Fables and Fabulists: Ancient and Modern

Thomas Newbigging



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FABLES AND FABULISTS.

MERCURY BESTOWING ON THE YOUTHFUL ÆSOP THE INVENTION OF THE APOLOGUE. (*See page 43.*)

FABLES AND FABULISTS:
ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY

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Author of

'The History of the Forest of Rossendale,' 'Old Gamul,' etc.

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'I shall tell you
A pretty tale: it may be you have heard it;
But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture
To stale't a little more.'

SHAKESPEARE: *Coriolanus.*

'He sat among the woods; he heard
    The sylvan merriment; he saw
The pranks of butterfly and bird,
    The humours of the ape, the daw.

'And in the lion or the frog—
    In all the life of moor and fen,
In ass and peacock, stork and log,
    He read similitudes of men.'

'The fables which appeal to our higher moral sympathies may sometimes do as much for us as the truths of science.'

MRS. JAMESON.

'The years of infancy constitute, in the memory of each of us, the fabulous season of existence; just as in the memory of nations, the fabulous period was the period of their infancy.'—GIACOMO LEOPARDI.

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FABLES AND FABULISTS

CHAPTER I.
DEFINITION OF FABLE.

'Read my little fable,
He that runs may read.'

TENNYSON: *The Flower*.

'As clear as a whistle.'

BYRON: *The Astrologer*.

THE term 'fable' is used in two senses, with two distinctive meanings.

First, as *fabulæ*, it is employed to denote the myths or fictions which, by the aid of imagination and superstition, have clouded, or have become blended with, the history of the remote past. Such are the stories related of Scandinavian and Grecian heroes and gods; beings, some of whom doubtless had an actual human existence, and were wise and valiant and powerful, or the reverse, in their day, but around whose names and persons have clustered all the marvellous legends that are to be found in mythological lore. The better name for these is 'romance.'

Secondly, as *fabellæ*, it is used to signify a special branch of literature, in which the imagination has full play, altogether unassisted by superstition in any shape or form. The fabulist confers the powers or gifts of reason and speech on the humbler subjects over whom he exercises sway, and so has ample scope for his imaginative faculty; but there is no attempt on his part at any serious make-believe in his inventions. On the contrary, there is a tacit understanding between him and his hearers and readers, that what he narrates is only true in the sense of its application to corresponding circumstances in human life and conduct.

It is with fable as understood in this latter sense that we propose to deal.

The Fable or Apologue has been variously defined by different writers. Mr. Walter Pater, paraphrasing Plato's definition, says that 'fables are medicinable lies or fictions, with a provisional or economized truth in them, set forth under such terms as simple souls can best receive.'[1] The sophist Aphthonius, taking the same view, defines the fable as 'a false discourse resembling truth.'[2] The harshness of both these definitions is scarcely relieved by their quaintness. To assert that the fable is a lie or a falsehood does not fairly represent the fact. A lie is spoken with intent to deceive. A fable, in its relation, can bear no such construction, however exaggerated in its terms or fictitious in its characters. The meanest comprehension is capable of grasping the humour of the situation it creates. Even the moral that lurks in the narration is often clear to minds the most obtuse. This is at least true of the best fables.

Dr. Johnson, in his 'Life of Gay,' remarks that 'A fable or epilogue seems to be, in its genuine state, a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate—*quod arbores loquantur, non tantum feræ*[3]—are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions.'

Dodsley says that "tis the very essence of a fable to convey some moral or useful truth beneath the shadow of an allegory.'[4] Boothby defines the fable as 'a maxim for the use of common life, exemplified in a short action, in which the inhabitants of the visible world are made the moral agents.' G. Moir Bussey states that 'the object of the author is to convey some moral truth to the reader or auditor, without usurping the province of the professed lecturer or pedant. The lesson must therefore be conveyed in an agreeable form, and so that the moralist himself may be as little prominent as possible.'[5] Mr. Joseph Jacobs says that 'the beast fable may be defined as a short humorous allegorical tale, in which animals act in such a way as to illustrate a simple moral truth or inculcate a wise maxim.'[6]

These various definitions or descriptions apply more especially to the Æsopian fable (and it is with this that we are dealing at present), which is *par excellence* the model of this class of composition. Steele declares that 'the virtue which we gather from a fable or an allegory is like the health we get by hunting, as we are engaged in an agreeable pursuit that draws us on with

pleasure, and makes us insensible of the fatigues that accompany it.'[7] This is applied to the longer fable or epic, such as the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' of Homer, or the 'Faerie Queen' of Spenser, rather than to the fable as the term is generally understood, otherwise the simile is somewhat inflated.

One more definition may be attempted:

The *Æsopian* fable or apologue is a short story, either fictitious or true, generally fictitious, calculated to convey instruction, advice or reproof, in an interesting form, impressing its lesson on the mind more deeply than a mere didactic piece of counsel or admonition is capable of doing. We say a short story, because if the narration is spun out to a considerable length it ceases to be a true fable in the ordinary acceptation of the term, and becomes a tale, such, for example, as a fairy tale. Now, a fairy or other fanciful tale usually or invariably contains some romance and much improbability; it often deals largely in the superstitious, and it is not necessarily the vehicle for conveying a moral. The very opposite holds good of a fable. Although animals are usually the actors in the fable, there is an air of naturalness in their assumed speech and actions. The story may be either highly imaginative or baldly matter-of-fact, but it never wanders beyond the range of intuitive (as opposed to actual or natural) experience, and it always contains a moral. In a word, a fable is, or ought to be, the very quintessence of common sense and wise counsel couched in brief narrative form. It partakes somewhat of the character of a parable, though it can hardly be described as a parable, because this is more sedate in character, has human beings as its actors, and is usually based on an actual occurrence.

Though parables are not fables in the strict and limited meaning of the term, they bear a close family relationship to them. Parables may be defined as stories in allegorical dress. The Scriptures, both old and new, abound with them. The most beautiful example in the Old Testament is that of Nathan and the ewe lamb,[8] in which David the King is made his own accuser. This was a favourite mode of conveying instruction and reproof employed by our Lord. Christ often 'spake in parables'; and with what feelings of reverential awe must we regard the parables of the Gospels, coming as they did from the lips of our Saviour!

FOOTNOTES:

[1] 'Plato and Platonism,' by Walter Pater. London: Macmillan and Co., 1893, p. 225.

[2] Aphthonius flourished at Antioch, at what time is uncertain. Forty of his *Æsopian* fables, with a Latin version by Kimedoncius, were printed from a MS. in the Palatine Library at the beginning of the seventeenth century. 'The *Æsopian* Fable,' by Sir Brooke Boothby, Bart. Edinburgh: Constable and Co., 1809. Preface, p. xxxi.

[3] 'Even trees speak, not only wild beasts.'—Phædrus, Book i., Prologue.

[4] 'Essay on Fable.'

[5] 'Fables Original and Selected,' by G. Moir Bussey. London: Willoughby and Co., 1842.

[6] 'The Fables of *Æsop*,' as first printed by William Caxton in 1484. London: David Nutt, 1889, vol. i., p. 204.

[7] 'The Tatler,' No. 147, vol. iii., p. 205.

[8] 2 Samuel xii. 1-7.

CHAPTER II.
CHARACTERISTICS OF FABLES.

'To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature.'

SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet.*

THERE is an archness about the best fables that creates interest and awakens curiosity; and it is the quality of such that, whilst simple enough as stories to be understood and enjoyed by the young, they are at the same time calculated to interest, amuse, instruct and admonish those more advanced in years.

A fable should carry its moral without the telling; nevertheless the application is often worth supplying, because it puts, or should put, the lesson taught by the fable in a terse and impressive form. Above and beyond all, a fable should possess the quality of simplicity, and whilst easy to be understood, it should have force and appropriateness.

Fables treat of the follies and weaknesses, and also of the nobler qualities, of humankind, generally through the medium of the lower animals and the members of the vegetable and natural kingdom. These are made to represent the characters we find in human life. Curious, that although it is chiefly the lower animals and inanimate things that are made the vehicle of the instruction or reproof contained in the story, we do not feel that there is any incongruity in these having the power of speech. We willingly accept the circumstance of their faculty of speech and reasoning as Gospel truth for the time being. It is natural that they in the fable should speak as the heroes or actors, and we listen to their words, whether wise or foolish, with deference or contempt as the case may be.

It is a question in casuistry how far justice and injustice are done to the inferior animals and the members of the vegetable kingdom by this liberty that is taken with them in the fable. If they had the knowledge of the fact, and the power of remonstrance, it may be conceived that some of them, at least,

would repudiate the characters and propensities which we in our superior conceit so glibly ascribe to them in the fable. And, indeed, there is doubtless a good deal of unfairness in our habit of stigmatizing this one with cunning, that one with cowardice, and the other with cruelty, or stupidity, or dishonesty, as suits our purpose. Possibly if some of the humbler creatures thus branded were gifted with the power of writing fables for the benefit of *their* fellow creatures and associates, they might be able to point to characteristics in the higher order of beings which it is desirable to hold in reprobation, and this, too, with as much or more reason and justice on their side than we have on ours. But, in truth, the fabulists themselves tacitly admit the force of this argument, inasmuch as the failings and defects and general qualities which they ascribe to the characters in the fable are, of course, those of the human species. A fable of Æsop, *The Man and the Lion*, [9] is very much to the point here:

'Once upon a time a man and a lion were journeying together, and came at length to high words which was the braver and stronger of the two. As the dispute waxed warmer they happened to pass by, on the road-side, a statue of a man strangling a lion. "See there," said the man; "what more undeniable proof can you have of our superiority than that?" "That," said the lion, "is your version of the story; let us be the sculptors, and for one lion under the feet of a man, you shall have twenty men under the paw of a lion!" Men are but sorry witnesses in their own cause.'

A fable is generally a fiction, as has already been said. It is a singular paradox, however, that nothing is truer than a good fable. True to intuition, true to nature, true to fact. The great virtue of fables consists in this quality of truthfulness, and their enduring life and popularity are corroboration of it. If not true in the sense of being reasonable, they are nothing, or foolish, and therefore intolerable. We instinctively feel their truth, and are encouraged, or amused, or conscience-smitten by the narration, for they deal with principles which lie at the very root of our human nature.

It is a remarkable feature of this species of composition that a departure from the natural order of things loses its incongruity in the fable; and although this view has been controverted, the argument against it fails to carry conviction in face of the excellent examples that can be adduced. By way of illustration,

take the fable of the man and his goose that laid the golden eggs. We don't remember ever meeting with a goose of this particular breed out of the fable. There are numberless geese in the world—human and other. But the goose that lays a golden egg every morning is a *rara avis*. Nevertheless, she has a veritable existence in the fable, and we would as soon think of casting a doubt on our own identity as on that of the fabled bird. The story has always been, and will continue to be, Gospel truth to us, and we never recall it without commiserating the untimely end of the poor obliging goose, and thinking, at the same time, what a goose its owner must have been to kill it and cut it up, in expectation of finding in its inside the inexhaustible treasure his impatient greed had pictured as existing there. *Semper avarus eget*. Had *we* been the fortunate owner of such an uncommon fowl, one golden egg each day would have contented us!

Certain early authors, with the formalism which characterizes their writings, have attempted an arrangement of fables under three distinct heads or classes, designating them, respectively, Rational, Emblematical, and Mixed. The Rational fable is held to be that in which the actors are either human beings or the gods of mythology; or, if beasts, birds, trees, and inanimate objects are introduced, the former only are the speakers. The Emblematical fable has animals, members of the vegetable kingdom, and even inanimate things for its heroes, and these are accordingly gifted with the power of speech. The Mixed fable, as the name implies, is that in which an association of the two former kinds is to be found. The distinction, though perfectly accurate, serves no useful purpose and need not be observed. As a matter of fact, all fables are rational or reasonable from the fabulist's stand-point; and all are emblematical or typical of moods, conditions, and possible or actual occurrences in daily life, whoever and whatever be the actors and speakers introduced.

FOOTNOTES:

[9] Quoted from James's 'Fables of Æsop.' Murray, 1848.

CHAPTER III.
THE MORAL AND APPLICATION OF FABLES.

'Come, sir, lend it your best ear.'

BEN JONSON: *Love Freed.*

THUS La Fontaine:[10] 'The fable proper is composed of two parts, of which one may be termed the body and the other the soul. The body is the subject-matter of the fable and the soul is the moral.'

On the origin of the added morals to fables, Mr. Joseph Jacobs[11] has the following appropriate remarks: 'The fable is a species of the allegory, and it seems absurd to give your allegory, and then give in addition the truth which you wish to convey. Either your fable makes its point or it does not. If it does, you need not repeat your point: if it does not, you need not give your fable. To add your point is practically to confess the fear that your fable has not put it with sufficient force. Yet this is practically what the moral does, which has now become part and parcel of a fable. It was not always so; it does not occur in the ancient classical fables. That it is not an organic part of the fable is shown by the curious fact that so many morals miss the point of the fables. How then did this artificial product come to be regarded as an essential part of the fable? Now, we have seen in the Jātakas what an important *rôle* is played by the *gāthas* or moral verses which sum up the whole teaching of the Jātakas. In most cases I have been able to give the pith of the Birth-stories by merely giving the *gāthas*, which are besides the only relics which are now left to us of the original form of the Jātakas. Is it too bold to suggest that any set of fables taken from the Jātakas or their source would adopt the *gātha* feature, and that the moral would naturally arise in this way? We find the moral fully developed in Babrius and Avian, whom we have seen strong reason for connecting with Kybises' Libyan fables. We may conclude the series of conjectures by suggesting that the morals of fables are an imitation of the *gāthas* of Jātakas as they passed into the Libyan collection of Kybises.'

Montaigne remarks that 'most of the fables of Æsop have diverse senses and meanings, of which the mythologists chose some one that quadrates well to the fable; but for the most part 'tis but the first face that presents itself and is superficial only; there yet remain others more vivid, essential and profound into which they have not been able to penetrate.'[12]

If this be so, it is an argument against the common practice of limiting their significance to the one moral that is often given as an appendage to the fable. It is worthy of note that Æsop did not supply, either orally or in writing, the separate moral to any of his fables. They were left to speak for themselves and produce their unaided effect. The moral or application appended to or introducing a fable (for both practices are followed), is an innovation, as appears from what has already been advanced, probably intended to make clear what was obscure in the apologue.

The true moral is contained in the fable itself. The application may, and often does, vary with the idiosyncrasies of the commentator. Besides the moral and application there is in some collections of fables what is designated 'The Remark,' and 'The Reflection,' in which the commentator tries, as it were, to drive home the application of the story with an additional blow. Our own experience as a youth was that all these appendages to the fable were invariably skipped.

From all which it would appear that the moral and the so-called application of a fable are not one and the same thing. In point of fact, the latter may and does vary according to the peculiar views of the commentator. An exemplification of this may be found in the applications of Sir Roger L'Estrange and Dr. Samuel Croxall, the latter taking it upon him to stigmatize in strong language the twist which he asserted the former gave to the morals of the fables in his collection. L'Estrange, who was a Catholic, concerned himself in helping the restoration of Charles II., and was a devoted adherent of his successor, James, from whom he received place and emoluments. In publishing his version of Æsop, his object, as he affirms in his preface, was to influence the minds of the rising generation, 'who being as it were mere blank paper, are ready indifferently for any opinion, good or bad, taking all upon credit.' Whereupon Croxall observes: 'What poor devils would L'Estrange make of the children who should be so unfortunate as to read his book and

imbibe his pernicious principles—principles coined and suited to promote the growth and serve the ends of Popery and arbitrary power,' and more to the same purpose.

The question as to whether the moral or application, if any is supplied, should be placed at the beginning or end of a fable has sometimes been discussed. On this head Dodsley has some pertinent remarks that may be quoted. He says: 'It has been matter of dispute whether the moral is better introduced at the end or beginning of a fable. Æsop universally rejected any separate moral. Those we now find at the close of his fables were placed there by other hands. Among the ancients Phædrus, and Gay among the moderns, inserted theirs at the beginning; La Motte prefers them at the conclusion, and La Fontaine disposes them indifferently at the beginning or end, as he sees convenient. If,' he adds, 'amidst the authority of such great names I might venture to mention my own opinion, I should rather prefer them as an introduction than add them as an appendage. For I would neither pay my reader nor myself so bad a compliment as to suppose, after he had read the fable, that he was not able to discover its meaning. Besides, when the moral of a fable is not very prominent and striking, a leading thought at the beginning puts the reader in a proper track. He knows the game which he pursues; and, like a beagle on a warm scent, he follows the sport with alacrity in proportion to his intelligence. On the other hand, if he have no previous intimation of the design, he is puzzled throughout the fable, and cannot determine upon its merit without the trouble of a fresh perusal. A ray of light imparted at first may show him the tendency and propriety of every expression as he goes along; but while he travels in the dark, no wonder if he stumble or mistake his way.' If it be considered necessary or desirable to give the moral separately, or to apply the fable, Dodsley's argument here seems to us to be incontrovertible.

FOOTNOTES:

[10] Preface, 'Fables,' 1668.

[11] 'History of the Æsopic Fable,' p. 148.

[12] Essay: 'Of Books.'

CHAPTER IV.
FABULISTS AS CENSORS.

'Mark, now, how a plain tale shall put you down.'

SHAKESPEARE: *King Henry IV.*

FABULISTS as censors have always been not only tolerated, but patronized and encouraged, even in the most despotic countries, and when they have exposed wickedness and folly in high places with an unsparing hand. Æsop among the ancients, and Krilof amongst the moderns, are both striking examples of this. The fables of antiquity may indeed be truly said to have been a natural product of the times in which they were invented. In the early days, when free speech was a perilous exercise, and when to declaim against vice and folly was to court personal risk, the fable was invented, or resorted to, by the moralist as a circuitous method of achieving the end he desired to reach—the lesson he wished to enforce. The entertainment afforded by the fable or apologue took off the keen edge of the reproof; and, whilst the censure conveyed was not less pointed and severe, the device of making the humbler creatures the scapegoat of human weakness or vice mollified its bitterness. The very indirectness of the fable had the effect of making the sinner his own accuser. Whom the cap fitted was at liberty to don it.

