

Literary Fables of Yriarte

Tomás de Iriarte

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Project Gutenberg's Literary Fables of Yriarte, by Tomas de Iriarte

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LITERARY FABLES

OF

YRIARTE.

(Tomás de Iriarte y Oropesa)

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH,

BY

GEO. H. DEVEREUX.

BOSTON:

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

MDCCCLV.

TO

THE CLASS OF 1829

I DEDICATE

THIS UNPRETENDING RESULT OF SOME LEISURE HOURS.

I do not flatter myself that it will make any conspicuous addition to the worthy achievements that have already graced our roll with names that rank high in the lists of Science, Philosophy and Literature. But it is pleasant to me to connect this translation of a college text-book—used by us all, long ago, within the walls of old Harvard—with the memory of youthful pursuits that have never lost their charm for the mind, and early associations that retain, with all their original freshness and geniality, their hold upon the heart.

PREFACE.

The Fable has always been a popular mode of conveying certain kinds of instruction. The brief and simple illustrations it affords give additional weight and point to moral apothegms or sententious criticisms. Like the feather on the shaft, they serve to increase the force and direct the aim more certainly to the mark. A pertinent fact or an apt fiction breathes, even into a dry and curt axiom, a living and practical interest which opens to it hearts and heads that would otherwise pass it by with indifference, or revolt from it with impatience. Many of these unpretending allegories have been familiar to us all, in childhood, in a great variety of dresses, and have long formed a standard part of our literature — congenial alike to nursery days and to mature age.

The fables contained in the little collection here translated are not, with one or two exceptions, found among the widely popular and familiar fables to which we have alluded. They were written in a foreign tongue, less generally understood, among us, than some other of the European languages; and they are designed for a special and somewhat abstruse purpose. Both these circumstances tend to narrow their sphere of circulation; and we presume that they form a book little known to most English readers.

If we do not err in our estimate of them, the Literary Fables of Don Thomas De Yriarte are well worthy of perusal. They are aptly and ingeniously adapted to the truths they seek to inculcate; and they are remarkable for a terse simplicity of form and style, well suited to the objects and character of such productions. The maxims and criticisms they enforce must approve themselves to the mind, both of the professed scholar and the general reader.

The author was born in Teneriffe, A.D. 1750, but was educated and resided at Madrid, where he died in 1791, at the early age, of course, of forty-one years. His uncle, Don Juan De Yriarte, was the chief superintendent of the royal library; and the nephew was educated under his auspices. In his eighteenth year, he commenced his literary career by the writing of dramas, and the translation of plays from the French for the Spanish stage. He spent his life in the duties of sundry offices under the government; yet he very soon assumed and maintained a high consideration as a scholar and writer. His works, however, were of a character to command but little interest from posterity, with the exception of the fables translated in this little volume.

Of them, Professor Ticknor, from whose learned work on Spanish literature we

have collected these details, speaks as follows:—

"Here, he, in some degree, struck out a new path; for he not only invented all his fictions, which no other fabulist, in modern times, had done, but restricted them all, in their moral purpose, to the correction of the faults and follies of men of learning—an application which had not before been thought of. They are written with great care, in no less than forty different measures, and show an extraordinary degree of ingenuity in adapting the attributes and instincts of animals to the instruction, not of mankind at large, as had always been done before, but to that of a separate and small class, between whom and the inferior creation the resemblance is rarely obvious. The task was certainly a difficult one. Perhaps, on this account, they are too narrative in their structure, and fail somewhat in the genial spirit which distinguishes Esop and La Fontaine, the greatest masters of Apologue and Fable. But their influence was so needed in the age of bad writing when they appeared, and they are, besides, so graceful in their versification, that they were not only received with great favor at first, but have never lost it since."—*Ticknor's Hist. of Span. Literature*, vol. iii., p. 279.

We have endeavored to discharge with fidelity the duty of translation; attempting to preserve the form and spirit of the author, as far as was consistent with giving the work an English dress. With this view, we have aimed to produce a literal and characteristic reflection of the original rather than an expanded and highly-wrought paraphrase. Where we could do so, we have sought to preserve the metre, or a nearly analogous one, in order, if possible, to give a clear idea of the Spanish work to the English reader. But this is not practicable in all cases. The peculiar construction of Spanish rhymes, together with the obstinacy with which some words and sentences refuse the stern yoke of our English rules, render the task, always hard, sometimes impossible. The terminal inflections of the Spanish language and its accentuation are widely different from those of the Anglo-Saxon; and so axe the arbitrary arrangements of the rhythm, which are, in the latter, far more exacting and precise. The professed scholar will recognize and make due allowance for such obstacles. To the public at large we shall hope our little book may convey some instruction and amusement, in a palatable shape. If so, it may give, to a novel class of subjects, somewhat of the well-known interest inspired by the graceful and popular fictions of Esop, Gay and La Fontaine.

