasing me," she said. "Your wits may not be sharp, but you have a good heart. To reward you, I will give you one of two things: you may choose either learning or wisdom; consider well."

"I want learning," replied Jean.

“Consider your choice,” said the lady. “If you take learning, you may regret it.”

“No matter,” said Jean. “I want to be learned, so that people stop calling me Jean the Idiot.”

The lady touched him with her wand, and henceforward as soon as he was asked a question, he knew the answer, and could explain all the reasons for it. People were astonished and said: “Where in the world have you learnt to be so clever?”

A lawyer in those parts needed a clerk and everyone told him about the farmer’s boy whose learning had made him famous for miles around: however, Jean was more learned than the lawyer and whenever he was told to do something he said: “I know all about that.”

Then he gave so many reasons, without wisdom, that the lawyer grew tired of him.

“Be off with you,” he said. “I have no more need of you.”

Poor Jean went back to the forest and he had hardly arrived when the beautiful lady once more appeared.

“I knew you would regret choosing learning,” she said. “I will take it from you, and in its place I will give you wisdom.”

The lady touched him with her wand, then she disappeared.

Jean continued on his way, and it was not long before he met a young man and woman who were quarrelling with each other.

“Ah,” they said, when they saw him. “Here is a man who will settle our differences. We have promised to abide by the judgement of the first person we meet on the road.”

“Tell me your story,” said Jean.



“Well,” said the young man. “We have an uncle who promised to leave all he owned to whoever arrived first when he was dying. I set out and arrived before this girl; but she soon joined us, and our uncle died as I was stepping outside to fetch something. Am I not his heir?”

“No,” cried the girl. “Surely I am.”

“You are cousins, aren’t you?” asked Jean.

“Yes,” they replied.

“And is either of you married?”

“No,” they replied.

“Very well,” said Jean. “What you had better do is marry each other.”

“Why yes – of course!” said the girl.

The two cousins were married and Jean was given the seat of honour at the wedding.

After that, he became known as the wisest man in the land; everyone came to seek his advice, and if he has not died, why, then he is living still.

*Told in 1880 by Joseph Macé,  
a fourteen-year-old cabin boy.*