Phædrus, in the prologue to his third book, thus gives his view of the origin and purpose of fables:

'Here something shortly I would teach
Of fables' origin. To reach
The potent criminal, a slave
To beasts and birds a language gave.
Wishing to strike, and yet afraid,
Of these his instruments he made:
For all that dove or lamb might say,

Against them no indictment lay.'[13]

The fable saves the self-love of the person to whom it is applicable. It enables him to stand aside, as it were, and become a spectator of the effect produced by his own conduct. In this way he is impressed and humbled without being affronted. When one, even though guilty, is openly and directly reproved for a misdeed, the stigma often raises a rebellious spirit, which either suggests a hundred justifiable reasons for his action or begets a defiant mood, driving him to persist in his evil courses.

Listening to the fable, 'we see nothing of the satirist, who probes only to heal us, and who does not exhibit any of the personal spleen and ill-humour which meet and put us out of countenance with ourselves and each other in the invectives of those who sometimes set up for moralists without the essential qualification of good nature. The fable gives an agreeable hint of the duties and relations of life, not a harangue on our want of sense or decorum. We feel none of the superiority of the fabulist, who, indeed, generally leaves us to make the application of his instructive story in our own way; and if we do sometimes prefer to apply it to our neighbour's case instead of our own, we are still improved and amended, inasmuch as we have learned to despise some vice or folly which our unassisted judgment might have regarded more leniently.'[14] Dodsley, again, puts the matter finely when he says:[15] 'The reason why fable has been so much esteemed in all ages and in all countries, is perhaps owing to the polite manner in which its maxims are conveyed. The very article of giving instruction supposes at least a superiority of wisdom in the adviser—a circumstance by no means favourable to the ready admission of advice. 'Tis the peculiar excellence of fable to waive this air of superiority; it leaves the reader to collect the moral, who, by thus discovering more than is shown him, finds his principle of self-love gratified, instead of being disgusted. The attention is either taken off from the adviser, or, if otherwise, we are at least flattered by his humility and address. Besides, instruction, as conveyed by fable, does not only lay aside its lofty mien and supercilious aspect, but appears dressed in all the smiles and graces which can strike the imagination or engage the passions. It pleases in order to convince, and it imprints its moral so much the deeper in proportion that it entertains; so that we may be said to feel our duties at the very instant we comprehend them.'

The humour of a good fable is a fine lubricant to the temper. Sarcasm, irony, even direct criticism, are in place in the fable, but humour is its saving grace. Without this it cannot be classed in the first order. Wanting in this quality, the fables of some writers who have attempted them are flat, stale and unprofitable. Humour in the fable is the gilding of the pill. It is like the effervescing quality in champagne, the subtle flavour in old port.

It may be questioned whether a fable has ever the full immediate effect intended. Men are loath to apply the moral to their own case, though they have no difficulty in applying it to the case of others—even to their best acquaintances and friends. For example, take the present company, the present company of my readers—it is usual, by the way, to except 'the present company,' but we will be rash enough, even at the risk of castigation, to break the rule—take, then, the present company in illustration of our point. Who among us would admit for a moment that we are the counterpart or human representative of the fox with its low cunning, the loquacious jackdaw, the silly goose, the ungrateful viper, the crow to be cajoled by flattery, not to mention the egregious donkey? 'Satire,' says an acute writer,[16] 'is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.' Or, to parody a line of Young, 'All men think all men peccable but themselves.' To be sure, we might be willing, modestly perhaps, to admit that we who are singers can emulate the nightingale; that we even possess some of the—call it shrewdness, of the fox; the faithful character of the honest dog; vie in dignity of manners and bearing with the stately lion. But all that is a matter of course; the noble traits we possess are so self-evident that none excepting the incorrigibly blind or prejudiced will be found to dispute them! So that the admonishing fable contains no lesson for any of us, but should be seriously taken to heart, with a view to their reformation, by certain persons whom we all know. That view of the question, however, need not be further pursued.

FOOTNOTES:

[13] Boothby's translation.

[14] G. Moir Bussey: Introduction to 'Fables.'

[15] 'Essay on Fable.'

[16] Swift: Preface to 'The Battle of the Books.'

CHAPTER V.
LESSONS TAUGHT BY FABLES.

'The tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry.'

COWPER: *Pairing Time Anticipated.*

IN the earlier ages of the world's history fables were invented for the edification of men and women. This was so in the palmiest days of Greek, Roman and Arabian or Saracenic civilization. In these later days fables are generally assumed to be more for the delectation of children than adults. This change of auditory need not be regretted; it has its marked advantages. The lesson which the fable inculcates is indelibly stamped on the mind of the child, and has an influence, less or more, on his or her career during life.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is the only writer of eminence who has inveighed against this use of the fable, but his remarks are by no means convincing. He accounted them lies without the 'medicinable quality,' and reprobated their employment in the instruction of youth. 'Fables,' says Rousseau, 'may amuse men, but the truth must be told to children.' His animadversion had special reference to the fables of La Fontaine, and doubtless some of these, and the morals deduced from them, are open to objection; but to condemn fables in general on this account is surely the height of unreason.

A greater than Rousseau had, long before, given expression in cogent language to the worth of the fable as a vehicle of instruction for youth. Plato, whilst excluding the mythical stories of Hesiod and Homer from the curriculum of his 'Republic'—that perfect commonwealth, in depicting which he lavished all the resources of his wisdom and genius—advised mothers and nurses to repeat selected fables to their children, so as to mould and give direction to their young and tender minds.

Phædrus, again, in the prologue to his fables, says—

"Tis but a play to form the youth
By fiction in the cause of truth,'

so that his view of the question also was just the very antipodes of that of the French philosopher.

Quintilian urges[17] that 'boys should learn to relate orally the fables of Æsop, which follow next after the nurse's stories.' True, he recommends this with a view to initiating them in the rudiments of the art of speaking; but he would not have inculcated the use of fables for children for even this secondary purpose, if he had dreamt for a moment they would have had a bad effect on their minds.

Rousseau, with all his knowledge of human character and his power of imagination, had a matter-of-fact vein running through his mind, which led him to entertain the mistaken view that the influence of fables on the juvenile mind was objectionable. Cowper, who was no mean writer of fables himself, with his clear common sense, broad natural instincts, and mother wit—in which Rousseau was lacking—saw the unwisdom of the philosopher's conclusions, and satirized his views in the well-known lines:

'I shall not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau
If birds confabulate or no;
'Tis clear that they were always able
To hold discourse, at least in fable;
And e'en the child, who knows no better
Than to interpret by the letter
A story of a cock and bull,
Must have a most uncommon skull.'[18]

It is no exaggeration to assert that the effect which fables and their lessons have had on the people is incalculable. They have been read and rehearsed and pondered in all ages, and by thousands whom no other class of literature could attract. The story and its moral (in the Æsopian fable at least) are obvious to the dullest comprehension, and they cling to the memory like the limpet to the rock, and find their application in all the concerns of daily life.

But it is not the illiterate alone that have profited by the fable; all classes have been affected by its lesson. We are all apt scholars when the fable is the schoolmaster. There is no class of the community that has not come under its sway. It has penetrated to the highest stratum of society equally with the humblest, and may be credited with an influence as wide and far-reaching as the sublimest moral treatise which the human intellect has produced.

The epic and the novel (fables of a kind), like some paintings, cover a wide canvas, and the details are not always easily grasped and remembered; but the true fable is a story in miniature which we take in at a glance, and stow away for after use in a small corner of our memory.

We have the 'successful villain' in the fable as sometimes on the stage; and it may be a question whether the tendency of this is not rather to encourage dissimulation in certain ill-constituted minds, than to inculcate virtue. One of Northcote's fables, *The Elephant and the Fox*, will exemplify what we mean.

'A grave and judicious elephant entering into argument with a pert fox, who insisted upon his superior powers of persuasion, which the elephant would not allow, it was at length agreed between them that whichever attracted the most attention from his auditors by his eloquence should be deemed the victor. At a certain appointed time a great assembly of animals attended the trial, and the elephant was allowed to speak first. He with eloquence spoke of the high importance of ever adhering with strictness to justice and to truth; also of the happiness which resulted from controlling the passions, of the dignity of patience, the inhospitable and hateful nature of selfishness, and the odiousness of cruelty and carnage.

'The pert fox, perceiving the audience not to be much amused by the discourse of the elephant, made no ceremony, but interrupted the oration by giving a farcical account of all his mischievous tricks and hairbreadth escapes, the success of his cunning, and his adroit contrivances to extricate himself from harm—all which so delighted the assembly, that the elephant was soon left, in the midst of his wise advice, without a single auditor near him; for they one and all with eagerness thronged to hear the diverting follies and knaveries of the fox, who, of course, was in the end declared the victor.'

It might almost appear that a fable of this kind is an error of judgment, and that it is calculated to do harm rather than good, inasmuch as it exhibits the triumph of duplicity and the defeat of wisdom. True, the author of the fable tries to recover the lost ground in the application, by mildly holding up the fox to reprobation, thus:

'Application: The effect these two orators had on the perceptions of their audience was exactly the reverse one to the other. That of the elephant touched the guilty, like satire, with pain and reproach; even the most innocent was humbled, as none were wholly free from vice, and all felt themselves lowered even in their own opinion, and heard the admonition as an irksome duty, but still with little inclination to undergo the difficult task of amendment. But when the fox began, all was joy; the innocent felt all the gratification which proceeds from the consciousness of superiority, and the guilty to find their vices and follies treated only as a jest; for we all have felt how much more pleasure we enjoy laughing at a fool than in being scrutinized by the sage. From this cause it is that farce of the most grotesque and absurd kind is tolerated and received, and not without some degree of relish, even by the good and the wise, as we all want comfort.'

In spite of the application—nay, rather to some extent by reason of it, for the anti-climax is extraordinary in a fable—it may be doubted whether our sympathies are not with the fox rather than with the elephant. We feel that the latter, with all his wisdom and good advice, is somewhat of a bore; whilst the fox, rake and wastrel though he be, has that touch of nature that makes him kin.

Æsop's well-known fable of *The Fox and the Crow* is also an example of the success of the scoundrel, but mark the difference: here there is the obvious reproof of the vain and silly bird, deceived by flattering words, till, in attempting to sing, she drops into the mouth of the fox the savoury morsel she held in her beak! Here our verdict is: 'Served her right!' In Northcote's fable, clever though it is as a narration, this climax is altogether wanting.

It has been suggested that there is a closer natural affinity than at first sight appears between man and the lower animals, and that the recognition of this contact at many points would suggest the idea of conferring the power of speech upon the latter in the fable. In the higher reason and its resultant

effects they differ fundamentally; mere animals are wanting discourse of reason, but the purely animal passions of cunning, anger, hatred, and even revenge and love of kind, and the nobler characteristics of faithfulness and gratitude prevail in the dispositions of both. These similarities would strike observers in the pastoral ages of the world with even greater force than in later times.

The ineradicable impression which certain fables have made upon the mind through uncounted generations by their self-evident appropriateness and truth, is well exemplified in *The Wolf and the Lamb*; *The Fox and the Grapes*; *The Hare and the Tortoise*; *The Dog and the Shadow*; *The Mountain in Labour*; *The Fox without a Tail*; *The Satyr and the Man*, who blew hot and cold with the same breath, and others. It is safe to assert that nothing in literature has been more quoted than the fables named. We could not afford to lose them; their absence would be a distinct loss—literature and life would be the poorer without them; and, such being the fact, we are justified in holding those writers in esteem who have contributed to the instruction and entertainment of mankind in the fables they have invented.

FOOTNOTES:

[17] 'Institutes of Oratory,' book i., chap. ix.

[18] 'Pairing Time Anticipated.'

CHAPTER VI.
ÆSOP.

'Nature formed but one such man.'

BYRON.

'The hungry judges soon the sentence sign.'

POPE.

ÆSOP is justly regarded as the foremost inventor of fables that the world has seen. He flourished in the sixth century before Christ. Several places, as in the case of Homer, are claimed as his birthplace—Sardis in Lydia, Ammorius, the island of Samos, and Mesembra, a city of Thrace; but the weight of authority is in favour of Cotiæum, a city of Phrygia in the Lesser Asia,[19] hence his sobriquet of 'the Phrygian.'

Whether he was a slave from birth is uncertain, but if not, he became such, and served three masters in succession. Demarchus or Caresias of Athens was his first master; the next, Zanthus or Xanthus, a philosopher, of the island of Samos; and the third, Idmon or Jadmon, also of Samos. His faithful service and wisdom so pleased Idmon that he gave Æsop his freedom.

Growing in reputation both as a sage and a wit, he associated with the wisest men of his age. Amongst his contemporaries were the seven sages of Greece: Periander, Thales, Solon, Cleobulus, Chilo, Bias and Pittacus; but he was eventually esteemed wiser than any of them. The humour with which his sage counsels were spiced made these more acceptable (both in his own and later times) than the dull, if weighty, wisdom of his compeers.

He became attached by invitation of Crœsus, the rich King of Lydia, to the court at Sardis, the capital, and continued under the patronage of that monarch for the remainder of his life. Crœsus employed him in various embassies which he carried to a successful issue. The last he undertook was a mission to Delphi to offer sacrifices to Apollo, and to distribute four minæ[20]

of silver to each citizen. To the character of the Delphians might with justice be applied the saying of a later time: 'The nearer the temple and the farther from God.' Familiarity with the Oracle, as is the case in smaller matters, bred contempt, for the meanness of their lives was due to the circumstance that the offerings of strangers coming to the temple of the god enabled them to live a life of idleness, to the neglect of the cultivation of their lands.

Æsop upbraided them for this conduct, and, scorning to encourage them in their evil habits, instead of distributing amongst them the money which Crœsus had sent, he returned it to Sardis. This, as was natural with persons of their mean character, so inflamed them against him that they conspired to compass his destruction. Accordingly (as the story goes), they hid away amongst his baggage, as he was leaving the city, a golden goblet taken from the temple and consecrated to Apollo. Search being made, and the vessel discovered, the charge of sacrilege was brought against him. His judges pronounced him guilty, and he was sentenced to be precipitated from the rock Hyampia. Immediately before his execution he delivered to his persecutors the fable of *The Eagle and the Beetle*,[21] by which he warned them that even the weak may procure vengeance against the strong for injuries inflicted. The warning was unheeded by his murderers. The shameful sentence was carried out, and so Æsop died, according to Eusebius, in the fourth year of the fifty-fourth Olympiad, or 561 years before the Christian era. The fate of poor Æsop was like that of a good many other world-menders!

According to ancient chroniclers, the death of Æsop did not go unavenged. Misfortunes of many kinds overtook the Delphians; pestilence decimated them; such of their lands as they tried to cultivate were rendered barren, with famine as the result, and these miseries continued to afflict them for many years. At length, having consulted the Oracle, they received as answer that which their secret conscience affirmed to be true, that their calamities were due to the death of Æsop, whom they had so unjustly condemned. Thereupon they caused proclamation to be made in all public places throughout the country, offering reparation to any of Æsop's representatives who should appear. The only claimant that responded was a grandson of Idmon, Æsop's former master; and having made such expiation as he demanded, the Delphians were delivered from their troubles.

Not only was *Æsop* unfortunate in his death: his personal appearance has suffered disparagement. The most trustworthy chroniclers in ancient times describe him as a man of good appearance, and even of a pleasing cast of countenance; whereas in later years he has been portrayed both by writers and in pictures as deformed in body and repellent in features. Stobæus, it is true, who lived in the fifth century A.D., had written disparagingly of 'the air of *Æsop's* countenance,' representing the fabulist as a man of sour visage, and intractable, but he goes no farther than that.

It is to Maximus Planudes, a Constantinople monk of the fourteenth century, nearly two thousand years after the time of *Æsop*, that the burlesque of the great fabulist is due. Planudes appears to have collected all the stories regarding *Æsop* current during the Middle Ages, and strung them together as an authentic history. Through ignorance, or by intention, he also confounded the Oriental fabulist, Locman,[22] with *Æsop*, and clothed the latter in all the admitted deformities of the other. He affirmed him as having been flat-faced, hunch-backed, jolt-headed, blubber-lipped, big-bellied, baker-legged, his body crooked all over, and his complexion of a swarthy hue. Even in recent years, accepting the description of the monk, *Æsop* has been thus depicted in the frontispiece to his fables. This writer is untrustworthy in other respects, for in his pretended life of the sage he makes him speak of persons who did not exist, and of events that did not occur for eighty to two hundred years after his death.

That the story of *Æsop's* hideous deformity is untrue is clear from evidence that is on record. Admitted that this evidence is chiefly of a negative kind, it is sufficiently strong to refute the statements of the monk. In the first place, Planudes, as we have seen, is an untrustworthy chronicler in other respects, and an account of *Æsop*, written after the lapse of two thousand years, could only be worthy of credence issuing from a truthful pen, and based on documentary or other unquestionable evidence. Of such evidence the Constantinople monk had probably none.

Again, it is related that during the years of his slavery *Æsop* had as mate, or wife, the beautiful Rhodope,[23] also a slave—an unlikely circumstance, assuming him to have been as repulsive in bodily appearance as has been

asserted. At all events, any incongruous association of this kind would have been remarked and commented on by earlier writers.

Further, none of Æsop's contemporaries, nor any writers that immediately followed him, make mention of his alleged deformities. On the contrary, the Athenians, about two hundred years after his death, in order to perpetuate his memory and appearance, commissioned the celebrated sculptor Lysippus to produce a statue of Æsop, and this they erected in a prominent position in front of those of the seven sages, 'because,' says Phædrus,[24] 'their severe manner did not persuade, while the jesting of Æsop pleased and instructed at the same time.' It is improbable that the figure of a man monstrously deformed as Æsop is said to have been would have proved acceptable to the severe taste of the Greek mind. An epigram of Agathia, of which the following is a translation,[25] celebrates the erection of this statue:

'To Lysippus.

'Sculptor of Sicyon! glory of thy art!
I laud thee that the image thou hast placed
Of good old Æsop in the foremost part,
More than the statues of the sages graced.
Grave thought and deep reflection may be found
In all the well-respected rolls of these;
In wisdom's saws and maxims they abound,
But still are wanting in the art to please:
Each tale the gentle Samian well has told,
Truth in fair fiction pleasantly imparts;
Above the rigid censor him I hold
Who teaches virtue while he wins our hearts.'

Philostratus, in an account of certain pictures in existence in the time of the Antonines, describes one as representing Æsop with a pleasing cast of countenance, in the midst of a circle of the various animals, and the Geniuses of Fable adorning him with wreaths of flowers and branches of the olive.