G.H.D.

Salem, October 25th, 1854.

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INTRODUCTION.

FABLE I.

THE ELEPHANT AND OTHER ANIMALS

Long years ago, in far-off land,
When every brute beast had a way,
What he thought and felt, to say
In language all could understand—
The sagacious Elephant observed
Among these creatures many a failing,
And gross abuses, too, prevailing,
Which strenuous reform deserved.
He called them all, from far and near,
His strictures on their ways to hear.
With reverence the most profound
His long proboscis swept the ground;

In careful phrase, well learned by heart,
He then discharged the censor's part—
A thousand silly foibles noted,
A thousand vicious actions quoted;
Envy, working sore vexation,
Ostentatious insolence,
Idleness, procrastination,
The arrogance of ignorance.

His sound and noble counsel stirs
The hearts of many listeners,
Accepting, with due reverence,
The dictates of his generous sense.
The guileless Lamb and thrifty Ant,
The Bee, frugal and provident,
The trusty Setter, and the Dove,
Ever faithful to her love,
The obedient Horse, the Linnet shy,
And the simple Butterfly.
But, of the audience, a part not small
Declared that their offended pride
Such language plain could not abide;
Not they—no, not at all.
The Tiger and rapacious Wolf,
Opening their lank jaws' bloody gulf,
Against the adviser rave;
His vile abuse, among the crowd,
The venomous Serpent hissed aloud;
While, all around, the whispering tone
Of Wasp and Hornet, Fly and Drone,
A murmuring echo gave.
The mischievous Balm-cricket leapt
From the tumultuous throng;
The Locust spread his clanging wing,
His greedy conscience felt the sting;
The wriggling Caterpillar crept
His sneaking way along;
The Weasel arched his spiteful back;
The Fox kept silence shrewd;

The Monkey, sauciest of the pack,
Mocked, with grimaces rude.

The stately Elephant looked down
Upon the vexed turmoil:
"To each and all and yet to none,"—
Spake his calm voice above the broil,—
"These censures I apply;
Let him who winces put them on;
Who not, hear quietly."



Whoever may my fables read,
This truth important let him heed:
That to all nations—not to any one—
And to all times, they speak.
The world has shown alike
The faults at which they strike
In each revolving week.
Then—since the warning finger
Points at no destined head—
Who feels the censure linger
Must sup on his own bread.



FABLE II.

THE SILKWORM AND SPIDER.

At his cocoon a busy Silkworm labored;
A Spider, who with all her might was spinning
Hard by, with laugh malicious, thus bespoke him.
In silly exultation tasks comparing:
"What think you of my web, good Master Silkworm?
This very morning I began it, early,
And now, mid-day will see the job completed.
Just see how fine and beautiful it is, too!"

Coolly replied the precious fabric's workman:
"T is true—your labor tells us its own story."



Let those who boast their numerous vapid volumes,
Know that 'tis quality, not bulk, that's precious.
What costs small labor is of smaller value.



FABLE III.

THE BEAR, THE MONKEY AND THE HOG.

A Piedmontese a Bear had taught
Upon two legs the art of dancing;
To earn their bread, the master sought,
By showing off his awkward prancing.

Now, Bruin, anxious to excel,
Before the Monkey showed his skill.
"How do I dance, friend? Prithee tell."
"Ill," said the Monkey, "very ill."

"I am afraid you look on me,"
Said Bruin, "with a jealous eye.
Now, that I move quite gracefully,
And know the step, can you deny?"

A jolly Pig was standing by,
And shouted,—"Bravo! nobly done!
A better dancer, sure am I,
Was never seen beneath the sun."

He spoke. But Bruin thoughtful stood,
And soberly the grunter eyed;
At last, in sad and humble mood,
To his loud praise he thus replied:

"When Monkey did my dancing slight
I did not much the censure heed;
But now I see, by your delight,
It must be miserable, indeed."



