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[要約]

ことわざとは、短く簡潔な方法で忠告を述べたり、教訓を提示したりする伝統的な言い回しのことである。ことわざは簡単に主な 3 つの部類に分けることができる。2 つ目のタイプのことわざには、より多彩な例の多くが含まれるが、これらは日常の経験からの特定の観察事項を用いて一般的な事柄を主張するものである。3 つ目のタイプのことわざは、伝統的な知恵や民間伝承の特定の分野からの言い習わしを含むものである。このカテゴリーには、例えば、「昼食後には少し休憩、夕食後には 1 マイル散歩」や「風邪にはエサを、熱には飢えを」という健康に関することわざがみられる。加えて、農業や季節や天候に関連した伝統的な田舎のことわざがある。中世、そして 17 世紀になっても、ことわざはしばしば普遍的な真実の地位を有し、主張を確証したり反論したりするのに用いられた。それでことわざは学識者の世界では簡単に皮肉の対象になってしまったのだらうし、現在でもなお、洗練された名文家の眉をひそめさせることがときどきある。それでもなお、ことわざは、人生の素朴な論評として、また祖先の知恵が現在でも我々にとって有益であることを気づかせてくれるものとして、人気を保持している。古いことわざが使われなくなるにつれて新しいことわざが絶えず生み出されていることは、ことわざのもつ活力を反映したものである。最近、コンピュータの世界は、古典になる可能性のある「ゴミを入れればゴミが出てくる」をもたらしてくれたし、また経済も「無料の昼食などというものはない」ということわざをもたらしてくれた。昔の収集家が飽きもせず述べていたように、ことわざは、普通の会話という肉に風味をそえる調味料を提供しつづけるのである。



A proverb is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and concise manner.

Proverbs fall readily into three main categories. Those of the first type take the form of abstract statements expressing general truths, such as *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* and *Time is money*. Proverbs of the second type, which include many of the more colourful examples, use specific observations from everyday experience to make a point which is general; for instance, *You can take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink* and *Don't put all your eggs in one basket*. The third type of proverb comprises sayings from particular areas of traditional wisdom and folklore. In this category are found, for example, the health proverbs *After dinner rest a while, after supper walk a mile* and *Feed a cold and starve a fever*. These are frequently classical maxims rendered into the vernacular. In addition, there are traditional country proverbs which relate to farming, the seasons, and the weather, such as *April showers bring forth May flowers* and *When the wind is in the east, it's neither good for man nor beast*.

It is sometimes said that the proverb is going out of fashion, or that it has become worn out. Such views overlook the fact that while the role of the proverb in English literature has changed, its popularity has remained constant. In medieval times, and even as late as the seventeenth century, proverbs often had the status of universal truths and were used to confirm or refute an argument. Lengthy lists of proverbs were compiled to assist the scholar in

debate; and many sayings from Latin, Greek, and the continental languages were drafted into English for this purpose. By the eighteenth century, however, the popularity of the proverb had declined in the work of educated writers, who began to ridicule it
30 as a vehicle for dull, conventional wisdom.

It is easy to see how proverbs came into disrepute. Seemingly contradictory proverbs can be paired — *Too many cooks spoil the broth* with *Many hands make light work*; *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* with its opposite *Out of sight, out of mind*. Proverbs
35 could thus become an easy object for satire in learned circles, and are still sometimes frowned upon by the polished stylist. The proverb has nonetheless retained its popularity as a homely commentary on life and as a reminder that the wisdom of our ancestors may still be useful to us today. This shift is reflected in
40 the quotations which accompany the entries in the dictionary: recent quotations are often taken from the works of minor writers, or from newspapers and magazines, while earlier quotations are more frequently from the works of major writers. It is a reflection of the proverb's vitality that new ones are continually being
45 created as older ones fall into disuse. Surprisingly, neither *A change is as good as a rest* nor *A trouble shared is a trouble halved* are recorded before the twentieth century; the popular saying *A watched pot never boils* first occurs as late as 1848. The computer world has recently given us a potential classic, *Garbage in,*
50 *garbage out*, and economics has supplied us with *There's no such thing as a free lunch*. Proverbs continue — as the early collectors

never tired of stating — to provide the sauce to relish the meat of ordinary speech.