Dr. Bentley, in his 'Dissertation,' ridicules the account of *Æ*sop's deformity as given by Planudes in face of all the evidence to the contrary. 'I wish,' says he, 'I could do that justice to the memory of our Phrygian, to oblige the painters to change their pencil. For 'tis certain he was no deformed person; and 'tis probable he was very handsome. For whether he was a Phrygian or, as others say, a Thracian, he must have been sold into Samos by a trader in slaves; and 'tis well known that that sort of people commonly bought up the most beautiful they could light on, because they would yield the most profit.'

Bentley's conjecture that *Æ*sop was 'very handsome' does not find general acceptance; it has, nevertheless, a solid foundation in the fact that the Greeks confined art to the imitation of the beautiful only, reprobating the portrayal of ugly forms, whether human or other. It is not to be believed, therefore, that the chisel of Lysippus was employed in the production of a statue to a deformed person, which not even the gift of wisdom would have rendered acceptable to the severe taste of his countrymen. Without going so far, however, as to accept the view of the learned Master of Trinity, that *Æ*sop was probably *very* handsome, we may with safety conclude that the objectionable portrait of the sage as drawn by the Byzantine is without justification.

FOOTNOTES:

[19] Suidas.

[20] The mina was twelve ounces, or a sum estimated as equal to £3 15s. English.

[21] See *post*, p. 76.

[22] Spelt variously Locman, Lôqman, Lokman.

[23] This woman is notorious in history as a courtesan who essayed to compound for her sins by votive offerings to the temple at Delphi. She is also said to have built the Lesser Pyramid out of her accumulated riches, but this is denied by Herodotus, who claims for

the structure a more ancient and less discreditable foundation, being the work, as he asserts, of Mycerinus, King of Egypt (Herod., ii. 134).

[24] Phædrus, Epilogue, book ii.

[25] Boothby, Preface, p. xxxiv.

CHAPTER VII.
STORIES RELATED OF ÆSOP.

'I cannot tell how the truth may be;
I say the tale as 'twas said to me.'

SCOTT: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

'Such the simple story told,
By a sage[26] renowned of old,
To a king[27] whose fabled gold
Could not procure him learning.'

JAMES CLERK MAXWELL.

THERE are numerous tales told of Æsop, some of which are obviously mythical; others, though their actual parentage may be doubtful, are entirely in keeping with his reputation for common, or uncommon, sense and ready wit. Phædrus has several of these, and Planudes, an untrustworthy chronicler, as we have seen, has many more. Some of the stories of the latter are absurd enough, and bordering perhaps on the foolish; but, on the other hand, he tells several that may be pronounced excellent in every sense, and whatever the shortcomings of the monk in other respects, he deserves credit for having rescued these from the oblivion which otherwise might have been their fate.

Most writers, especially modern writers, on Æsop, have scouted with an unnecessary display of eclecticism the whole of the stories collected by Planudes regarding his hero; but in this they show a want of discrimination. Whether the stories are true of Æsop or not, and I know of no character on whom they may be more aptly fathered, they are as ripe in wisdom as are many of the best of the fables, and their pedigree is quite as authentic.

Philostratus, in his life of Apollonius Tyaneus, gives the following mythical account of the youthful Æsop: When a shepherd's boy, he fed his flock near a temple of Mercury, and frequently prayed to the god for mental endowments. Many other supplicants also came and laid rich presents upon the altar, but Æsop's only offering was a little milk and honey, and a few flowers, which the care of his sheep did not allow him to arrange with much art. The mercenary god disposed of his gifts in proportion to the value of the offerings. To one he gave philosophy, to another eloquence, to a third astronomy, and to a fourth the poetical art. When all these were given away he perceived Æsop, and recollecting a fable which the Hours had related to him in his infancy, he bestowed upon him the invention of the Apologue.

Even when a slave, readiness of resource was a characteristic of Æsop, and often stood him in good stead. His first master, Demarchus, one day brought home some choice figs, which he handed to his butler, telling him that he would partake of them after his bath. The butler had a friend paying him a visit, and by way of entertainment placed the figs before him, and both heartily partook of them. Fearing the displeasure of Demarchus, he resolved to charge Æsop with the theft. Having finished his ablutions, Demarchus ordered the fruit to be brought; but the butler had none to bring, and charged Æsop with having stolen and eaten them. The slave, being summoned, denied the charge. It was a serious matter for one in his position. To be guilty meant many stripes, if not death. He begged to have some warm water, and he would prove his innocence. The water being brought, he took a deep drink; then, putting his finger down his gullet, the water—the sole contents of his stomach—was belched. Demarchus now ordered the butler to do the same, with the result that he was proved to be both thief and liar, and was punished accordingly.

Æsop going on a journey for his master, along with other slaves of the household, and there being many burdens to carry, he begged they would not overload him. Looking upon him as weak in body, his fellow-slaves gave him his choice of a load. On this, Æsop selected the pannier of bread, which was the heaviest burden of all, at which his companions were amazed, and thought him a fool. Noon came, however, and when they had each partaken of its contents, Æsop's burden was lightened by one half. At the next meal all

the bread was cleared out, leaving Æsop with only the empty basket to carry. At this their eyes were opened, and instead of the fool they at first thought him, he was seen to be the wisest of them all.

The second master who owned Æsop as a slave was Zanthus, the philosopher. Their meeting was in this wise: Æsop being in the marketplace for sale along with two other slaves, Zanthus, who was looking round with a view to making a purchase, asked them what they could do. Æsop's companions hastened to reply, and between them professed that they could do 'everything.' On Æsop being similarly questioned, he laughingly answered, 'Nothing.' His two fellow-slaves had forestalled him in all possible work, and left him with nothing to do. This reply so amused Zanthus that he selected Æsop in preference to the others who were so boastful of their abilities.

Zanthus once, when in his cups, had foolishly wagered his land and houses that he would drink the sea dry. Recovering his senses, he besought Æsop his slave to find him a way out of his difficulty. This Æsop engaged to do. At the appointed time, when the foolish feat was to be performed, or his houses and lands forfeited, Zanthus, previously instructed by Æsop, appeared at the seaside before the multitude which had assembled to witness his expected discomfiture. 'I am ready,' cried he, 'to drain the waters of the sea to the last drop; but first of all you must stop the rivers from running into it: to drink these also is not in the contract.' The request was admitted to be a reasonable one, and as his opponents were powerless to perform their part, they were covered with derision by the populace, who were loud in their praises of the wisdom of Zanthus.

Philosopher notwithstanding, Zanthus appears to have been often in hot water. On another occasion his wife left him, whether on account of her bad temper (as the report goes), or from his too frequent indulgence in liquor (as is not unlikely), matters little. He was anxious that she should return, but how to induce her was a difficulty hard to compass. Æsop, as usual, was equal to it. 'Leave it to me, master!' said he. Going to market, he gave orders to this dealer and that and the other, to send of their best to the residence of Zanthus, as, being about to take unto himself another wife, he intended to celebrate the happy occasion by a feast. The report spread like wildfire, and coming to the ears of his spouse, she quickly gathered up her belongings in

the place where she had taken up her abode, and returned to the house of her lord and master. 'Take another wife, say you, Zanthus! Not whilst I am alive, my dear!' And so the ruse was successful, for, as the story affirms, she settled down to her duties, and no further cause for separation occurred between them ever after.

Phædrus relates several stories showing the characteristic readiness of the sage. A mean fellow, seeing Æsop in the street, threw a stone at him. 'Well done!' was his response to the unmannerly action. 'See! here is a penny for you; on my faith it is all I have, but I will tell you how you may get something more. See, yonder comes a rich and influential man. Throw a stone at him in the same way, and you will receive a due reward.' The rude fool, being persuaded, did as he was advised. His daring impudence, however, brought him a requital he did not hope for, though it was what he deserved, for, being seized, he paid the penalty. Æsop in this incident exhibited not only his ready wit, but his deep craft, inasmuch as he brought condign punishment upon his persecutor by the hand of another, though he himself, being only a slave, might be insulted with impunity.

An Athenian, seeing Æsop at play in the midst of a crowd of boys, stopped and laughed and jeered at him for a madman. The sage, a laugher at others rather than one to be laughed at, perceiving this, placed an unstrung bow in the middle of the road. 'Hark you, wise man,' said he; 'unriddle what this means.' The people gathered round, whilst the man tormented his invention for a long time, trying to frame an answer to the riddle; but at last he gave it up. Upon this the victorious philosopher said: 'The bow will soon break if you always keep it bent, but relax it occasionally, and it will be fit for use, and strong, when it is wanted'—a piece of sound advice which others than the wiseacre chiefly concerned would find it advantageous to practise.

A would-be author had recited some worthless composition to Æsop, in which was contained an inordinate eulogy of himself and his own powers, and, desiring to know what the sage thought about it, asked: 'Does it appear to you that I have been too conceited? I have no empty confidence in my own capacity.' Worried to death with the execrable production, Æsop replied: 'I greatly approve of your bestowing praise on yourself, for it will never be your lot to receive it from another.'

In the course of a conversation, being asked by Chilo (one of the wise men of Greece), 'What is the employment of the gods?' Æsop's answer was: 'To depress the proud and exalt the humble.' And in allusion to the sorrows inseparable from the human lot, his explanation, at once striking and poetical, was that 'Prometheus having taken earth to form mankind, moistened and tempered it, not with water, but with tears.'

Apart from wisdom in the highest sense, Æsop possessed no little share of worldly wisdom, or political wisdom—often only another name for chicane—and exercised it as occasion served. It is related by Plutarch, in the 'Life of Solon,' that 'Æsop being at the Court of Crœsus at a time when the seven sages of Greece were also present, the King, having shown them the magnificence of his Court and the vastness of his riches, asked them, "Whom do you think the happiest man?" Some of them named one, and some another. Solon (whom without injury we may look upon as superior to all the rest) in his answer gave two instances. The first was that of one Tellus, a poor Athenian, but of great virtues, who had eminently distinguished himself by his care and education of his family, and at last lost his life in fighting for his country. The other was of two brothers who had given a very remarkable proof of their filial piety, and were in reward for it taken out of this life by the gods the very night after they had performed so dutiful an action. He concluded by adding that he had given such instances because no one could be pronounced happy before his death. Æsop perceived that the King was not well satisfied with any of their answers, and being asked the same question, replied "that for his part he was persuaded that Crœsus had as much pre-eminence in happiness over all other men as the sea has over all the rivers."

'The King was so much pleased with this compliment that he eagerly pronounced that sentence which afterwards became a common proverb, "The Phrygian has hit the mark." Soon after this happened, Solon took his leave of Crœsus, and was dismissed very coolly. Æsop, on his departure, accompanied him part of his journey, and as they were on the road took an opportunity of saying to him, "Oh, Solon, either we must not speak to kings, or we must say what will please them." "On the contrary," replied Solon, "we should either not speak to kings at all, or we should give them good and useful advice." So great was the steadiness of the chief of the sages, and such the courtliness of Æsop.'[28]

It will be noticed that this reply of Æsop to the question of the King was evasive, though the vanity of the latter probably prevented his remarking it. He does not declare the King to be the happiest man, but leaves it to be inferred that, assuming happiness to be attained by men during life (which Solon denied), then was Crœsus pre-eminent over all others in that respect. It must be admitted that the answer does not display the character of Æsop in the best light as a moralist, however much it may exalt his reputation as a courtier. There probably was a good deal of the fox in his nature, and this, not less than his wisdom, enabled him to maintain his position at the Court of this vain and wealthy potentate.

FOOTNOTES:

[26] Solon.

[27] Crœsus.

[28] Quoted from the 'Life of Æsop' in the introduction to Dodsley's 'Select Fables.'

CHAPTER VIII.
THE ÆSOPIAN FABLES.

'Brevity is the soul of wit.'

SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet.*

IT has been asserted that this same Æsop, if not a mythical personage, is at least credited with much more than is his due, and that it is only around his name that have clustered the various fables attributed to him, like rich juicy grapes round their central stalk, or, to use a more appropriate image, like swarming bees round a pendent branch. Others have endeavoured, with less or more feasibility, to prove that most of what are called Æsopian fables had their origin in the far East—'The inquisitive amongst the Greeks,' say they, 'travelled into the East to ripen their own imperfect conceptions, and on their return taught them at home, with the mixture of fables and ornaments of fancy'[29]—that the ideas first propounded in India and Arabia were thus carried westward; that Æsop appropriated them and gave them forth in a modified form and in a new dress. Scholars and investigators differ in their views regarding the truth, or the extent of the truth, of these allegations, and display much erudition in their attempts to settle the question. It would appear that Æsop has indubitably the credit of certain fables of which he was not the inventor, as they were in vogue at a period anterior to the era in which he flourished. It is equally proved, on the other hand, that genuine Æsopian or Grecian fables have been attributed to Eastern sources, and are found included in collections of Eastern fables compiled in the earlier years of the Christian era. All this is only what might be expected, and does not affect to any serious extent the credit for ingenuity and originality of either Æsop or other early fabulists. Doubtless Æsop did get some of the subjects of his fables from foreign sources, but he melted them in the crucible of his mind—he distilled their very essence, and handed us the precious concentrated spirit. If he had done nothing more, that was good.

It is well known, of course, that there were fables of a very excellent kind before the time of Æsop. Amongst the Æsopian fables supposed to be borrowed from the Jātakas are *The Wolf and the Crane*, *The Ass in the Lion's Skin*, *The Lion and Mouse*, and *The Countryman, his Son and the Snake*. And Plutarch[30] asserts that the language of Hesiod's nightingale to the hawk (spoken three hundred years before the era of Æsop) is the origin of the beautiful and instructive wisdom in which Æsop has employed so many tongues. Thus:

'Poor Philomel, one luckless day,
Fell in a hungry falcons way.
"If he her life," she said, "would spare,
He should have something choice and rare."
"What's that?" quoth he. "A song," she says,
"Melodious as Apollo's lays,
That with delight all nature hears."
"A hungry belly has no ears,"
Replied the hawk, "I first must sup,"
And ate the little siren up.
When strength and resolution fail,
Talents and graces nought avail.'[31]

Archilochus also wrote fables before Æsop;[32] and even anterior to these is the fable of *The Belly and the Members*, and those given in Holy Scripture. But, without question, Æsop was a true inventor of fables, for it is not to be believed for a moment that Greek genius (and this was the genius of Æsop, whatever his parentage) was not equal to such a task.

Doubtless many later, as well as earlier, fables are included under the general designation of 'Æsopian,' by virtue of their resembling in the characteristics of brevity, force and wit the inventions of the sage.

Æsop in all probability did not write out his fables; they were handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. At length they were collected together, first by Diagoras (400 B.C.), and later by Demetrius Phalereus, the Tyrant of Athens (318 B.C.), under the title of 'The Assemblies of Æsopian Fables,' long after the sage's death. This collection was made use of both by the Greek freedman Phædrus, during the reign of Augustus, in the

early years of the Christian era, and later by Valerius Babrius, the Roman (230 A.D.). Later again, towards the end of the fourth century, a number of them were translated into Latin by Avienus.

The Æsopian fables are distinguished by their simplicity, their mother-wit and natural humour. A score of examples exhibiting these qualities might be cited. A few, not the best known, will suffice:

The Wolf and the Shepherds.—'A wolf peeping into a hut where a company of shepherds were regaling themselves with a joint of mutton—"Lord," said he, "what a clamour would these men have raised if they had caught *me* at such a banquet!"'

The compression and humour of this fable are remarkable, and the obvious moral is: 'That men are apt to condemn in others what they practise themselves without scruple.'

The Dog and the Crocodile bids us be on our guard against associating with persons of an ill reputation. 'As a dog was coursing the banks of the Nile, he grew thirsty; but fearing to be seized by the monsters of that river, he would not stop to satiate his drought, but lapped as he ran. A crocodile, raising his head above the surface of the water, asked him why he was in such a hurry. He had often, he said, wished for his acquaintance, and should be glad to embrace the present opportunity. "You do me great honour," returned the dog, "but it is to avoid such companions as you that I am in so much haste."'

Again, *The Snake and the Hedgehog*. 'By the intreaties of a hedgehog, half starved with cold, a snake was once persuaded to receive him into her cell. He was no sooner entered than his prickles began to be very annoying to his companion, upon which the snake desired he would provide himself another lodging, as she found, upon trial, the apartment was not large enough to accommodate both. "Nay," said the hedgehog, "let them that are uneasy in their situation exchange it; for my own part, I am very well contented where I am; if you are not, you are welcome to remove whenever you think proper!"'

The fable (or rather story, for it is more an anecdote than a fable) of *Mercury and the Sculptor* reads like a joke of yesterday. In Mr. Cross's 'Life of George Eliot,' it is recorded that the great novelist (in a conversation with Mr. Burne-Jones) recalled her passionate delight and total absorption in Æsop's fables,

the possession of which, when a child, had opened new worlds to her imagination, and she laughed till the tears ran down her face in recalling her infantine enjoyment of the humour of this story, as follows:

'Mercury once determined to learn in what esteem he was held among mortals. For this purpose he assumed the character of a man, and visited in this disguise the studio of a sculptor. Having looked at various statues, he demanded the price of two figures of Jupiter and Juno. When the sum at which they were valued was named, he pointed to a figure of himself, saying to the sculptor: "You will certainly want much more for this, as it is the statue of the messenger of the gods, and the author of all your gain." The sculptor replied, "Well, if you will buy these, I'll fling you that into the bargain."'

Again, take *The Bull and the Gnat*, intended to show that the least considerable of mankind are seldom destitute of importance:

'A conceited gnat, fully persuaded of his own importance, having placed himself on the horn of a bull, expressed great uneasiness lest his weight should be incommodious; and with much ceremony begged the bull's pardon for the liberty he had taken, assuring him that he would immediately remove if he pressed too hard upon him. "Give yourself no uneasiness on that account, I beseech you," replied the bull, "for as I never perceived when you sat down, I shall probably not miss you whenever you think fit to rise up."'

Here, again, the humour is exquisite; but, indeed, that is a characteristic of nearly all the fables ascribed to Æsop.

The fable does not readily lend itself to the expression of pathos. Perhaps the only really pathetic fable is that of *The Wolf and the Lamb*, and it is also one of the very best. In this there is a touch of genuine pathos, unique in its character. Hesiod's *Hawk and Nightingale*,[33] and *The Old Woodcutter and Death*, as told by La Fontaine, are not wanting in pathos.