Authors, who seek a noble fame,
Mark well the moral of my verse!
That's bad which worthy judges blame;
What bad applaud, is worse.



FABLE IV.

THE DRONES AND THE BEE.

By a sense of their bad reputation molested,
The Drones in grave council assembled one day;
And various measures each idler suggested,
To wash of their sloth the sad stigma away.

No other expedient well could they see,
In the eyes of all animals better to stand—
Though lazy and stupid as well they could be—
Than to try, at the making of honey, their hand.

But the labor proved very distasteful, indeed;
The workmen, a rude, inexperienced crew;
They began to be doubtful if they should succeed
Very well in attaining the object in view.

To get rid of their trouble they fain would contrive,
By interring in state an old Bee that had died—
A notable Bee of a neighboring hive,
Of all her companions the model and pride.

With pomp and with honor they lauded her name,
In funeral obsequies, brilliant and grand;
Panegyrics immortal they buzzed to her fame,
For the whitest of wax and honey so bland.

This done, with much self-satisfaction they stop.
But a Bee said in scorn, "Is this all you can do?
Of the honey I make, not one single drop
Would I give for the fuss of your beggarly crew."



How many there are, who their emptiness mask,
By quoting wise words from the lips of the dead!
But with all their pretence, did they ever, I ask,
Produce any such from their own shallow head?



FABLE V.

THE TWO PARROTS AND THE MAGPIE.

A dame from St. Domingo
Brought with her Parrots twain.
Now this island is half Gallic,
Half owns the flag of Spain;
Thus, in two different languages,
The Parrots talked amain,
Till the gallery where their cages hung
Discordant was as Babylon.
Soon the French and the Castilian
They mixed up in such a bother
That, in the end, no soul could tell
If it were one or 't other.
The French Parrot from the Spaniard
Took a contribution small;
While the Spanish bird changed nigh each word
For the idiom of Gaul.

Their mistress parts the babblers—
And the Frenchman kept not long
The phrases he had borrowed
From less fashionable tongue.
The other still refuses
His jargon to give over;
But new merit rather chooses
In this hotchpotch to discover—
Exulting that he thus can vary
The range of his vocabulary.

In mongrel French, one day,
He eagerly begged after
The scrapings of the pot;
With hearty roar of laughter,
From balcony across the way,
A Magpie shouted out
At the folly of the lout.

The Parrot answered pertly,
As with argument conclusive,—
"You are nothing but a Purist,
Of taste foolishly exclusive."—?
"Thanks for the compliment," quoth Magpie, curtly.



Many men, in sooth, there are,
Like the Parrots, everywhere;
With their own language not content,
Would a mongrel tongue invent.



FABLE VI.

THE SHOWMAN'S MONKEY AND HIS MASTER.

That authentic author, Father Valdecebro,—
In his veracious Natural History,
Who exercised his warm imagination,
By spots and marks, each beast minutely painting,
And told, in style so fanciful and turgid,
About the Unicorn astounding marvels,
And to the fabulous Phoenix gave full credence,—
In his eighth book, or ninth,—which I've forgotten,—
Relates the story of a famous Monkey.

The story ran: That it was a Monkey skilful
In thousand tricks, who served a puppet showman:
That thought one day, in absence of his master,
To ask some beasts—his own especial cronies—
To witness all his entertaining juggles.
First he played dead man; then, like Harlequin,
Danced on the rope with somerset and shuffle;
Made desperate leaps, exhibited the sword-dance,
On hands and feet alternate spun in circles;
Last, did the Prussian manual, gun on shoulder.
With these and other tricks he long amused them.
But, better yet than any,—since the evening
Had now set in, nor yet the audience wearied,—
An exhibition with the magic lanthorn
He now would give, as he had seen his master.

When, by preliminary explanation,
He fixed attention,—as is showman's custom,—
Behind the lanthorn being duly stationed,
From side to side he shoved the painted glasses,
Each scene loquaciously, the while, explaining.

The chamber was all darkened, as is usual;
But the spectators strained their eyes attentive
In vain, for none could see the brilliant wonders
Which Monkey was so volubly announcing.

All were perplexed, and soon arose suspicion
That these proceedings were but empty humbug.

The Monkey, most of all, was disconcerted;
When Master Pedro, entering unexpected,
And,—what was going on at once perceiving,—
Half laughing and half angry, said to Monkey,
"What is the use of all your endless gabble,
You fool, if you forget to light your lanthorn?"



Pardon my hint, ye deep and subtile writers,
Who boast to be beyond our comprehensions;
Your brains are dark as the unlighted lanthorn.



FABLE VII.

THE CATHEDRAL BELL AND THE LITTLE BELL.

In a certain cathedral a huge bell there hung,
That only on solemn occasions was rung;
Its echoes majestic, by strokes three or four,
Now and then, in grave cadence, were heard—never more.
For this stately reserve and its wonderful weight,
Throughout the whole parish, its glory was great.

In the district the city held under its sway,
Of a few wretched rustics, a hamlet there lay;
And a poor little church, with a belfry so small,
That you hardly would call it a belfry at all.
There a little cracked cow-bell, that in it was swinging,
For the poor little neighborhood did all the ringing.

Now that this little belfry might ape in renown
The cathedral's huge tower, that loomed up o'er the town;
That briefly and seldom—on festivals noted—
The said little bell should be rung—it was voted.
By this cunning device, in their rustical eyes,
Its tinkle soon passed for a bell of great size.



Of true merit and excellence, many men try,
By grave airs and long faces, the place to supply;
And think that their wisdom is surely inferred
From their seldom vouchsafing to utter a word.

Indeed, it is true, in a general way,
Asses may not be known if they never should bray,
And for a wise animal safely may pass;
If one opens his mouth, then we know he's an ass.

FABLE VIII.

THE ASS AND THE FLUTE.

Be it good or bad,
This little lay
To me occurred to-day,
By chance.

Through a field in our village
A wandering ass
One day did pass,
By chance.

Left by a careless swain,
Forgotten on the ground,
There a flute he found,
By chance.

As he stopped to smell it—
This donkey grave—
A snort he gave,
By chance.

Into the flute his breath

Happened to find its way,
And the flute began to play,
By chance.

"Oho!" said the wise beast,
"How well I can play!
Who will say me nay?
By chance."



There are donkeys plenty,
Who, without one jot of art,
May, for once, well play a part,
By chance.



FABLE IX.

THE ANT AND THE FLEA.

A curious affectation some put on
Of knowing everything they chance upon.
Whatever matter they may hear or see,
However new or excellent it be,
Of small account and easy always deem it,
And never worthy of their praise esteem it.
This sort of folks I cannot let go by;
But, for their foolish pertness, I shall try,
Sure as I live, to show them up in rhyme,
If I should waste on them a whole day's time.

The Ant was once relating to the Flea
The wholesome lesson of her industry;
How, by her labor, her support she gains;
How builds the ant-hills; with what care and pains
She gathers up the scattered grains for food;
And how all labor for the common good;

With other instances of enterprise,
That might with many pass for idle lies,
If 't were not every day before our eyes.

To all her statements still the Flea demurred,—
Yet could not contradict a single word—
With talk like this: "Ah, yes, undoubtedly;
I grant it; certainly. O, so I see!
'T is plain. I think so, too, myself. Of course.
All right. I understand. There's better and there worse."

With such evasions, patience growing thin,
Ready almost to jump out of her skin,
Unto the Flea she answered,—"Now, my friend,
To go with me, I beg you, condescend.
And since, in such grand fashion, you assume
All this so mighty easy to be done,
Give us yourself, by way of good example,
Of your own great abilities, a sample."

With impudence unmoved, replied the Flea:
"Pooh, nonsense! Think you thus to puzzle me?
Who couldn't, if they chose to try? But, stay,—
I've an engagement now. Another day
We'll think of it,"—and lightly leaped away.

FABLE X.

THE WALL-FLOWER AND THE THYME.

A Wall-flower spoke,—as I have somewhere read,—
A Thyme-plant growing in a neighboring bed,
In the flower language, scornfully addressing:
"Heaven help you, Thyme! 'Tis really distressing!
Though the most fragrant of all plants, I own,
Scarce a hand's breadth above the ground you've grown."

"Dear friend, that I'm of humble height, 'tis true,
But without help I grow. I pity you,
That cannot rise, even a hand's breadth high,
Without a wall to climb by, if you try."



For writers, who, by clinging to the name
Of others, arrogate an author's fame,—
By adding to a work, perchance a note,
Or a short preface,—this response I quote.



FABLE XI.

THE RABBITS AND THE DOGS.

A Rabbit, whom
Two Dogs pursue,
Into the copse
In terror flew.