The applicability of the fables of Æsop to the circumstances and occurrences of every-day life, in the highest walks as in the humblest—for the nature in both is human, after all—gives them peculiar value. This, and their epigrammatical character, so conspicuous in the best, combined with the humorous turn that is given to them, impresses them upon the memory.

In such repute have the Æsopian fables always been held, that the most learned men in all ages have occupied themselves in translating and transcribing them. Socrates relieved his prison hours in turning some of them into verse.[34] In the days of ancient Greece, not to be familiar with Æsop was a sign of illiteracy.[35]

We have seen how other of the ancients collected and disseminated them. Coming down to later times, one of the first printed collections was by Bonus Accursius (1489,) from a MS. in the Ambrosian Library at Milan. To this was prefixed the Life by Planudes, written a century before. Another edition of the same was published by Aldus in 1505. The edition of Robert Stephens, published in Paris in 1546, followed; then came the enlarged collection by Neveletus, from the Heidelberg Library, in 1610. Later, Gabriele Faerno's 'One Hundred Fables' are Æsop given in Latin verse. So also with most of the collections by modern fabulists, La Fontaine, Sir Roger L'Estrange, Dr. Samuel Croxall, La Motte, Richer, Brettinger, Bitteux—they are all largely Æsop, with added pieces of later invention.

'Æsop has been agreed by all ages since his era for the greatest Master in his kind, and all others of that sort have been but imitations of his original.'[36]

Of the popularity of Æsop's fables in book form during last century and the beginning of this, we can scarcely form any conception in these days of cheap literature in such variety and excellence. Along with the Bible and 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' Æsop may be said to have occupied a place on the meagre bookshelf of almost every cottage.

The editions of Æsop in English are innumerable, but the most noteworthy, in the different epochs from the age of the invention of printing downwards have been: Caxton's collection (1484); the one by Leonard Willans (1650); that by John Ogilby (1651); Sir Roger L'Estrange's edition (1692); Dr. Croxall's collection (1722); that of Robert Dodsley (1764); and the Rev. Thomas James's Æsop (1848).

It is remarkable that the majority of those who have busied themselves in translating and editing Æsop have won fame and (shall we say?) immortality through that circumstance alone. Take the names in order of time, and it will be seen that the men are remembered chiefly or only (most of them) by

reason of their association with the Æsopian fables: Demetrius Phalereus, Phædrus, Babrius, Avienus, Planudes, Bonus Accursius, Neveletus, even down to La Fontaine, L'Estrange,[37] Croxall, and James. The Æsopian fable has indeed a perennial life, and its votaries have rendered themselves immortal by association therewith.

Writers of much erudition, and in many countries, have vied with each other in learned research in this branch of literature, and in endeavours to trace the history of fable. Among the French we have Pierre Pithou (1539-96), editor of the first printed edition of Phædrus; Bachet de Meziriac, who wrote a life of Æsop (1632); Boissonade, Robert, Edelestand du Meril (1854); Hervieux and Gaston Paris. Of German writers there are Lessing, Fausboll, Hermann Oesterley, Mueller, Wagener, Heydenreich, Otto Crusius (1879), Benfey, Mall, Knoell, Gitlbauer; Niccolo, Perotti, Archbishop of Siponto (1430-80), and Jannelli, among the Italians; amongst Jewish writers, Dr. Landsberger. Of English writers we have Christopher Wase, Alsop, Boyle, Bentley, Tyrwhitt, Rutherford, James, Robinson Ellis, Rhys-Davids, G. F. Townsend, and last but not least, Joseph Jacobs, in his scholarly 'History of the Æsopic Fable.'

FOOTNOTES:

[29] Antiquary in 'The Club.'

[30] 'Conviv. Sapient.'

[31] Boothby's translation.

[32] Priscian.

[33] *Ante*, p. 54.

[34] 'Being exhorted by a dream, I composed some verses in honour of the god to whom the present festival [of the sacred embassy to Delos] belongs; but after the god, considering it necessary that he who designs to be a poet should make fables and not discourses, and

knowing that I myself was not a mythologist, on these accounts I versified the fables of Æsop, which were at hand, and were known to me.'—Socrates in Plato's 'Phædo.'

[35] Suidas.

[36] Sir William Temple.

[37] Goldsmith, in his 'Account of the Augustine Age of England,' remarks: 'That L'Estrange was a standard writer cannot be disowned, because a great many very eminent authors formed their style by his. But his standard was far from being a just one; though, when party considerations are set aside, he certainly was possessed of elegance, ease, and perspicuity.' Notwithstanding this considerable estimate of L'Estrange, it may be said that he is now remembered chiefly by his association with the Æsopian fables.

CHAPTER IX.
PHÆDRUS AND BABRIUS.

'United, yet divided, twain at once—
sit two kings of Fable on one throne.'

COWPER: *The Task (altered).*

PHÆDRUS, who wrote the fables of Æsop in Latin iambics, and added others of his own, was born at the very source of poetic inspiration, on Mount Pierius, near to the Pierian spring, the seat of the Muses, in Thrace, at that time a portion of the Roman province of Macedonia, and of which Octavius, the father of Augustus Cæsar, was Proconsul, during the last century before the Christian era. Like Æsop, he too was a slave in early youth, but being taken to Rome, he was manumitted by Augustus, and occupied a place in the household of that Emperor. Here he acquired the pure Latinity of his style, and in later years wrote the well-known fables in the collection that bears his name. His fables are in five books, and were published during the reign of Tiberius and subsequent emperors.

In the prologue to his third book, addressed to Eutychus,[38] he thus alludes to his birthplace, and disavows all mercenary aims in his literary pursuits:

'Me—whom a Grecian mother bore
On Hill Pierian, where of yore
Mnemosyne in love divine
Brought forth to Jove the tuneful Nine.
Though sprung where genius reigned with art,
I grubb'd up av'rice from my heart,
And rather for applause than pay,
Embrace the literary way—
Yet as a writer and a wit,
With some abatements they admit.
What is his case then, do you think,

Who toils for wealth nor sleeps a wink,
Preferring to the pleasing pain
Of composition, sordid gain?
But hap what will (as Sinon said
When to King Priam he was led),
I book the third shall now fulfil,
With Æsop for my master still,
Which book I dedicate to you
As both to worth and honour due.
Pleased, if you read; if not, content,
As conscious of a sure event,
That these my fables shall remain,
And after-ages entertain.'[39]

His object, as he declares, was to expose vice and folly; in pursuing it he did not escape persecution, for Sejanus, the arbitrary minister of Tiberius (who had now succeeded to the imperial purple), took mortal offence at certain of the apologues which he suspected applied to himself, and, 'informer, witness, judge and all,' laid the iron hand of power heavy upon the fabulist. Phædrus, whose early years of slavery had left no taint of servility upon his character, was too independent to stoop to insolent power, and resented the treatment to which he was subjected. Thus beset, and probably largely owing to this cause, his last years were spent in poverty. Amidst the infirmities of age he compares himself to the old hound in his last apologue, which being chastised by his master for his feebleness in allowing the boar to escape, replied, 'Spare your old servant! It was the power, not the will, that failed me. Remember rather what I was than abuse me for what I am.' A lesson which even at the present day may sometimes find its application. Phædrus prophesied his own immortality as an author, and his boast was that whilst Æsop invented, he (Phædrus) perfected.

Babrius,[40] a Latin, did for the Æsopian fable, in Greek choliambics, what Phædrus, a Greek, accomplished for them in Latin iambics. He is believed to have lived in the third century A.D., and to have composed his fables in his quality of tutor to Branchus, the young son of the Emperor Alexander Severus.[41] His collection of Æsopian fables in two books was known to ancient writers, who refer to him and quote his apologues, but, like other

literary treasures, it was lost during the Middle Ages. Early in the seventeenth century, Isaac Nicholas Neveletus, a Swiss, published (1610) an edition of the fables of Æsop, containing not only those embraced in the work of Planudes, but additional fables from MSS. in the Vatican Library, and some from Aphthonius and Babrius. He further expressed the opinion that the latter was the earliest collector and writer of the Æsopian fables in Greek. Francis Vavassor, a French Jesuit, followed with comments on Babrius on the same lines; so also another Frenchman, Bayle, in his 'Dictionnaire Historique'; Thomas Tyrwhitt and Dr. Bentley in England, and Francisco de Furia in Italy, also espoused the idea first suggested by Neveletus, and adduced further proofs in support of it. Singularly enough, the accuracy of the forecast of these scholars was established by the discovery in 1840, by M. Minoides Menas, a Greek, at the Convent of St. Laura on Mount Athos, of a veritable copy of Babrius in Greek choliambic verse. The transcript of Menas was first published in Paris in 1844. The first English edition was edited by Sir George Cornewall Lewis in the original Greek text, with Latin notes, and afterwards (1860) translated into English by the Rev. James Davies, M.A., and they now form the most trustworthy version of the Æsopian fables.

FOOTNOTES:

[38] 'The Charioteer of Caligula,' Bücheler.

[39] From the translation of the fables of Phædrus into English verse by Christopher Smart, A.M.

[40] Sometimes spelt 'Gabrias.'

[41] Jacobs: 'History of the Æsopic Fable,' p. 22.

CHAPTER X.
THE FABLE IN HISTORY AND MYTH.

'Full of wise saws.'

SHAKESPEARE: *As You Like It*.

'FABLES,' says Aristotle, 'are adapted to deliberate oratory, and possess this advantage: that to hit upon facts which have occurred in point is difficult; but with regard to fables it is comparatively easy. For an orator ought to construct them just as he does his illustrations, if he be able to discover the point of similitude, a thing which will be easy to him if he be of a philosophical turn of mind.'[42]

The truth of this is exemplified in the use which has been made of the apologue by orators in all ages, but especially in early times.

The following instances of the application of fables to particular occasions are recorded. The fable of *The Belly and the Members*, which is reputed to be the oldest in existence, is of sterling excellence, as well as of venerable antiquity.[43] Its lucid moral is truth in essence. The logic of its conclusion is as invulnerable as the demonstration of a proposition in Euclid. There is no gainsaying it, turn it how we may, and, with all due deference to Montaigne, only one moral is deducible from it. This is solid bottom ground and bed rock, safe for chain-cable holding; safe for building upon, however high the superstructure. Striking use was made of it by Menenius Agrippa when the rabble refused to pay their share of the taxes necessary for carrying on the business of the State.

In the 'Coriolanus' of Shakespeare, Menenius, the Roman Consul, is introduced in character,[44] and recounts the apologue to the disaffected citizens of Rome. Thus the dramatist, in his superb way:

Men. Either you must
Confess yourselves wondrous malicious,

Or be accused of folly. I shall tell you
A pretty tale: it may be you have heard it;
But since it serves my purpose, I will venture
To stale 't a little more.

1 Cit. Well, I'll hear it, sir; yet you must not think to fob off our disgrace with a tale; but, an 't please you, deliver.

Men. There was a time when all the body's Members
Rebelled against the Belly; thus accused it:
That only like a gulf it did remain
I' the midst o' the body, idle and inactive,
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
Like labour with the rest; where th' other instruments
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
And, mutually participate, did minister
Unto the appetite and affection common
Of the whole body. The Belly answered:

1 Cit. Well, sir, what answer made the Belly?

Men. Sir, I shall tell you. With a kind of smile,
Which ne'er came from the lungs, but even thus—
For, look you, I may make the Belly smile
As well as speak—it tauntingly replied
To the discontented Members, the mutinous parts
That envied his receipt: even so most fitly
As you malign our senators, for that
They are not such as you.

1 Cit. Your Belly's answer? What!
The kingly-crowned head, the vigilant eye,
The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter,
With other muniments and petty helps
In this our fabric, if that they——

Men. What then?——
'Fore me this fellow speaks!—what then? what then?

1 Cit. Should by the cormorant Belly be restrained,
Who is the sink o' the body——

Men. Well, what then?

1 Cit. The former agents, if they did complain,
What could the Belly answer?

Men. I will tell you,
If you'll bestow a small—of what you have little—
Patience awhile, you'll hear the Belly's answer.

1 Cit. Ye're long about it.

Men. Note me this, good friend,
Your most grave Belly was deliberate,
Not rash, like his accusers, and thus answered:
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
'That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
Because I am the storehouse and the shop
Of the whole body; but, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o' the brain,
And through the cranks and offices of man.
The strongest nerves, and small inferior veins,
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live; and though that all at once,
You, my good friends——' This says the Belly, mark me.

1 Cit. Ay, sir; well, well.

Men. 'Though all at once cannot
See what I do deliver out to each,
Yet I can make my audit up, that all

From me do back receive the flour of all,
And leave me but the bran.' What say you to 't?

1 Cit. It was an answer. How apply you this?

Men. The senators of Rome are this good Belly,
And you the mutinous Members; for examine
Their counsels and their cares; digest things rightly,
Touching the weal o' the common, you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
And no way from yourselves. What do you think?

The oldest fable in Holy Scripture, having been spoken or written about six centuries before the time of Æsop, is that of *The Trees in Search of a King*, recounted by Jotham to the men of Shechem, and directed against Abimelech,[45] wherein it is shown that the most worthless persons are generally the most presuming:

'And all the men of Shechem assembled themselves together, and all the house of Millo, and went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem. And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The Trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the Olive-tree, Reign thou over us. But the Olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the Trees said to the Fig-tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the Fig-tree said unto them, Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the Trees said unto the Vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the Vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said all the Trees unto the Bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the Bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the Bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

The Samians had impeached their Prime Minister for embezzling the money of the Commonwealth, and would have put him to death. *Æsop*, addressing the assembled councillors, introduced the fable of *The Fox and the Hedgehog* into his oration, as an argument to dissuade them from their purpose.

'A fox, swimming across a rapid river, was carried by the current into a deep ravine, where he lay for a time bruised and sick, and unable to move. A swarm of hungry flies[46] settled upon him. A hedgehog, passing by, compassionated his sufferings, and would have driven away the flies that were tormenting him. "Pray do not molest them," cried the fox. "How is this?" asked the hedgehog. "Do you not want to be rid of them?" "By no means," replied the fox; "for these flies are now full of blood, and sting me but little, and if you rid me of these which are already satiated, others more hungry will come in their place, and will drink up all the blood I have left." Thus also, O Samians, this man no longer injures you, for he is wealthy; should you, however, put him to death, others who are poor will come, who will exhaust you by filching the public money.'

Such a plea in arrest of judgment would hardly suffice in these later days.

The fable of *The Frogs petitioning Jupiter for a King* was spoken by *Æsop* to the Athenians in order to reconcile them to the mild yoke of the usurper Pisistratus, against whom, after they had raised him to the supreme power, the people began to murmur. 'The Commonwealth of Frogs, a discontented, variable race, weary of liberty, and fond of a change, petitioned Jupiter to grant them a king. The good-natured deity, in order to indulge this their request with as little mischief to the petitioners as possible, threw them down a log. At first they regarded their new monarch with great reverence, and kept from him at a most respectful distance; but perceiving his tame and peaceable disposition, they by degrees ventured to approach him with more familiarity, till at length some of them even ventured to climb up his side and squat upon him, and they all conceived for him the utmost contempt. In this disposition, they renewed their request to Jupiter, and entreated him to bestow upon them another king. The Thunderer in his wrath sent them a crane, who no sooner took possession of his new dominions than he began to devour his subjects one after another in a most capricious and tyrannical manner. They were now more dissatisfied than before; when applying to

Jupiter a third time, they were dismissed with the reproof that the evil they complained of they had imprudently brought upon themselves, and that they had no remedy now but to submit to it with patience.'

Plutarch, in his account of 'The Feast of the Sages' at the Court of Periander, King of Corinth (himself one of the seven), narrates the incident of Alexidemus, natural son of the Tyrant of Miletus, who, having taken offence at being placed lower at the table than 'Æolians, and Islanders, and people known to nobody,' was ridiculed by Æsop, who related to the assembled guests the fable of *The Arrogant Mule mortified*. 'The lion,' said he, 'gave a feast to the beasts. The horse and the ass sent excuses, the one having to bear his master a journey, and the other to turn the mill for the housewife; but, in order to honour the hospitality of the forest king, they sent their son, the mule, in their stead. At table a dispute arose about precedence, the mule claiming the higher place in right of his parent the horse, which the ox and others disputed, asserting that the mule had no just pretensions to the dignity claimed. At length, argument having run high, the mule would fain have been content with the seat reserved for the ass; but even this was now denied him, and, as a punishment for his presumption, he was thrust to the lower end, as one who, instead of meriting consideration, was nothing but a base mongrel.'

It is said that when Æsop was being taken to the rock Hyampia, there to be sacrificed, he predicted that the hand of retributive Justice would smite his persecutors for their inhumanity; and, reciting the fable of *The Eagle and the Beetle*, he warned them that the weakest may procure vengeance against the most powerful in requital of injuries inflicted. 'A hare, being pursued by an eagle, retreated into the nest of a beetle, who promised her protection. The eagle repulsed the beetle, and destroyed the hare before its face. The beetle, remembering the wrong done it, soared to the nest of the eagle and destroyed her eggs. Appealing to Jupiter, the god listened to the petition of his favourite bird, and granted her leave to lay her eggs in his lap for safety. The beetle, seeing this, made a ball of dirt, and, carrying it aloft, dropped it into the lap of the god, who, forgetting the eggs, shook all off together.'

The Piper turned Fisherman was spoken by Cyrus (King of Persia) at Sardis to the Ionians and Æolians on the occasion of their sending ambassadors, offering to become subject to him on the same terms as they had been to Crœsus. But he, when he heard their proposal, told them this story: 'A piper seeing some fishes in the sea, began to pipe, expecting that they would come to shore; but finding his hopes disappointed, he took a casting-net, and enclosed a great number of fishes, and drew them out. When he saw them leaping about, he said to the fishes: "Cease your dancing, since when I piped you would not come out and dance."' Cyrus told this story to the Ionians and Æolians because the Ionians, when Cyrus pressed them by his ambassador to revolt from Crœsus, refused to consent, and now, when the business was done, were ready to listen to him. He therefore, under the influence of anger, gave them this answer.[47]

The fable of *The Horse and the Stag* was rehearsed by Stesichorus to the citizens of Himera[48] with a view to stimulating them to beware of the encroachments of Phalaris the Tyrant, whom they had chosen general with absolute powers, and were on the eve of assigning him a body-guard. 'The stag, with his horns, got the better of the horse, and drove him clean out of the pasture where they used to feed together. So the horse craved the assistance of man; and in order to receive the benefit of his help, suffered him to put a bridle on his neck, a bit in his mouth, and a saddle upon his back. By this means he entirely defeated his enemy. But guess his chagrin when, returning thanks, and desiring to be dismissed, he received for answer: "No! I never knew before how useful a drudge you were; and now that I have found what you are good for, you may depend upon it I will keep you to it." Look to it, then' (continued Stesichorus), 'lest in your wish to avenge yourselves on your enemies you suffer in the same way as the horse; for already, through your choice of a commander with independent power, you have the bit in your mouths; but if you assign him a body-guard, and permit him to mount into the saddle, you will become, from that moment forth, the slaves of Phalaris.'