Out of his burrow,
At the clatter,
A comrade sprung.—
"Friend, what's the matter?"

"The matter? Zounds!
I'm fairly blown;
By villain hounds
I'm hunted down."

"I see them yonder
Through the furze.
But they 're not hounds."—
"What then?"—"They're curs."

"Curs, hey! Then so
Is my grandmother!
You do not know
The one from t' other."

"Stupid! they 're naught
But mongrel cur."—
"They're hounds, I say."—
"They're curs, good sir."

While they dispute
The dogs arrive;
And both of them
Eat up alive.



Ye who, important
Matters scorning,
Toy with trifles,
Take our warning.

FABLE XII.

THE EGGS.

Beyond the sunny Philippines
An island lies, whose name I do not know;
But that's of little consequence, if so
You understand that there they had no hens;
Till, by a happy chance, a traveller,
After a while, carried some poultry there.
Fast they increased as any one could wish;
Until fresh eggs became the common dish.
But all the natives ate them boiled,—they say,—
Because the stranger taught no other way.
At last the experiment by one was tried—

Sagacious man!—of having his eggs fried.
And, O! what boundless honors, for his pains,
His fruitful and inventive fancy gains!
Another, now, to have them baked devised,—
Most happy thought!—and still another, spiced.
Who ever thought eggs were so delicate!
Next, some one gave his friends an omelette:
"Ah!" all exclaimed, "what an ingenious feat!"

But scarce a year went by, an artiste shouts,
"I have it now,—ye 're all a pack of louts!—
With nice tomatoes all my eggs are stewed."
And the whole island thought the mode so good,
That they would so have cooked them to this day,
But that a stranger, wandering out that way,
Another dish the gaping natives taught,
And showed them eggs cooked *à la Huguenot*.

Successive cooks thus proved their skill diverse;
But how shall I be able to rehearse
All of the new, delicious condiments
That luxury, from time to time, invents?
Soft, hard and dropped; and now with sugar sweet,
And now boiled up with milk, the eggs they eat;
In sherbet, in preserves; at last they tickle
Their palates fanciful with eggs in pickle.
All had their day—the last was still the best.
But a grave senior thus, one day, addressed
The epicures: "Boast, ninnies, if you will,
These countless prodigies of gastric skill—
But blessings on the man who brought the hens!"



Beyond the sunny Philippines
Our crowd of modern authors need not go
New-fangled modes of cooking eggs to show.

FABLE XIII.

THE DUCK AND THE SNAKE.

On the borders of a pond
Stood a Duck, discoursing thus:
"Nature to me is generous
All creatures else beyond.

For my life, it hath no bound
Water, earth or air within;
I can fly or I can swim,
When a-weary of the ground."

A cunning Snake stood by.
And heard the vaunting strain;
And hissing said, "How vain
To hold yourself so high!

Not on land with the fleet Stag,
Or swift Falcon in the air,
Can you make good your brag:
In the water, too, the Trout
Will beat you out and out:
You with neither can compare."



The wise man knoweth well,
That it is not wisdom's end
In all things to pretend,—
But in something to excel.

FABLE XIV.

THE MUFF, THE FAN, AND THE UMBRELLA.

If some absurd presumption show—
In seeking everything to know,
To serve but for a single use
May also be without excuse.

Upon a table, once, together lay
A Muff, Umbrella, and a Fan.
In dialect such as, in a former day,
The Pot unto the Kettle spoke.
The Umbrella silence broke,
And to his two companions thus began:

"Now pretty articles are not ye both!
You, Muff, in winter serve your purpose well;
But, when spring comes about, in idle sloth
In a dark corner must forgotten dwell.
You, Fan, an useless thing become, in turn,
When heat declines in summer's glowing urn,

And cold winds take your office quite away.
Learn now, from me, a broader part to play.
To shield the head from rains of wintry skies,
I, as Umbrella, serve the turn;
Again, like praise I earn
When summer's ardent rays the Parasol defies."

FABLE XV.

THE FROG AND THE TADPOLE.

On Tagus' banks, in artless wonder,
A little Tadpole, on a canebrake gazing,
Long with its mother chatted of the leaves,
Of the huge stalks, and verdure so amazing;
But now the air with the fierce tempest heaves,
And the rough winds the canebrake rent asunder—

A broken cane into the stream fell over;
"Come, look, my child," now said the thoughtful
mother,
"Without, so strong, luxuriant and smooth—
Within, all pith and emptiness, forsooth!"



If our good Frog some poets' works had read,
Perchance, of them she might the same have said.



FABLE XVI.

THE BUSTARD.

The sluggish Bustard, in her foolish pate,
Vexed with her young ones' awkward flight,
Purposed to raise a brood more light,
Even though 't were illegitimate.

For this end many an egg she stole
From Partridge, Pigeon and the Kite,
And sundry birds of easy flight;
And in her nest mixed up the whole.

Long while and patiently she sat upon them;
Though some proved addled, yet, in time, the rest
With a fine brood of nurslings filled the nest;
And many a kind, of course, was found among them.

A host of birds collects, at her request,
To admire her progeny, so rare and new;
But each away with his own offspring flew,
And left poor Bustard with an empty nest.

Ye, who the ideas of other men brood over,—
Bring out your fledglings. Let us see them fly!

Then, "This, and this is mine," resounds the cry
How much belongs to you, we'll soon discover.

FABLE XVII.

THE LINNET AND THE SWAN.

"Keep silence, noisy little one,"
Unto a Linnet said the Swan.
"It almost tempts myself to sing; although
No voice, our feathered tribes among,
Compares with mine in melody, you know."

The Linnet still maintained her joyous trill.
"What insolence is this!" continued he.
"See how this tiny warbler taunteth me!
Naught but my great consideration
Prevents your well-deserved humiliation,
By the display of my superior skill."

"Would you might sing!" replied the little bird;
"With boundless curiosity we all—
All other voice by silent wonder shackled—
Should listen to that harmony divine,
Which boasts far greater fame than mine;
Though none of us, as yet, hath ever heard."
Kashly the Swan essayed—but only cackled.

Not strange, that empty reputation,
Without, or skill or genius, at foundation,
Should, upon trial, cheat the expectation!

FABLE XVIII.

THE HACK MULE.

Full fed and antic,
A Hack Mule pushed
With speed so frantic
Forth from her stable,
That her rider
Scarcely was able
With rein to guide her.
Half our journey
Not long will bide her
In such a race.
But the false jade
Now slacks her pace.
What trouble now?
Go on! Perhaps
The spur will do.
What, no? Then taps
Of this light rod
Or harder raps
From pointed goad.
Both are, I find,
In vain bestowed.
How! out of wind!
With ready heels
She kicks behind,
And bites and squeals.
What a curvette!
She jumps and reels.
You devil's pet,
With hand and foot
We'll try you yet.
Upon her belly
Down she flounders,—
Here sprawling flat.
A murrain foul
Seize on your soul!
Amen to that!



The Mule, that work begins
With such capers,
Is not the mule for me;
And, whene'er I see
That any author vapors
Too much of his intent,—
At once, I say, "Beware!
Good friend, pray have a care
Of this mule's predicament."

FABLE XIX.

THE GOAT AND THE HORSE.

A Goat, in mute delight,
To the sweet echoes of a violin,
Harmonious, long stood listening;
His feet, the while, in sympathetic measure,
Danced all unconsciously for pleasure.
And, to an honest Nag, who, in like mood
Absorbed, forgot his food,
These words he spoke:

"Now, of these strings you hear the harmony,
Know that they are the entrails of a Goat,
Who pastured, in times past, with me.
And, for myself, I trust some future time—
Blest thought!—such sonorous strains may rise from
mine."

The good Hack turned himself, and answered thus:
"Never are heard these sounds harmonious,
Except, across the strings concordant, sweep
The hairs that from my tail were drawn.
My fright is over and the pain is gone;
And, as reward, I now the pleasure reap

Of seeing, for myself, the honors paid
To the sweet instrument, through my own aid.
For you, who hope like pleasure to derive,—
When shall you taste it? Not while you're alive.

Just so, in vain a wretched writer tries,
Throughout his life, to gain celebrity;
To better judgment of posterity
He leaves his work, and, thus consoled, he dies.

FABLE XX.

THE BEE AND THE CUCKOO.

"Stop, Cuckoo," said the Bee;
"With my labor interferes
That unpleasant voice of thine,
Always ringing in my ears.

There is no bird, in song,
So monotonous as thou.
It is cuckoo all day long,
And nothing but cuckoo!"

"Wearies you, my monotone?"
The Cuckoo straight rejoined;
"So, too, one shape alone,
In thy waxen cells, I find.