When the Athenians, with the ingratitude which sometimes blinds a whole people to the merits of their best friends, would have betrayed Demosthenes into the hands of Philip, King of Macedonia, the orator, as watch-dog of the State,[49] brought them to a better frame of mind by a recital of *The Wolves*

and the Sheep. 'Once on a time, the wolves sent an embassy to the sheep, desiring that there might be peace between them for the time to come. "Why," said they, "should we be for ever waging this deadly strife? Those wicked dogs are the cause of it all; they are incessantly barking at us and provoking us; send them away, and there will no longer be any obstacle to our eternal friendship and peace." The silly sheep listened; the dogs were dismissed, and the flock, thus deprived of their best protectors, became an easy prey to their treacherous enemy.'

On another occasion, when the populace were wrangling and disputing on matters of comparatively small moment whilst neglecting more important concerns, the same orator warned them of the danger they were in of losing the substance in fighting for the shadow. 'A youth,' said he, 'one hot summer day, hired an ass to carry him from Athens to Megara. At mid-day the heat of the sun was so intense that he dismounted, and sat down to repose himself in the shadow of the ass. The driver of the ass thereupon disputed with him, declaring that he had a better right to the shade than the other. "What!" said the youth, "did I not hire the ass for the whole journey?" "Yes," replied the other, "you hired the ass, but not the ass's shadow." While they were wrangling and fighting for the place, the ass took to his heels and ran away.'

FOOTNOTES:

[42] 'Rhetoric,' book ii., chap. xx.

[43] 'A variant of it, or something very like it, was discovered twelve years ago by M. Maspero in a fragmentary papyrus, which he dates about the twentieth dynasty (*circa* 1250 B.C.).'—Jacobs: 'History of the Æsopic Fable,' p. 82.

[44] Act I., Scene i.

[45] Judges ix. 8-15.

[46] Aristotle in his 'Treatise on Rhetoric,' book ii., chap. xx. has horse-leeches as the blood-suckers.

[47] Herodotus, i. 141. Cary's translation; Bohn.

[48] Aristotle's 'Rhetoric,' book ii., chap. xx.

[49] The episode of the eccentric and, alas! well-nigh forgotten politician, John Arthur Roebuck, in his assumption of the character of 'Tearem,' the watch-dog, will recur to readers.

CHAPTER XI.

HINDOO, ARABIAN, AND PERSIAN FABLES.—PILPAY, LOCMAN.—THE 'GESTA ROMANORUM.'

'When to my study I retire,
And from books of ancient sages
Glean fresh sparks of buried fire
Lurking in their ample pages—
While the task my mind engages
Let old words new truths inspire.'

JAMES CLERK MAXWELL.

THE 'Panca Tantra' is a collection of Hindoo fables, the supposed author of which was Vishnu Sarman, and this is believed to be the source of 'The Fables of Pilpay' or *Bidpaī*, which are undoubtedly of Indian origin. The transformation which these latter have experienced in their progress down the ages, chiefly by reason of their having been translated into the Arabic in the sixth century under the name of the 'Book of Kalilah and Dimnah,' and afterwards into other Eastern languages, has altered their Indian character, and caused them to assume a Persian vesture and significance. They are rich in ripe wisdom, and prove the insight of their author or authors into human nature, which in those early days, and in those far countries, was much as it is in more westerly communities and in our own times.

Taking the Æsopian fable as our model, the bulk of Pilpay's stories are not fables *par excellence*. They are more of the nature of *rencontres* of adventures, fabulous, it is true, and containing generally an excellent moral, but elaborated and complex for the most part; they are wanting in the terseness, the crispness, and concentration, as well as in the simplicity and spontaneity, of the Greek. At the same time there is a freshness and vigour in these old fables that is not sacrificed by translation, and they are sufficiently

striking and admirable as moral stories to justify the repute in which they have always been held. *The Greedy and Ambitious Cat* is one of the stories in the Bidpaī collection.

'There was formerly an old woman in a village, extremely thin, half starved, and meagre. She lived in a little cottage as dark and gloomy as a fool's heart, and withal as close shut up as a miser's hand.[50] This miserable creature had for the companion of her wretched retirement a cat, meagre and lean as herself; the poor creature never saw bread nor beheld the face of a stranger, and was forced to be contented with only smelling the mice in their holes, or seeing the prints of their feet in the dust. If by some extraordinary lucky chance this miserable animal happened to catch a mouse, she was like a beggar that discovers a treasure: her visage and her eyes were inflamed with joy, and that booty served her for a whole week; and out of the excess of her admiration, and distrust of her own happiness, she would cry out to herself, "Heavens! is this a dream, or is it real?" One day, however, ready to die for hunger, she got upon the ridge of her enchanted castle, which had long been the mansion of famine for cats, and spied from thence another cat, that was stalking upon a neighbour's wall like a lion, walking along as if she were counting her steps, and so fat that she could hardly go. The old woman's cat, astonished to see a creature of her own species so plump and so large, with a loud voice cries out to her pursy neighbour: "In the name of pity speak to me, thou happiest of the cat kind! Why, you look as if you came from one of the Khan of Kathais'[51] feasts; I conjure ye to tell me how or in what region it is that you get your skin so well stuffed."

'"Where?" replied the fat one. "Why, where should one feed well but at a king's table? I go to the house," continued she, "every day about dinner-time, and there I lay my paws upon some delicious morsel or other, which serves me till the next, and then leave enough for an army of mice, which under me live in peace and tranquillity; for why should I commit murder for a piece of tough and skinny mouse-flesh, when I can live on venison at a much easier rate?"

'The lean cat, on this, eagerly inquired the way to this house of plenty, and entreated her plump neighbour to carry her one day along with her.

'"Most willingly," said the fat puss; "for thou seest I am naturally charitable, and thou art so lean that I heartily pity thy condition."

'On this promise they parted, and the lean cat returned to the old woman's chamber, where she told her dame the story of what had befallen her.

'The old woman prudently endeavoured to dissuade her cat from prosecuting her design, admonishing her withal to have a care of being deceived.

'"For, believe me," said she, "the desires of the ambitious are never to be satiated but when their mouths are stuffed with the dirt of their graves. Sobriety and temperance are the only things that truly enrich people. I must tell thee, poor silly cat, that they who travel to satisfy their ambition have no knowledge of the good things they possess, nor are they truly thankful to Heaven for what they enjoy, who are not contented with their fortune."

'The poor starved cat, however, had conceived so fair an idea of the king's table, that the old woman's good morals and judicious remonstrances entered in at one ear and went out at the other; in short, she departed the next day with the fat puss to go to the king's house; but, alas! before she got thither her destiny had laid a snare for her. For, being a house of good cheer, it was so haunted with cats that the servants had, just at this time, orders to kill all the cats that came near it, by reason of a great robbery committed the night before in the king's larder by several grimalkins. The old woman's cat, however, pushed on by hunger, entered the house, and no sooner saw a dish of meat unobserved by the cooks, but she made a seizure of it, and was doing what for many years she had not done before, that is, heartily filling her belly; but as she was enjoying herself under the dresser-board, and feeding heartily upon her stolen morsels, one of the testy officers of the kitchen, missing his breakfast, and seeing where the poor cat was solacing herself with it, threw his knife at her with such an unlucky hand that it struck her full in the breast. However, as it has been the providence of Nature to give this creature nine lives instead of one, poor puss made a shift to crawl away, after she had for some time shammed dead; but in her flight, observing the blood come streaming from her wound—"Well," said she, "let me but escape this accident, and if ever I quit my old home and my own mice for all the rarities in the king's kitchen, may I lose all my nine lives at once!"'

The moral of the story is, that it is better to be contented with what one has than to travel in search of what ambition prompts us to seek for.

In the Escurial, near Madrid, the library of which is rich in ancient literary treasures, is a work by Ebn Arabscah, a collection of Arabian fables. Arabia may with truth be designated the very fountain-head of fabulous story. It was in that country that the venerable Locman flourished, during, it is believed, the reigns of the Jewish kings David and Solomon. Berington, in his essay on 'The Arabian or Saracenic Learning,' remarks that Locman is said to have been an Ethiopian or Nubian, extremely deformed in his person, but so famed for wisdom as to have acquired the appellation of the Sage. His fables and moral maxims, written for the instruction of mankind, were in the estimation of the Eastern people a gift from heaven, and they received them as its inspired dictates. 'Heretofore,' says the Divine being in the Koran, 'we gave wisdom to Locman.' The same writer suggests whether Locman and Æsop may not be the same person. 'The history of the two sages is so perfectly similar in their characters and the incidents of their lives, that one must have been borrowed from the other. But the chronological difficulties,' he adds, 'are sufficiently perplexing.'

We have already seen that the alleged similarity in character and bodily appearance was due to the invention or misconception of Planudes, whose story of Æsop was written in the fourteenth century, and therefore the seeming identity of the sages falls to the ground. Moreover, the fables of Æsop have a mobility about them which we do not find in those of other fabulists; they are essentially Attic in their diction, exhibiting all the marks of that compressed wit and wisdom for which the ancient Greek mind was distinguished. Eastern fable, on the other hand, is ornate and florid, and wanting in the Grecian clear-cut directness and point. It is idle to assume that the ideas, if not the diction, may have been borrowed and clothed in a new dress, unless it can be shown that the substance or subject-matter of the fables of the two sages is alike or similar in character. Granted that a few—about a dozen in number[52]—of the Æsopian fables find their counterpart in the fables of a more remote antiquity and in more Eastern countries, this circumstance might be expected; ideas dating from the very advent of the human race are current amongst us in this day, but surely even we of the

nineteenth century have a sufficient stock of original conceptions to justify our claims to be considered inventors, and so with Æsop and the race of fabulists in all ages.

Mrs. Jameson says,[53] with great force and truth, that 'the fables which appeal to our higher moral sympathies may sometimes do as much for us as the truths of science,' and she paraphrases from Sir William Jones's Persian Grammar a fable embodying one of those traditions of our Lord which are preserved in the East.

'Jesus,' says the story, 'arrived one evening at the gates of a certain city, and He sent His disciples forward to prepare supper, while He Himself, intent on doing good, walked through the streets into the market place.

'And He saw at the corner of the market some people gathered together looking at an object on the ground; and He drew near to see what it might be. It was a dead dog with a halter round his neck, by which he appeared to have been dragged through the dirt; and a viler, more abject, a more unclean thing never met the eyes of man.

'And those who stood by looked on with abhorrence.

'"Faugh!" said one, stopping his nose, "it pollutes the air." "How long," said another, "shall this foul beast offend our sight?" "Look at his torn hide," said a third; "one could not even cut a shoe out of it." "And his ears," said a fourth, "all draggled and bleeding!" "No doubt," said a fifth, "he hath been hanged for thieving!"

'And Jesus heard them, and looking down compassionately on the dead creature, He said, "Pearls are not equal to the whiteness of his teeth!"

'Then the people turned towards Him with amazement, and said among themselves, "Who is this? this must be Jesus of Nazareth, for only *He* could find something to pity and approve even in a dead dog!" And being ashamed, they bowed their heads before Him, and went each on his way.'

'I can recall,' continues Mrs. Jameson, 'at this hour, the vivid, yet softening and pathetic, impression left on my fancy by this old Eastern story. It struck me as exquisitely humorous, as well as exquisitely beautiful. It gave me a pain in my conscience, for it seemed thenceforward so easy and so vulgar to say

satirical things, and so much nobler to be benign and merciful; and I took the lesson so home that I was in great danger of falling into the opposite extreme; of seeking the beautiful even in the midst of the corrupt and the repulsive. Pity, a large element in my composition, might have easily degenerated into weakness, threatening to subvert hatred of evil in trying to find excuses for it; and whether my mind has ever completely righted itself, I am not sure.'

Our remarks on the fables of Pilpay are equally applicable to the 'Gesta Romanorum' or 'Entertaining Moral Stories' invented by the monks as a fireside recreation in the Middle Ages. Most of them are recitals of adventures rather than fables. They are believed to be of English origin, though a similar 'Gesta,' composed of stories in imitation of them, appeared in Germany about the same time. The taste displayed in many of them is of a questionable kind, and an outrageous twist is often given to their application; though doubtless they are a truthful reflex of the ideas and manners of the age in which they were composed and rehearsed, and in that respect they are of the utmost interest and value. Most of the fables or tales in the 'Gesta' begin well, and with a promise of interest. This interest, it must be said, is rarely maintained, for, as a rule, their conclusion is insipid, and sometimes inane. This notwithstanding, they are valuable by reason of their suggestiveness. The two examples we quote, translated from the Latin by the Rev. Charles Swan, are not faultless, but they are coherent throughout, and have a rounded literary finish in which many of the others are wanting. The first is entitled *Of Perfect Life*:

'When Titus was Emperor of Rome, he made a decree that the natal day of his first-born son should be held sacred, and that whosoever violated it by any kind of labour should be put to death. This edict being promulgated, he called Virgil, the learned man, to him, and said, "Good friend, I have established a certain law, but as offences may frequently be committed without being discovered by the ministers of justice, I desire you to frame some curious piece of art which may reveal to me every transgressor of the law." Virgil replied, "Sire, your will shall be accomplished." He straightway constructed a magic statue, and caused it to be erected in the midst of the city. By virtue of the secret powers with which it was invested, it communicated to the Emperor whatever offences were committed in secret on that day. And thus, by the accusation of the statue, an infinite number of persons were convicted.

'Now, there was a certain carpenter, called Focus, who pursued his occupation every day alike. Once, as he lay in his bed, his thoughts turned upon the accusations of the statue, and the multitudes which it had caused to perish. In the morning he clothed himself, and proceeded to the statue, which he addressed in the following manner: "O statue! statue! because of thy informations, many of our citizens have been apprehended and slain. I vow to my God that, if thou accusest me, I will break thy head." Having so said, he returned home. About the first hour, the Emperor, as he was wont, despatched sundry messengers to the statue to inquire if the edict had been strictly complied with. After they had arrived and delivered the Emperor's pleasure, the statue exclaimed, "Friends, look up: what see ye written upon my forehead?" They looked, and beheld three sentences, which ran thus: "Times are altered. Men grow worse. He who speaks truth will have his head broken." "Go," said the statue; "declare to his majesty what you have seen and read." The messengers obeyed, and detailed the circumstances as they had happened.

'The Emperor thereupon commanded his guard to arm, and march to the place on which the statue was erected; and he further ordered that, if any one presumed to molest it, they should bind him hand and foot and drag him into his presence. The soldiers approached the statue, and said: "Our Emperor wills you to declare who have broken the law, and who they are that threatened you." The statue made answer, "Seize Focus, the carpenter! Every day he violates the law, and, moreover, menaces me." Immediately Focus was apprehended and conducted to the Emperor, who said, "Friend, what do I hear of thee? Why dost thou break my law?" "My lord," answered Focus, "I cannot keep it; for I am obliged to obtain every day eight pennies, which, without incessant labour, I have not the means of acquiring." "And why eight pennies?" said the Emperor. "Every day through the year," returned the carpenter, "I am bound to repay two pennies which I borrowed in my youth; two I lend; two I lose; and two I spend." "You must make this more clear," said the Emperor. "My lord," he replied, "listen to me. I am bound each day to repay two pennies to my father; for when I was a boy my father expended upon me daily the like sum. Now he is poor, and needs my assistance, and therefore I return what I borrowed formerly. Two other pennies I lend to my son, who is pursuing his studies, in order that, if by any chance I should fall

into poverty, he may restore the loan, just as I have done to his grandfather. Again, I lose two pennies every day on my wife; for she is contradictious, wilful, and passionate. Now, because of this disposition, I account whatsoever is given to her entirely lost. Lastly, two other pennies I expend upon myself in meat and drink, I cannot do with less; nor can I obtain them without unremitting labour. You now know the truth, and I pray you give a righteous judgment." "Friend," said the Emperor, "thou hast answered well. Go, and labour earnestly in thy calling." Soon after this the Emperor died, and Focus the carpenter, on account of his singular wisdom, was elected in his stead, by the unanimous choice of the whole nation. He governed as wisely as he had lived; and at his death his picture, bearing on the head eight pennies, was reposited among the effigies of the deceased Emperors.

'Application: My beloved, the Emperor is God, who appointed Sunday as a day of rest. By Virgil is typified the Holy Spirit, which ordains a preacher to declare men's virtues and vices. Focus is any good Christian who labours diligently in his vocation, and performs faithfully every relative duty.'

The story has point and humour, but in the latter quality it is surpassed by the next one, entitled *Confession*.

'A certain Emperor, named Asmodeus, established an ordinance, by which every malefactor taken and brought before the judge should, if he distinctly declared three truths, against which no exception could be taken, obtain his life and property. It chanced that a certain soldier transgressed the law and fled. He hid himself in a forest, and there committed many atrocities, despoiling and slaying whomsoever he could lay his hands upon. When the judge of the district ascertained his haunt, he ordered the forest to be surrounded, and the soldier to be seized and brought bound to the seat of judgment. "You know the law," said the judge. "I do," returned the other: "If I declare three unquestionable truths, I shall be free; but if not, I must die." "True," replied the judge; "take, then, advantage of the law's clemency, or this very day you shall not taste food until you are hanged." "Cause silence to be kept," said the soldier. His wish being complied with, he proceeded in the following manner. "The first truth is this: I protest before ye all, that from my youth up I have been a bad man." The judge, hearing this, said to the bystanders: "He says true, else he had not now been in this situation. Go on,

then," continued the judge; "what is the second truth?" "I like not," exclaimed he, "the dangerous situation in which I stand." "Certainly," said the judge, "we may credit thee. Now then for the third truth, and thou hast saved thy life." "Why," he replied, "if I once get out of this confounded place, I will never willingly re-enter it." "Amen," said the judge, "thy wit hath preserved thee; go in peace." And thus he was saved.