If, in the self-same way,
You make a hundred as each one;
If I nothing new can say,
Nothing new by you is done."

This was the Bee's reply:

"A work of usefulness
May lack variety,
And be valued none the less.

But in a work designed
To gratify the taste,
If we no invention find,
Aught else is tedious waste."

FABLE XXI.

THE RAT AND THE CAT.

At telling of rabies old Esop was grand;
With his subtile invention, his wisdom so great.
And a story of his, as I have it at hand,
Into our own language I now will translate.

"It is plain," said a Rat, at the mouth of his hole,
"No distinction more lovely and noble is found
Than fidelity. Therefore it is, on my soul,
I love and respect the generous Hound."

A Cat answered, hard by: "This quality fine
I assure you is also a merit of mine."—
"Ah! what's that?" said the Rat, as, in terrible fright
He sprang to his hole, and, when safe out of sight,
Just poking his nose out, he coolly did call:
"You boast of it, hey? I don't like it at all."

The honor which many would freely allow,
They retract, when it lights on an enemy's brow.

Now what say you, my reader? "The fable is one
Which delights and instructs. It is perfectly done.

Esop had, in these things, a way of his own."
Ah! but look, my good sir; from this noddle of mine
It all came. Your friend Esop wrote never a line—
Of the whole.—"Ah, indeed! Then the fable is thine?"

Yes it is, learned man; and I ween you'll not fail.
Being mine, to attack it with tooth and with nail.

FABLE XXII.—XXIII.

THE OWL AND LAMP,

AND

THE DOGS AND THE RAGMAN.

There is a set of dastard knaves,
Vile critics, that will wait to make attack
On authors till their victims are—alack!—
All safe and quiet in their graves;
For living men, they know, might answer back.

To this same purpose, once a little lay
My old grandmother sang to me,
Recounting how a wandering Owl, one day,
Into a convent chanced to make her way;—
I'm wrong—by day it could not be.

For, without doubt, the evening's sun had set
Below the horizon long ago.
Now, as she flew along, our Owl she met
A Lamp or Lanthorn in the passage set—
Which of the two I do not know.

Turning reluctant back, in angry spite,
Thus spoke she out her mind:

"Ah, Lamp! with what unspeakable delight
I'd suck the oil all out of you this night,
But that my eyes you blind!

But if I cannot now,
Since you are such a blaze of dazzling light,—
If I should find you, on some other night,
Unlighted, then, I shall be ready quite
To make a feast, I vow."

Denounced though I may be,
By coward critics, that I here expose—
Because I dare their meanness to disclose;
Their portrait they shall see
In yet another fable ere I close.

Beating an old dust pan,
A Ragman stood, when, barking furiously
As Cerberus, two Dogs, eying him curiously,
With vagabondish man,
As is their wont—howled savagely.

To them a tall Greyhound
Said, "Let the wretch alone,—for he is one
Who from dead dogs will strip the reeking skin
To sell for bread. No honor can you win
On him—for, I'll be bound,
From living dogs the conscious rogue will run."

FABLE XXIV.

THE THRUSH, PARROT AND MAGPIE.

A Thrush, who heard a Parrot talking—
Of him, rather than of his instructor, man,

Desired himself the mystery to learn.
And, in one lesson, such line accent thought
To have attained, that, in his turn,
He the great art of speech began
To the Magpie to teach; and turned his pupil out
A scholar, as accomplished as, no doubt,
Are those who will poor copies and translations scan
For models—Blunder shocking!

FABLE XXV.

THE WOLF AND THE SHEPHERD.

The Wolf a Shepherd blandly once addressed:
"Friend—let me say I really do not know
Why you will view me always as a pest;
You think me a bad fellow. Faith, I am not so.
What a warm coat my skin in winter yields!
It shelters many a man from cold and wetting;
Moreover, too, from sting of flea it shields,
And other insects vile your couch besetting.
Against the withering blight of evil eye
My claws will screen you—counter charm secure.
My fat for hurts a sovereign remedy—
The uses of my teeth you know, I'm sure."

The Shepherd answered: "Animal perverse!
Upon thy head be Heaven's eternal curse!
On endless mischief bent—no thanks to you
If, now and then, some good you chance to do."

To many books, in these our days, my verse
Allots the Wolf's foul character and curse.

FABLE XXVI.

THE LION, EAGLE AND BAT.