'Application: My beloved, the emperor is Christ. The soldier is any sinner; the judge is a wise confessor. If the sinner confess the truth in such a manner as not even demons can object, he shall be saved; that is, if he confess and repent.'

The 'Gesta' is a rich storehouse from which many poets, including Gower, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Parnell, and others, have borrowed. Shakespeare's 'Pericles' has its source in the 'Gesta'; so also Parnell's delightful poem, 'The Hermit,' and Dr. John Byrom's 'Three Black Crows' are from the same prolific treasure-house.

FOOTNOTES:

[50] In the whole range of literature there are no apter similes than these: the darkness and gloom of the fool's heart and the closeness of the miser's fist.

[51] A nobleman of the East, famous for his hospitality.

[52] 'About a dozen instances or so must stand for the present as representing the contribution of the Jātakas to the question of the origin of Æsop's fables.'—Jacobs: 'History of Fable.'

[53] In her 'Commonplace Book,' Longmans, 1854, pp. 142, 143.

CHAPTER XII.
MODERN FABULISTS: LA FONTAINE, GAY.

'Lie gently on their ashes, gentle earth.'

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

IT is a remarkable circumstance in connection with the literature of fable, that those who have excelled in it are comparatively few. The principal names that occur to us are Æsop, La Fontaine, Gay, Lessing, Krilof; 'the rest are all but leather or prunello,' if we except a few rare examples from Northcote and Cowper. The composition of fables seems to call for the exercise of a talent which is peculiar and rare. La Fontaine says[54] that the writing of apologues is a gift sent down from the immortals. Not even those who have practised the art have always succeeded in it to perfection. Gay, who is esteemed the best of the English fabulists, is often prolix and lacking in point. La Fontaine, sprightly as are his renderings of the ancient fables which he found ready to his hand, is weak and commonplace in his attempts at originality. Dodsley is too didactic and goody-goody; Northcote is stilted, and often unnatural. Even Krilof, admirable as he generally is, is sometimes darkly obscure, and his moral difficult to find. Lessing comes nearest to the terseness and concentration of the Æsopian model, but many of his so-called fables are better described as epigrams and witticisms. True, all these writers have sometimes, like the Phrygian, 'hit the mark,' but oftener they have missed not only the bull's-eye, but the target itself; and the arrows of their satire are frequently lost in the mazes of verbiage. Æsop alone is in the fable what Shakespeare is in the drama, a paragon without a peer, and all competitors with either of these master minds must be content to take a lower place—to stand on a lower plane.

Excellent as many modern fables fare, full of instruction and entertainment, it is but few of them that spontaneously recur to us in connection with the affairs of daily life.

Amongst modern fabulists, La Fontaine stands in the front rank. Jean de la Fontaine was born at Chateau-Thierry on July 8, 1621; died in Paris, March 15, 1695,[55] in his seventy-fourth year; and was buried in the cemetery of St. Joseph, near the remains of his friend Molière. He was one of the galaxy of great men and writers that adorned the age of Louis XIV. His fables, as is well known, are in verse, and include the best of those from ancient sources, with others of his own invention. He may be said to have turned Æsop into rhyme. The happy spirit of the genial Frenchman inspires them all. They are written with a vivacity and sprightliness all his own, and these qualities, with the humour which he infuses into them, make their perusal exhilarating and health-giving.

'I have considered,' says he, 'that as these fables are already known to all the world, I should have done nothing if I had not rendered them in some degree new, by clothing them with certain fresh characteristics. I have endeavoured to meet the wants of the day, which are novelty and gaiety; and by gaiety I do not mean merely that which excites laughter, but a certain charm, an agreeable air, which may be given to every species of subject, even the most serious.'[56] He had attained to middle age before he found his true vocation in literature, his first collection of fables in six books being published in 1668, when he was forty-seven years of age.

La Fontaine is well known in this country by the English translations of his work. A version containing some of his best fables was published anonymously in 1820, but is known to be from the pen of John Matthews of Herefordshire. In his preface, Matthews states that the fables are not altogether a translation or an imitation of La Fontaine, because in most of them are allusions to public characters and the events of the times, where they are suggested by the subject. These allusions are largely political. The fables, apart from these ephemeral references to personages and events, are written with great cleverness and vivacity, full of humour, and in many instances are well suited for recitation.

The Fox and the Stork is a good example of his style:

'For sport once Renard, sly old sinner,
Press'd gossip Stork to share his dinner.
"Neighbour, I must entreat you'll stay

And take your soup with me to-day.
My praise shall not my fare enhance,
But let me beg you'll take your chance;
You're kindly welcome were it better."
She yielded as he thus beset her,
And soon arrived the pottage smoking
In plates of shallow depth provoking.
'Twas vain the guest essay'd to fill
With unsubstantial fare her bill.
'Twas vain she fish'd to find a collop,
The host soon lapp'd the liquor all up.
Dame Stork conceal'd her deep displeasure,
But thought to find revenge at leisure;
And said, "Ere long, my friend, you'll try
My humble hospitality.
I know your taste, and we'll contrive—
To-morrow I'm at home at five."
With punctual haste the wily scoffer
Accepts his neighbour's friendly offer,
And ent'ring cries, "Dear Stork, how is it?
You see I soon return your visit,
I can't resist when you invite;
I've brought a famous appetite.
The steam which issues from your kitchen
Proves that your pot there's something rich in."
The Stork with civil welcome greeted,
And soon at table they were seated,
When lo! there came upon the board
Hash'd goose in two tall pitchers pour'd—
Pitchers whose long and narrow neck
Sly Renard's jaws completely check,
Whilst the gay hostess, much diverted,
Her bill with perfect ease inserted.
The Fox, half mad at this retorter,
Sought dinner in some other quarter.
Hoaxers, for you this tale is written,

Learn hence that biters may be bitten.'

Matthews adds this note: '*Hoaxers, for you, this tale is written*. The word "hoax," though sufficiently expressive, and admitted into general use, has not, perhaps, found its way into the dictionaries. It is, however, of some importance, as it serves in some measure to characterize the times we live in. Former periods have been distinguished by the epithets golden, silver, brazen, iron. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of metals which chemistry has now discovered, none of them may be sufficiently descriptive of the manners of men in these days. Quitting, therefore, the ancient mode of classification, the present may not be unaptly designated the hoaxing age. The term deserves a definition. A hoax may be said to be *a practical joke, calculated more or less to injure its object, sometimes accompanied by a high degree of criminality*. This definition, which is much at the service of future English lexicographers, includes not only the minor essays of mischievous humour, which assembles all the schoolmasters of the Metropolis at one house; the medical professors and undertakers at another; the milliners, mantua-makers, and mercers at a third; whilst the street before the victim's door is blocked up by grand pianofortes, Grecian couches, caravans of wild beasts, and patent coffins; but also the more sublime strokes of genius, which would acquire sudden wealth by throwing Change Alley into an uproar—which would gain excessive popularity by gulling the English people with a show of mock patriotism—which can make bankrupts in fortune and reputation leaders of thousands and tens of thousands, so as to threaten destruction to the State. The performers of all these notable exploits may be denominated hoaxers, most of whom may, in the end, find themselves involved in the predicament expressed in the concluding couplet of the fable.'

We are tempted to give another very fine example from Matthews, containing as it does an interesting reference to the two mighty men of letters of the first quarter of the present century—*The Viper and the File:*

'A Viper chanc'd his head to pop
Into a neighbouring blacksmith's shop.
Long near the place had he been lurking,
And stayed till past the hours for working.
As with keen eyes he glanc'd around

In search of food, a File he found:
Of meats he saw no single item
Which tempted hungry jaws to bite 'em.
So with his fangs the eager fool
Attack'd the rough impassive tool;
And whilst his wounded palate bled,
Fancied on foreign gore he fed.
When thus the File retorted coolly:
"Viper! this work's ingenious, truly!
No more those idle efforts try;
Proof 'gainst assaults like yours am I.
On me you'd fracture ev'ry bone;
I feel the teeth of Time alone."
Thus did a Poet,[57] vain and young
(Who since has palinody sung),
His fangs upon a Minstrel's lay[58]
Fix hard. 'Twas labour thrown away!
On that sweet Bard of Doric strain
This venom'd bite was tried in vain:
His flights, thro' no dark medium view'd,
Derive from fog no magnitude;
But bright and clear to charm our eyes
His vivid pictures boldly rise.
In painting manners, arms, and dress, sure
Time show'd him all his form and pressure.
Bard of the North! thou still shalt be
A File to Critics, harsh as he.
Tho' Time has teeth, thou need'st not fear 'em;
Thy verse defies old Edax Rerum!'

It must be confessed that the general moral here is not very obvious, though the special application of the fable to the circumstances of Byron's attack on Scott, and his subsequent recantation—with the fabulist's eulogy of the 'Bard of the North'—are expressed in charming and faultless verse.

John Gay, who was born in the parish of Landkey, near Barnstaple, Devonshire, in 1685, and died in London, on December 4, 1732, aged forty-seven, is, without question, the best of the English fabulists. Unlike most writers in this department of literature, his fables are almost all original. His language is choice and elegant, yet well suited to his subject. His rhymes are perfect, and at times he almost rises into poetry. His fables, however, are lacking in humour, and they have not that abounding *esprit* and *naïveté* which characterize La Fontaine.

Gay was a writer of much industry,[59] producing during his lifetime almost every species of composition. His 'Beggar's Opera' is yet occasionally seen on the stage, and this, after his fables, is his best-known work.

He was essentially Bohemian in disposition and habits, and lacking in business capacity; a man of culture, however, a pleasant companion, and a warm-hearted friend. He was on intimate terms with Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, and other distinguished men of letters and wits of his day, and the eccentric but kind-hearted Duchess of Queensberry was his patron and friend. Unfortunately, he was too much given to dangling at the skirts of the great, and sueing for place at Court instead of depending on his own genius, which was unquestionably of no mean order. Notwithstanding this failing, he was no sycophant or flatterer, but exposed the follies and vices of human nature, as exemplified in the characters of the rich and great, as in those of the humbler ranks, without fear or favour. His best-known fables are probably *The Hare and many Friends*, and *The Miser and Plutus*.

Many of Gay's lines, both from his fables and plays, have become widely popular, for example:

'Princes, like beauties, from their youth
Are strangers to the voice of truth.
Learn to contemn all praise betimes,
For Flattery's the nurse of crimes.'

'In every age and clime we see
Two of a trade can ne'er agree.'

'While there's life there's hope.'

'Those who in quarrels interpose
Must often wipe a bloody nose.'

'When a lady's in the case
You know all other things give place.'

'And what's a butterfly? At best
He's but a caterpillar dressed.'

"Tis woman that seduces all mankind.'

'How happy could I be with either
Were t'other dear charmer away.'

And his own epitaph, written by himself:

'Life's a jest, and all things show it;
I thought so once, and now I know it.'

In the letter to Pope in which this distich is given, he says: 'If anybody should ask how I could communicate this after death, let it be known it is not meant so, but my present sentiments in life.'

Gay was buried in Westminster Abbey. The monument which marks his grave bears the well-known lines composed by Pope:

'Of manners gentle, of Affections mild,
In wit a Man, simplicity, a child;
With native Humour, temp'ring Virtuous Rage,
Formed to delight at once and lash the Age:
Above Temptation in a low Estate,
And uncorrupted, e'en among the great.
A safe Companion, and an easy Friend,
Unblam'd thro' life, lamented in thy End.
These are thy Honours! Not that here thy Bust
Is mix'd with Heroes, or with Kings thy Dust:
But that the Worthy and the Good shall say,
Striking their pensive bosoms,—here lies Gay.'

The piece we have selected, *The Miser and Plutus*, as an example of his work as a fabulist, is in his best style, and the moral is irreproachable:

'The wind was high, the window shakes,
With sudden start the Miser wakes;
Along the silent room he stalks,
Looks back, and trembles as he walks.
Each lock and every bolt he tries,
In every creek and corner pries;
Then opes the chest with treasure stor'd,
And stands in rapture o'er his hoard:
But now with sudden qualms possest,
He wrings his hands, he beats his breast;
By conscience stung he wildly stares,
And thus his guilty soul declares:
"Had the deep earth her stores confin'd,
This heart had known sweet peace of mind.
But virtue's sold. Good gods! what price
Can recompense the pangs of vice?
O bane of good! seducing cheat!
Can man, weak man, thy power defeat?
Gold banish'd honour from the mind,
And only left the name behind;
Gold sow'd the world with every ill;
Gold taught the murderer's sword to kill.
'Twas gold instructed coward hearts
In treachery's more pernicious arts.
Who can recount the mischiefs o'er?
Virtue resides on earth no more!"
He spoke, and sighed. In angry mood
Plutus, his god, before him stood.
The Miser, trembling, locked his chest;
The Vision frowned, and thus address'd:
"Whence is this vile ungrateful rant,
Each sordid rascal's daily cant?
Did I, base wretch! corrupt mankind?

The fault's in thy rapacious mind.
Because my blessings are abused,
Must I be censur'd, curs'd, accus'd?
Ev'n virtue's self by knaves is made
A cloak to carry on the trade;
And power (when lodg'd in their possession)
Grows tyranny, and rank oppression.
Thus when the villain crams his chest,
Gold is the canker of the breast;
'Tis avarice, insolence, and pride,
And ev'ry shocking vice beside;
But when to virtuous hands 'tis given,
It blesses, like the dews of Heaven;
Like Heaven, it hears the orphan's cries,
And wipes the tears from widows' eyes.
Their crimes on gold shall misers lay,
Who pawn'd their sordid souls for pay?
Let bravos, then, when blood is spilt,
Upbraid the passive sword with guilt.'"

FOOTNOTES:

[54] In his dedication to Madame de Montespan.

[55] Geruzez gives February 13 as the date of La Fontaine's death.

[56] Preface, 'Fables,' 1668.

[57] Byron.

[58] Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel.'

[59] The opposite of this has been said, but without good reason. The number and variety of his productions attest his industry.

CHAPTER XIII.
MODERN FABULISTS: DODSLEY, NORTHCOTE.

'A tale may find him who a sermon flies.'

GEORGE HERBERT.

ROBERT DODSLEY, born at Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, in 1703, died at Durham, December 25, 1764, buried in the abbey churchyard there, author of 'The Economy of Human Life' and other estimable works, compiled a volume of fables (1761). This was the favourite collection in this country at the end of last and the beginning of the present century. The contents of the volume are in three parts, and comprise 'Ancient Fables,' 'Modern Fables,' and 'Fables Newly Invented.' The first two divisions of the volume are Æsopian in character. The fables contained in the last were not all written by Dodsley, some of them being contributed, as he states in his preface, 'by authors with whom it is an honour to be connected, and who having condescended to favour him with their assistance, have given him an opportunity of making some atonement for his own defects.' It is to be regretted that he did not give the names of the authors referred to. The work contains a life of Æsop 'by a learned friend' (no name given),[60] and an excellent, though somewhat pedantic, 'Essay on Fable.'

The following are three original fables from Dodsley's collection:

'*The Miser and the Magpie.*—As a miser sat at his desk counting over his heaps of gold, a magpie eloped from his cage, picked up a guinea, and hopped away with it. The miser, who never failed to count his money over a second time, immediately missed the piece, and rising up from his seat in the utmost consternation, observed the felon hiding it in a crevice of the floor. "And art thou," cried he, "that worst of thieves, who hast robbed me of my gold without the plea of necessity, and without regard to its proper use? But thy life shall atone for so preposterous a villainy." "Soft words, good master!" quoth the magpie. "Have I, then, injured you in any other sense than you

defraud the public? And am I not using your money in the same manner you do yourself? If I must lose my life for hiding a single guinea, what do you, I pray, deserve, who secrete so many thousands?"'

'*The Toad and the Ephemeron.*—As some workmen were digging in a mountain of Scythia, they discerned a toad of enormous size in the midst of a solid rock. They were very much surprised at so uncommon an appearance, and the more they considered the circumstances of it, the more their wonder increased. It was hard to conceive by what means the creature had preserved life and received nourishment in so narrow a prison, and still more difficult to account for his birth and existence in a place so totally inaccessible to all of his species. They could conclude no other than that he was formed together with the rock in which he had been bred, and was coeval with the mountain itself. While they were pursuing these speculations, the toad sat swelling and bloating till he was ready to burst with pride and self-importance, to which at last he thus gave vent: "Yes," says he, "you behold in me a specimen of the antediluvian race of animals. I was begotten before the flood; and who is there among the present upstart race of mortals that shall dare to contend with me in nobility of birth or dignity of character?" An ephemeron, sprung that morning from the river Hypanis, as he was flying about from place to place, chanced to be present, and observed all that passed with great attention and curiosity. "Vain boaster," says he, "what foundation hast thou for pride, either in thy descent, merely because it is ancient, or thy life, because it hath been long? What good qualities hast thou received from thy ancestors? Insignificant even to thyself, as well as useless to others, thou art almost as insensible as the block in which thou wast bred. Even I, that had my birth only from the scum of the neighbouring river, at the rising of this day's sun, and who shall die at its setting, have more reason to applaud my condition than thou hast to be proud of thine. I have enjoyed the warmth of the sun, the light of the day, and the purity of the air; I have flown from stream to stream, from tree to tree, and from the plain to the mountain; I have provided for posterity, and shall leave behind me a numerous offspring to people the next age of to-morrow; in short, I have fulfilled all the ends of my being, and I have been happy. My whole life, 'tis true, is but of twelve

hours, but even one hour of it is to be preferred to a thousand years of mere existence, which have been spent, like thine, in sloth, ignorance and stupidity.'"

'*The Bee and the Spider*.—On the leaves and flowers of the same shrub, a spider and a bee pursued their several occupations, the one covering her thighs with honey, the other distending his bag with poison. The spider, as he glanced his eye obliquely at the bee, was ruminating with spleen on the superiority of her productions. "And how happens it," said he, in a peevish tone, "that I am able to collect nothing but poison from the selfsame plant that supplies thee with honey? My pains and industry are not less than thine; in those respects we are each indefatigable." "It proceeds only," replied the bee, "from the different disposition of our nature; mine gives a pleasing flavour to everything I touch, whereas thine converts to poison what by a different process had been the purest honey."'

James Northcote, R.A., the indefatigable painter, who, when a youth, enjoyed the friendship of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and was occasionally one of the company at his hospitable table, along with Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, Garrick and Boswell, published two volumes of original and selected fables in 1828-33, when he was eighty-two years of age. When a boy, living at Plymouth, where he was born on October 22, 1746, he took pleasure in copying the pictures from an edition of Æsop's fables. The memory of these clung to him through life, and, as occasion offered, he occupied himself in composing apologues in imitation of those with which he was familiar in his early years.

The diction of Northcote's fables is admirable. They are in the choicest phraseology, both in their verse and prose, for he practised both forms of composition, though chiefly the latter. Neither crisp nor brilliant, they are now and again lighted up with scintillations of humour. His applications are delivered with grave solemnity befitting a judge or a philosopher—not to say a bore; and in many instances they extend to three or four times the length of the fable itself.

Northcote died in London at the ripe age of eighty-five, and was buried beneath the New Church of St. Marylebone.

Perhaps his best fables are *The Jay and the Owl*, *Echo and the Parrot*, *Stone Broth*, and *The Trooper and his Armour*. None of Northcote's fables have become popular with the multitude, though many of them are good examples of this class of composition. We give the last-named piece as a specimen of his work as a fabulist. The application is well conceived, but it is scarcely indicated in the fable:

'A trooper, in the time of battle, picked up the shoe of a horse that lay in his way, and quickly by a cord suspended it from his neck. Soon after, in a skirmish with the enemy, a shot struck exactly on the said horseshoe and saved his life,[61] as it fell harmless to the ground. "Well done," said the trooper, "I see that a very little armour is sufficient when it is well placed."

'Application: Although the trooper's good luck with his bit of armour may appear to be the effect of chance, yet certain it is that prudent persons are always prepared to receive good fortune, or may be said to meet it half-way, turning every accident if possible to good, which gives an appearance as if they were the favourites of fortune; whilst the thoughtless and improvident, on the contrary, often neglect to embrace the very blessings which chance throws in their way, and then survey with envy those who prosper by their careful and judicious conduct, and blame their partial or hard fortune for all those privations and sufferings which their mismanagement alone has brought upon themselves.'

FOOTNOTES:

[60] It has been suggested, that Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith were the 'authors,' and Goldsmith the 'learned friend.' See the preface by Edwin Pearson to the 1871 edition, of Bewick's 'Select Fables of Æsop.'

[61] Northcote's grammar is at fault here.

CHAPTER XIV.

MODERN FABULISTS: LESSING, YRIARTE, KRILOF.

'Great thoughts, great feelings, come to them
Like instincts, unawares.'

R. M. MILNES.

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING, born January 22, 1729, at Kamenz, died February 15, 1781, aged fifty-two years, was a distinguished German scholar, poet and dramatist. As a fabulist, Lessing is noted for epigrammatic point rather than humour, though he is by no means lacking in the latter characteristic. He is perhaps the most original writer of fables amongst the moderns. Sagacious, wise, witty, his apologues (1759) have nothing superfluous about them. They are nearly all brief, pithy, and very much to the point. In these respects they follow the Æsopian model more than those of any other modern writer. The following are good examples of his style:

'*Æsop and the Ass.*—"The next time you write a fable about me," said the donkey to Æsop, "make me say something wise and sensible."

'"Something sensible from you!" exclaimed Æsop; "what would the world think? People would call you the sage, and me the donkey!"

'*The Shepherd and the Nightingale.*—"Sing to me, dearest nightingale," said a shepherd to the silent songstress one beautiful spring evening.

'"Alas!" said the nightingale, "the frogs make so much noise that I have no inclination to sing. Do you not hear them?"

'"Undoubtedly I hear them," replied the shepherd, "but it is owing to your silence."

'*Solomon's Ghost.*—A venerable old man, despite his years and the heat of the day, was ploughing his field with his own hand, and sowing the grain in the willing earth, in anticipation of the harvest it would produce.

'Suddenly, beneath the deep shadow of a spreading oak, a divine apparition stood before him! The old man was seized with affright.

'"I am Solomon," said the phantom encouragingly, "what dost thou here, old friend?"

'"If thou art Solomon," said the owner of the field, "how canst thou ask? In my youth I learnt from the ant to be industrious and to accumulate wealth. That which I then learnt I now practise."

'"Thou hast learnt but half of thy lesson," pursued the spirit. "Go once more to the ant, and she will teach thee to rest in the winter of thy existence, and enjoy what thou hast earned."'

Don Tomas de Yriarte, or Iriarte, a Spanish fabulist of the eighteenth century, born at Teneriffe in 1750, is held in much esteem by cultured readers in Spain. His 'Fabulas Literarias,' or Literary Fables (1782), sixty-seven in all, and mostly original, were written with a view to inculcating literary truths. In other words, their object was to praise or censure literary work according to its supposed deserts. Their moral or application is therefore limited in scope; they do not touch human nature as a whole, and being thus restricted in their range, they are deficient in general interest and value. Obviously, however, it is possible to give a wider application to the truths enforced in the apologues, and this is sometimes done by omitting the special moral supplied by the writer. Yriarte's versification is graceful and sprightly, 'combining the exquisite simplicity of the old Spanish romances and songs with the true spirit of Æsopian fable;'[62] some of them are composed in the redondilla measure much affected by the lyrical poets of Spain, and please by their style quite as much as by their intrinsic merits. Yriarte died in 1791. We select the piece which follows to illustrate his skill as a fabulist:

'*The Two Thrushes.*

'A sage old thrush was once discipling
His grandson thrush, a hair-brained stripling,
In the purveying art. He knew,
He said, where vines in plenty grew,
Whose fruit delicious when he'd come

He might attack *ad libitum*.

"Ha!" said the young one, "where's this vine?
Let's see this fruit you think so fine."
"Come then, my child, your fortune's great; you
Can't conceive what feasts await you!"
He said, and gliding through the air
They reached a vine, and halted there.

Soon as the grapes the youngster spied,
"Is this the fruit you praise?" he cried;
"Why, an old bird, sir, as you are,
Should judge, I think, more wisely far
Than to admire, or hold as good,
Such half-grown, small, and worthless food.
Come, see a fruit which I possess
In yonder garden; you'll confess,
When you behold it, that it is
Bigger and better far than this."
"I'll go," he said; "but ere I see
This fruit of yours, whate'er it be,
I'm sure it is not worth a stone
Or grape-skin from my vines alone."

They reached the spot the thrushlet named,
And he triumphantly exclaimed:
"Show me the fruit to equal mine!
A size so great, a shape so fine;
What luxury, however rare,
Can e'en your grapes with this compare?"
The old bird stared, as well he might,
For lo! a pumpkin met his sight.

Now, that a thrush should take this fancy
Without much marvelling I can see;
But it is truly monstrous when
Men, who are held as learned men,
All books, whatever they be, despise
Unless of largest bulk and size.
A book is great, if good at all;

If bad, it cannot be too small.'

Ivan Andreivitch Krilof, or Krilov, the Russian, who was born in Moscow, February 2, 1768, O.S., and died in St. Petersburg on November 9, 1844, aged seventy-six years, was one of the greatest original fabulists of modern times. One writer (an Englishman) goes so far as to claim for him the position of 'the crowned King of the fabulists of all languages.' His published fables amount altogether to two hundred and two, of which thirty-five only are borrowed, the rest being original. They are in rhymed verse in the Russian, and an English translation, also in verse, and with a close adherence to the text in the original, has been made by Mr. J. Henry Harrison.[63] An excellent prose translation, with a life of Krilof, by the late Mr. W. R. S. Ralston, M.A., was published in 1868.[64]

Krilof is characterized by rich common sense and sound judgment, a rare vein of satire and an excellent humour. He indeed brims over with sarcastic humour. A kind of rugged directness of language, well calculated to undermine the shams and abuses at which he aimed, also distinguishes his apologues. He deserves to be better known in this country.

Krilof was a journalist, and wrote a number of dramas, both in tragedy and comedy, before turning his attention to fables. It is on these latter that his claim to distinction rests. He rose to high eminence in his native country, where his name is a household word; he was patronized by royalty, and beloved by the common people, and at his death a monument to his memory was erected in the Summer Garden at St. Petersburg.

The following translation of Krilof's beautiful fable of *The Leaves and the Roots* is from a brilliant article in *Fraser's Magazine* for February, 1839:

"Twas on a sunny summer day,
Exulting in the flickering shade
They cast athwart the greensward glade,
The leaves, a fluttering host,
Thus 'gan their worth to boast,
And to each other say:
"Is it not we
That deck the tree—

Its stem and branches all array
In verdant pomp and vigorous grace?
Deprived of us, how altered were their case!
Is it not we who form the grateful screen
Of foliage and luxuriant green,
    Welcome to traveller and to swain?
    Yes! we may be deeméd vain,
But we it is whose charms invite
    Youths and maidens to the grove;
And we it is, too, who at night
    Shelter in her retired alcove
    The songstress of the woods, whose strain
    Wafts music over dale and plain!
In us the zephyrs most rejoice:
Our emerald beauty to caress,
On silken wings they fondly press!"
    "Most true; but yet
    You ought not to forget
We too exist," replied a voice
That issued from the earth;
"We sure possess some little worth."
"And who are ye? where do ye grow?"
"Buried are we here below,
Deep in the ground. 'Tis we who nourish
The stem and you, and make you flourish:
For understand, we are the roots
From whom the tree itself upshoots:
'Tis we by whom you thrive—
From whom your beauty ye derive;
Unlike to you, we are not fair,
Nor dwell we in the upper air;
Yet do we not, like you, decay—
Winter tears us not away.
Ye fall, yet still remains the tree;
But should it chance that *we*
Once cease to live, adieu

Both to the tree, fair leaves, and you!"'

As an example of his ironical humour we give a prose translation, by Mr. Ralston, of his fable *The Geese*:

'A peasant, with a long rod in his hand, was driving some geese to a town where they were to be sold; and, to tell the truth, he did not treat them over-politely. In hopes of making a good bargain, he was hastening on so as not to lose the market-day (and when gain is concerned, geese and men alike are apt to suffer). I do not blame the peasant; but the geese talked about him in a different spirit, and, whenever they met any passers-by, abused him to them in such terms as these:

'"Is it possible to find any geese more unfortunate than we are? This moujik[65] harasses us so terribly, and chases us about just as if we were common geese. The ignoramus does not know that he ought to pay us reverence, seeing that we are the noble descendants of those geese to whom Rome was once indebted for her salvation, and in whose honour even feast-days were specially appointed there."

'"And do you want to have honour paid you on that account?" a passer-by asked them.

'"Why, our ancestors——"

'"I know that—I have read all about it; but I want to know this: of what use have you been yourselves?"

'"Why, our ancestors saved Rome!"

'"Quite so; but what have you done?"

'"We? Nothing."

'"Then, what merit is there in you? Let your ancestors rest in peace—they justly received honourable reward; but you, my friends, are only fit to be roasted!"'

Krilof concludes: 'It would be easy to make this fable still more intelligible; but I am afraid of irritating the geese.'

A story, rather than a fable, is *The Man with Three Wives*, and the moral underlying it is in the author's peculiar vein. This is translated from the original by Mr. J. H. Harrison:

'A certain vanquisher of women's hearts,
While still his first wife was alive and well,
Married a second, and a third. They tell
The king the scandal of such shameless arts,
And, as his majesty abhorred all vice,
    Given himself to self-denial,
    He gave the order in a trice
    To bring the bigamist to trial,
And such a punishment invent, that none
Should evermore dare do what he had done.
"And if the punishment to me should seem too small,
Around their table will I hang the judges all."
    This to the judges seemed no joke:
    The cold sweat ran along each spine.
Three days and nights they sit, but can't divine
What punishment will best such lawless license choke.
Thousands of punishments there are; but then,
    As all men of experience know,
They cannot keep from evil evil men.
This time kind Providence did help them though,
And when the culprit came before the court,
    This was his sentence short:
To give him back his three wives all together.
The people wondered much at this decision,
And thought the judges' lives hung by a feather;
    But three days had not passed before
    The bigamist, behind his door,
Himself hung to a peg with great precision:
And then the sentence wrought on all great fear,
And much the morals of the kingdom steadied,
For from that time its annalists are clear
That no man in it more has three wives wedded.'

FOOTNOTES:

[62] Bouterwick's 'History of Spanish Literature,' book iii., chap. iii.

[63] London: Remington and Co., 1883.

[64] London: Strahan and Co., 1868. A second edition appeared the year following.

[65] Peasant.

CHAPTER XV.
OTHER AND OCCASIONAL FABULISTS.

'With wisdom fraught,
Not such as books, but such as Nature taught.'

WALLER.

SIR ROGER L'ESTRANGE (1616-1704) was a rabid Jacobite, journalist, and pamphleteer, and during a long life spent in fierce political conflict, in which, at times, he bore a far from estimable part, found time to translate various classical works, amongst these being Æsop's fables. L'Estrange's version (1692) of the sage is not in the best taste. It is disfigured by mannerisms and vulgarisms in language, and the applications which he appended to the fables are often a distortion of the true intent of the apologue, stated so as to support and enforce his own peculiar views in politics and religion.

Steele (1672-1729) was the author of at least one excellent fable,[66] *The Mastiff and his Puppy*, not unworthy to take a place beside those of the Greek sage:

'It happened one day, as a stout and honest mastiff (that guarded the village where he lived against thieves and robbers) was very gravely walking with one of his puppies by his side, all the little dogs in the street gathered round him, and barked at him. The little puppy was so offended at this affront done to his sire, that he asked him why he would not fall upon them, and tear them to pieces. To which the sire answered with great composure of mind, "If there were no curs, I should be no mastiff."'

Of other fabulists, it will be sufficient, without going into lengthy particulars, to name Allan Ramsay (1686-1758), who attempted the writing of fables, though with but doubtful success; of the thirty he produced there is not one of striking merit. Edmund Arwaker, Rector of Donaghmore, who compiled a collection of two hundred and twenty-five select fables from Æsop and

others, which he entitled, 'Truth in Fiction; or, Morality in Masquerade' (1708). John Hall-Stevenson, 1718-1785 (the original of Sterne's 'Eugenius'), wrote 'Fables for Grown Gentlemen.' Edward Moore composed a series of original 'Fables for the Fair Sex' (1756), pleasing in their versification, but otherwise of no striking merit. Moore, besides a number of poems, odes and songs, wrote two comedies ('The Foundling' and 'Gil Blas') and a tragedy ('The Gamester'), in which Garrick acted the leading characters. He was also editor of the *World*, a satirical journal of the period, which had a brief life of four years. He died in poverty in 1751. Francis Gentleman (actor and dramatist), whose collection of 'Royal Fables' (1766) was dedicated to George, Prince of Wales. William Wilkie, D.D., a Scotch fabulist of some note in his day, was Professor of Natural Philosophy in St. Andrews University. In 1768 he published a volume containing sixteen fables after the manner of Gay. One of these, *The Boy and the Rainbow*,[67] a fable of considerable merit, has survived; the others are forgotten. Rev. Henry Rowe, whose fables tire without interesting. 'Fables for Mankind,' by Charles Westmacott. 'The Fables of Flora,' by Dr. Langhorne. Gaspey wrote a number of original fables, as did also Dr. Aitken and Walter Brown. Cowper, the poet, penned some elegant fables with which most readers are familiar. There are 'Fables for Children, Young and Old, in Humorous Verse,' by W. E. Staite (1830); Sheridan Wilson was the author of a volume entitled 'The Bath Fables' (1850); finally, there is Frere's Fables for 'Five Years Old.' Æsop's fables have been parodied and caricatured, with varying success, by different writers, notably by an American author, under the pseudonym of 'G. Washington Æsop.'

Of lady fabulists, the most notable is Maria de France, who lived in the first half of the thirteenth century, and made a collection of one hundred and six fables in French, which, she alleges, were translated from the English of King Alfred.[68] There are several more modern collections by members of the fair sex. One is entitled 'The Enchanted Plants, Fables in Verse;' London, 1800. The name of the author is not given, but evidently a lady. Mrs. Trimmer has her version of Æsop. A volume of original fables was published by Mary Maria Colling, a writer of humble rank, under the patronage of the once

celebrated Mrs. Bray (daughter of Thomas Stothard, R.A.), and Southey, the Poet Laureate. A volume of fables, also original, by Mrs. Prosser, and 'Æsop's Fables in Words of One Syllable,' by Mary Godolphin.

Besides the fabulists already named, there are, among the ancients, Avian, Ademar, Rufus, Romulus, Alfonso and Poggio. Among the French, Nivernois, and the Abbé Fénelon (1651-1715), author of 'Dialogues of the Dead' and 'Telemachus.' Notwithstanding his reputation in his own country as a fabulist, it must be allowed that his fables are much too lengthy and prolix. The characters he gives to his animals are unnatural, and their manners and speech pointless and tame. Florian, an imitator of Yriarte, and a friend of Voltaire, by whose advice he cultivated the literature of Spain; Boursalt, Boisard, Ginguene, Jauffret, Le Grand and Armoult. Amongst the Germans are, Gellert (1746), Nicolai, Hagedorn, Pfeffel and Lichtner. The Italian fabulists are numerous: Tommaso Crudeli (1703-1743), Gian-Carlo Passeroni (1713-1803), Giambattisti Roberti (1719-1786), Luigi Grillo (1725-1790), Lorenzo Pignotti (1739-1812), who with an elegant diction combines splendid descriptive powers; Clemente Bondi (1742-1821), Aurelio de Giorgi Bertola (1753-1798), Luigi Clasio (1754-1825), Giovanni Gherardo de Rossi (1754-1827), Gaetano Perego (1814-1868) and Gaetano Polidori. Among Spanish fabulists, besides Yriarte, there is Samaniego (1745-1801). Of Russian writers of fables we have already spoken of Krilof, and there are besides, Chemnitzer, Dmitriev, Glinka, Lomonosov (1711-1765), Goncharov and Alexander Sumarakov (1718-1777). Of English writers not already referred to, the following may be named as having tried their hand at the composition of fables: Addison, Sir John Vanbrugh,[69] Prior, Goldsmith, Henryson, Coyne, Winter. Thomas Percival, M.D., President of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester about the end of last century, wrote a volume of moral tales, fables, and reflections. Bussey's collection is well known. The late W. J. Macquorn Rankine, Regius Professor of Civil Engineering in Glasgow University, wrote a number of 'Songs and Fables,' which were published posthumously in a small volume in 1874. The fables, twelve in all, are an ingenious attempt, not wanting in playful humour, to elucidate the origin and meaning of some of the old and well-known signboards, such as *The Pig and Whistle*, *The Cat and Fiddle*, *The Goat and Compasses*, and others. An interesting collection of one hundred and six 'Indian Fables,' in English, the

materials for which were gathered from native sources and put into form by Mr. P. V. Ramaswami Raju, B.A., were originally contributed to the columns of the *Leisure Hour*, and afterwards published in a volume (1887).[70]

Specimens of the work of some of the writers named are given in the succeeding pages.

The Bee and the Coquette (Florian).—'Chloe, young, handsome, and a decided coquette, laboured very hard every morning on rising; people say it was at her toilet; and there, smiling and smirking, she related to her dear confidant all her pains, her pleasures, and the projects of her soul.

'A thoughtless bee, entering her chamber, began buzzing about. "Help! help!" immediately shrieked the lady. "Lizzy! Mary! here, make haste! drive away this winged monster!"

'The insolent insect settling on Chloe's lips, she fainted; and Mary, furiously seizing the bee, prepared to crush it.

'"Alas!" gently exclaimed the unfortunate insect, "forgive my error; Chloe's mouth seemed to me a rose, and as such I kissed it."

'This speech restored Chloe to her senses: "Let us forgive it," said she, "on account of its candid confession! Besides, its sting is but a trifle; since it has spoken to you, I have scarcely felt it."

'What may one not effect by a little well-timed flattery?'

The Farmer, Horseman, and Pedestrian (Nivernois).

'A farmer on his ass astride,
Who peacefully pursued his ride,
Exclaim'd, when, on a Spanish steed,
A horseman pass'd with lively speed,
"Ah, charming seat! what deed of mine
Should thus incense the powers divine,
Who doom me ne'er to shift my place,
But at an ass's tardy pace?"
Thus speaking, with chagrin and spite,

He reach'd a rough and rocky height,
Up which a poor, o'er-labour'd drudge,
On tottering feet, was forc'd to trudge;
With forehead prone, and bending back
Press'd by a large and heavy pack.
    The farmer cross'd the hill at ease;
Jocosely set, with lolling knees,
On his poor ass, the rugged scene
Appear'd a soft and level green,
No flinty points his feet annoy'd;
He pass'd the panting walker's side,
Yet saw him not, so rapt his brain
With dreams of Andalusia's plain.
    Such is the world—our bosoms brood
With keen desire o'er others' good;
On this we muse, and, musing still,
We rarely dream of others' ill.
    A further truth the tale unfolds:
Each, like the ass-born hind, beholds
The rich around on steeds of Spain,
And deems their rank exempt from pain.
But still let us our notice keep
On those who clamber up the steep.'

The Land of the Halt (Gellert).—'Many years since, in a small territory, there was not one of the inhabitants who did not stutter when he spoke, and halt in walking; both these defects, moreover, were considered accomplishments. A stranger saw the evil, and, thinking how they would admire his walking, went about without halting, after the usual manner of our race. Everyone stopped to look at him, and all those who looked, laughed, and, holding their sides to repress their merriment, shouted: "Teach the stranger how to walk properly!"

'The stranger considered it his duty to cast the reproach from himself. "You halt," he cried, "it is not I; you must accustom yourselves to leave off so awkward a habit!" This only increased the uproar, when they heard him speak; he did not even stammer; this was sufficient to disgrace him, and he was laughed at throughout the country.

'Habit will render faults, which we have been accustomed to regard from youth, beautiful; in vain will a stranger attempt to convince us that we are in error. We look upon him as a madman, solely because he is wiser than ourselves.'

The Beau and Butterfly (Francis Gentleman).

'Thus speaks an adage, somewhat old,
"*Truth is not to be always told*."
What eye but, struck with outward show,
Admires the pretty thing, a beau?
Which both by Art and Nature made is,
The sport of sense, the toy of ladies.
A mortal of this tiny mould,
In clothes of silk, adorned with gold,
And dressed in ev'ry point of sight
To give the world of taste delight,
Prepared to enter his sedan,
A birthday picture of a man,
Cried out in vain soliloquy:
"Was ever creature formed like me?
By Art or Nature's nicest care
Made more complete and debonnair?
I see myself, with perfect joy,
Of human kind the *je ne sçai quoy*;
In ev'rything I rival France,
In fashion, wit, and sprightly dance;
So charming are my shape and parts,
I'm formed for captivating hearts;
The proudest toast, when in the vein,
I take at once by *coup de main*;
Mort de ma vie, 'tis magic all,
I look, and vanquished women fall!"
One of the race of butterflies,
An insect far more nice than wise,
Who, from his sunny couch of glass,

Had listened to the two-legged ass,
With intermeddling zeal replied:
"Unequalled folly! matchless pride!
Shalt thou, a patchwork creature, claim
More lovely shape, or greater name,
Than one of us? Assert thy right—
Stand naked in my critic sight!

"To parent earth at once resign
The produce of her golden mine;
Give to the worm her silken store,
The diamond to Golconda's shore;
Nor let the many teeth you want
Be plundered from the elephant;
Let native locks adorn thy head,
Nor glow thy cheeks with borrowed red;
Give to the ostrich back his plume,
Nor rob the cat of her perfume;
Here to the beaver yield at once
His fur which crowns thy empty sconce;
In short, appear through every part
No more, nor less, than what thou art;
Then little better than an ape
Will show thy metamorphosed shape;
While butterflies to death retain
The beauties they from Nature gain.

"You'll say, perhaps, our sojourn here
Is less, by half, than half a year;
That churlish winter surely brings
Destruction to our painted wings.
I grant the truth. Now, answer me:
Can beaus outlive adversity?
Will milliners and tailors join
To make a foppish beggar fine?
'Tis certain, no. Of glitter made,
You surely vanish in the shade.
Compared, then, who will dare deny

A beau is less than butterfly?"'

The Nightingale and Glow-worm (Edward Moore).

'The prudent nymph, whose cheeks disclose
The lily and the blushing rose,
From public view her charms will screen,
And rarely in the crowd be seen.
This simple truth shall keep her wise:
"The fairest fruits attract the flies."
One night a glow-worm, proud and vain,
Contemplating her glitt'ring train,
Cried, "Sure there never was in Nature
So elegant, so fine a creature;
All other insects that I see—
The frugal ant, industrious bee,
Or silk-worm—with contempt I view;
With all that low, mechanic crew
Who servilely their lives employ
In business, enemy to joy.
Mean, vulgar herd! ye are my scorn,
For grandeur only I was born;
Or, sure, am sprung from race divine,
And placed on earth to live and shine.
Those lights, that sparkle so on high,
Are but the glow-worms of the sky;
And kings on earth their gems admire
Because they imitate my fire."
She spoke. Attentive on a spray,
A nightingale forebore his lay;
He saw the shining morsel near,
And flew, directed by the glare;
Awhile he gazed, with sober look,
And thus the trembling prey bespoke:
"Deluded fool, with pride elate,
Know 'tis thy beauty brings thy fate;

Less dazzling, long thou mightst have lain,
Unheeded on the velvet plain.
Pride, soon or late, degraded mourns,
And beauty wrecks whom she adorns."'

It is interesting to observe how a true poet, Cowper, treats the same subject, the object or moral of the fable, however, being different:

The Nightingale and Glow-worm.

'A nightingale, that all day long
Had cheer'd the village with his song,
Nor yet at eve his note suspended,
Nor yet when eventide was ended,
Began to feel, as well he might,
The keen demands of appetite;
When, looking eagerly around,
He spied far off, upon the ground,
A something shining in the dark,
And knew the glow-worm by his spark;
So, stooping down from hawthorn top,
He thought to put him in his crop.
The worm, aware of his intent,
Harangued him thus, right eloquent:
"Did you admire my lamp," quoth he,
"As much as I your minstrelsy,
You would abhor to do me wrong,
As much as I to spoil your song;
For 'twas the selfsame Power Divine
Taught you to sing and me to shine;
That you with music, I with light,
Might beautify and cheer the night."
The songster heard his short oration,
And, warbling out his approbation,
Released him—as my story tells—
And found a supper somewhere else.

Hence jarring sectaries may learn
Their real interest to discern;
That brother should not war with brother,
And worry and devour each other;
But sing and shine by sweet consent,
Till life's poor transient night is spent,
Respecting in each other's case
The gifts of nature and of grace.
Those Christians best deserve the name
Who studiously make peace their aim;
Peace both the duty and the prize
Of him that creeps and him that flies.'

Other excellent fables of Cowper will occur to the reader, as, for example: *The Raven*, *The Contest between Nose and Eyes*, *The Poet, the Oyster and the Sensitive Plant*, and *Pairing Time Anticipated*.

The Boy and the Rainbow (William Wilkie, D.D.).

'Declare, ye sages, if ye find
'Mongst animals of every kind,
Of each condition, sort, and size,
From whales and elephants to flies,
A creature that mistakes his plan,
And errs so constantly as man.
Each kind pursues his proper good,
And seeks for pleasure, rest, and food,
As Nature points, and never errs
In what it chooses and prefers;
Man only blunders, though possest
Of talents far above the rest.
Descend to instances, and try:
An ox will scarce attempt to fly,
Or leave his pasture in the wood
With fishes to explore the flood.
Man only acts, of every creature,

In opposition to his nature.
The happiness of humankind
Consists in rectitude of mind,
A will subdued to reason's sway,
And passions practised to obey;
An open and a gen'rous heart,
Refined from selfishness and art;
Patience which mocks at fortune's pow'r,
And wisdom never sad nor sour:
In these consist our proper bliss;
Else Plato reasons much amiss.
But foolish mortals still pursue
False happiness in place of true;
Ambition serves us for a guide,
Or lust, or avarice, or pride;
While reason no assent can gain,
And revelation warns in vain.
Hence, through our lives in every stage,
From infancy itself to age,
A happiness we toil to find,
Which still avoids us like the wind;
Ev'n when we think the prize our own,
At once 'tis vanished, lost and gone.
You'll ask me why I thus rehearse
All Epictetus in my verse,
And if I fondly hope to please
With dry reflections such as these,
So trite, so hackneyed, and so stale?
I'll take the hint, and tell a tale.
    One evening, as a simple swain
His flock attended on the plain,
The shining bow he chanced to spy,
Which warns us when a shower is nigh;
With brightest rays it seemed to glow,
Its distance eighty yards or so.
This bumpkin had, it seems, been told

The story of the cup of gold,
Which fame reports is to be found
Just where the rainbow meets the ground.
He therefore felt a sudden itch
To seize the goblet and be rich;
Hoping—yet hopes are oft but vain—
No more to toil through wind and rain,
But sit indulging by the fire,
Midst ease and plenty, like a squire.
He marked the very spot of land
On which the rainbow seemed to stand,
And, stepping forwards at his leisure,
Expected to have found the treasure.
But as he moved, the coloured ray
Still changed its place and slipt away,
As seeming his approach to shun.
From walking he began to run,
But all in vain; it still withdrew
As nimbly as he could pursue.
At last, through many a bog and lake,
Rough craggy road and thorny brake,
It led the easy fool, till night
Approached, then vanished in his sight,
And left him to compute his gains,
With nought but labour for his pains.'

Professor Rankine evidently took Æsop's illustration of 'The Bow Unbent' to heart, when, relaxing his severer studies, he occupied occasional hours in composing 'Songs and Fables.' The three following pieces are examples of his work as a fabulist, and of his skill in interpreting the meaning of popular signs:

'*The Magpie and Stump*.—A magpie was in the habit of depositing articles which he pilfered in the hollow stump of a tree. "I grieve less," the stump was heard to say, "at the misfortune of losing my branches and leaves, than at the disgrace of being made a receptacle for stolen goods." Moral: *Infamy is harder to bear than adverse fortune*.'

'*The Green Man.*—A green man, wandering through the Highlands of Scotland, discovered, in a sequestered valley, a still, with which certain unprincipled individuals were engaged in the illicit manufacture of aqua-vitæ. Being, as we have stated, a green man, he was easily persuaded by those unprincipled individuals to expend a considerable sum in the purchase of the intoxicating produce of their still, and to drink so much of it that he speedily became insensible. On awaking next morning, with an empty purse and an aching head, he thought, with sorrow and shame, what a green man he had been. Moral: *He who follows the advice of unprincipled individuals is a green man indeed.*'

'*The Bull and Mouth.*—A native of the Sister Isle having opened his mouth during a convivial entertainment, out flew a bull, whereupon some of the company manifested alarm. "Calm your fears," said the sagacious host; "verbal bulls have no horns." Moral: *Harmless blunders are subjects of amusement rather than of consternation.*'

The following curious 'Birth Story,' from the collection of Indian Fables by Mr. P. V. Ramaswami Raju, is an ironical commentary on the doctrine of transmigration, in which the followers of Buddha implicitly believe:

'One day a king in the far East was seated in the hall of justice. A thief was brought before him; he inquired into his case, and said he should receive one hundred lashes with a cat-o'-nine-tails. Instantly he recollected an old Eastern saying, "What we do to others in this birth, they will do to us in the next," and said to his minister, "I have a great mind to let this thief go quietly, for he is sure to give me these one hundred lashes in the next birth." "Sire," replied the minister, "I know the saying you refer to is perfectly true, but you must understand you are simply returning to the thief in this birth what he gave you in the last." The king was perfectly pleased with this reply, says the story, and gave his minister a rich present.'

This selection of fables may be suitably concluded by two which, though not original, we have not met with in print. The first is entitled *The Nightingale, the Cuckoo and the Ass*:[71]

'The nightingale and the cuckoo disputed as to which of them was the best singer, and they chose the ass to be the judge. First, the nightingale poured forth one of his most entrancing lays, followed by the cuckoo, with his two mellow notes. Being requested to deliver judgment, said the ass, "Without doubt the trill of the nightingale is worth listening to; but for a good plain song give me that of the cuckoo!"'

The moral here is obvious. Persons with a want of taste, or with a depraved taste, see no difference between things excellent and mean. Nay, they will often be found to prefer the mean, as being more in harmony with their own predilections.

The next is the shortest fable on record; its humour is as conspicuous as its brevity, and it hails from the County Palatine of Lancashire. It is named The *Flea and the Elephant*:

'Passing into the ark together, said the flea to its big brother: "Now, then, mister! no thrutching!"

'Moral: Insignificance has often its full share of self-importance.'

FOOTNOTES:

[66] 'The Tatler,' No. 115, vol iii., p. 7.

[67] *Post*, p. 137.

[68] Mr. Joseph Jacobs, in his erudite 'History of the Æsopian Fable,' shows that this was a mistake on the part of Maria de France, and that the author of the work from which her translation was made was not the King, but 'Alfred the Englishman,' who flourished about A.D. 1170.

[69] Vanbrugh, the architect, noted for the solidity of the structures he designed, and on whom the epitaph, one of the best epigrams ever penned, was proposed:

'Lie heavy on him, Earth, for he
Laid many a heavy load on thee.'

[70] London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Co.

[71] Krilof's *Ass and Nightingale* bears some resemblance to the fable here given; but, instead of the cuckoo, the cock is one of the competitors.

CHAPTER XVI.
CONCLUSION.

'Out, out, brief candle.'

SHAKESPEARE: *Macbeth*.

PICTURES illustrating fables are a feature that tends to enhance their attractiveness and value, and the ablest artists have employed their pencils in the work. It is sufficient to mention Bewick and his pupils, whose illustrations are greatly prized. S. Howitt's etchings of animals in illustration of the fabulists (1811). Northcote's original volumes (1828-33) are illustrated with 560 charming engravings from the author's designs. Robert Cruikshank illustrated the 'Fables for Mankind,' by Charles Westmacott (1823). Blake, Stothard, Harvey, and Sir John Tenniel, the distinguished *Punch* artist, have gained applause in the same field. The latter illustrated a small volume of Æsop published by Murray in 1848. This is 'A New Version of the Old Fables, chiefly from Original Sources,' by the Rev. Thomas James, M.A., and contains an introduction which is worthy of perusal by those interested in the subject. The first edition of the work is a rarity sought for by collectors. Randolph Caldecott illustrated some of Æsop's fables in his own inimitable style. Walter Crane[72] and Harrison Weir[73] have exercised their talents in the same direction, and Mrs. Hugh Blackburn has supplied clever illustrations to Rankine's fables. The pictures in the collection of fables made by G. Moir Bussey (1842) are from designs by J. J. Grandville, and are full of originality and humour. The same volume also contains an excellent 'Dissertation on the History of Fable.' The spirited and masterly designs of Oudry in illustration of La Fontaine are justly prized and highly valued. Gustave Doré also employed his facile pencil in illustrating the same author.

There are books bearing the title of 'Fables' the contents of which are not fables in the restricted sense. Of these are Dryden's so-called fables, which are really metrical romances. A competent critic has pronounced them to be the 'noblest specimens of versification to be found in any modern language,'

but we need not speak further of them in this connection. Again, there is Bernard Mandeville's eccentric work, entitled 'The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices Public Benefits.' This is an apologue in rhyme, with a moral in addition, and followed by a voluminous prose disquisition on questions of morality, partaking of all the audacious paradoxical elements which characterized its ingenious author. Thomas Moore, the distinguished Irish poet, wrote a series of eight political fables, which were originally published by him under the pseudonym of 'Thomas Brown.' Neither these nor that of Mandeville, however, are fables from our point of view. The same remark applies to Lowell's well-known 'Fable for Critics,' and Lord Lytton's 'Fables in Song,' on which it is unnecessary to dwell.

And so, having taken our survey of the fabulist and his work, we conclude, as we rightly may, that he is both philosopher and poet, but more poet than philosopher, inasmuch as the imaginative faculty is greatly at his command. Further, as saith Sir Philip Sidney,[74] 'The philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teacheth them that are already taught. But the poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs; the poet is, indeed, the right popular philosopher. Whereof Æsop's tales give good proof; whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from these dumb speakers.'

FOOTNOTES:

[72] 'The Baby's Own Æsop;' the fables condensed in rhyme by W. J. Linton. Routledge, 1887.

[73] 'Æsop's Fables,' translated from the Greek by the Rev. George Fyler Townsend, M.A. Routledge.

[74] 'A Defence of Poesie.'

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