The Eagle and Lion
Held solemn debate;
To settle between them
Some matters of state

Loud complaints of the Bat
Made the Eagle—"How long
Shall this pitiful creature
Dare do us such wrong?"

With my vassals mixing,
To her birdship she clings,—
As proof irrefragable,
Showing her wings;

But says, when she chooses
Our laws to defy,
I'm no subject of yours;
A plain quadruped I.

Would you call me a Bird?
A sad blunder you've made!
For I wear a broad snout,
And no beak, on my head?

With my vassals, she slanders
The Beasts of your reign;
When among you she wanders,
Of the Birds will complain."

"In my realm," said the Lion,
"No more shall she come."—
"Nor in mine," said the Eagle—
"Let that be her doom."

Thenceforward, in darkness,
She wanders alone;
No Bird and no Beast
Such companion will own.

Bats of authors, who seek
To be two things at once,
Take care lest ye prove
In both—but a dunce!

FABLE XXVII.

THE MONKEY.

A Monkey, clothed in silk,
Will a Monkey still remain;
So says an ancient proverb,
And so say I again;
As to all, it clearly will appear,
Who listen to our fable here.

In dress of gaudy hues,
Such as harlequin would choose,
A Monkey tricked herself.
But I rather think the elf
From her master got her finery;
For else, I hardly see
How Monkey could or cloth or tailor find find—
Yet so the story goes—but never mind.
Seeing herself so gay,
She through the window sprang
Upon a roof that lay
Below, then took her way
Unto the far-off land of Tetuan.
The proverb don't say this;

But there a history is,
Which I cannot call to mind,—
For the book is very rare,—
Which doth the truth unravel
Whither she did travel;
Which to discover must have cost a world of care
But the author does not say,
And neither can I guess.
If by ship, or by the way
Of the Isthmus of Suez:
All that we know is, that she certainly went there.
Here our fine lady found
A jolly Monkey crew,—
For Monkeys there abound,—
But naked every one:
As no other style they knew
In the land of Tetuan.
Now the naked Monkeys crowd
An admiring glance to snatch;
Homage to pay they press;
And readily allowed,
To the brainless little wretch,
Wisdom and wit to match
The splendors of her dress.
And forthwith it was decided,
By general accord,
That to her should be confided,
As ruler of the horde,
A meditated foray
Far and wide about the land,
A stock of food to gather
To feed the hungry band.
So the leader new set forth
With all her subject host,
And, not alone her road,
But her wits as well, she lost.
Over mountain, moor and valley,
Forest, and ridge, and plain,
Deserts, rivers and morasses,

She dragged her wearied train.
When the day's work was over
They could scarcely move a limb;
And each exhausted rover
Decided—if again,
Through his life, in such excursion
It should be his luck to join—
That he would choose a captain
More skilled, if not so fine.
From toil and from vexation,
They learned a lesson bitter—
That fine clothing is not wisdom,
Not all things gold that glitter.



Now, far this side of Tetuan,
We many a Monkey see,
Who, though he wear the student's
Will still a blockhead be.

FABLE XXVIII.

THE ASS AND HIS MASTER.

"On good and bad an equal value sets
The stupid mob. From me the worst it gets,
And never fails to praise," With vile pretence,
The scurrilous author thus his trash excused.
A poet shrewd, hearing the lame defence,
Indignant, thus exposed the argument abused.

A Donkey's master said unto his beast,
While doling out to him his lock of straw,
"Here, take it—since such diet suits your taste,
And much good may it do your vulgar maw!"
Often the slighting speech the man repeated.

The Ass—his quiet mood by insult heated—
Replies: "Just what you choose to give, I take,
Master unjust! but not because I choose it.
Think you I nothing like but straw? Then make
The experiment. Bring corn, and see if I refuse it."



Ye caterers for the public, hence take heed
How your defaults by false excuse you cover!
Fed upon straw—straw it may eat, indeed:
Try it with generous fare—'t will scorn the other.



FABLE XXIX.

THE TURNSPIT AND THE MULE OF THE WELL.

In inn or convent kitchen,
The reader oft, no doubt,
Turning the spit about,
A contrivance shrewd has seen.

A wheel of wood is it,
With steps on outer rim,
Where a Dog, ceaseless clambering,
Turns it beneath his feet.

A Dog, who every day,
In such wheel, performed his stint,
Thus expressed his discontent:
"Hard work and paltry pay!

Here I may climb and sweat;
And, when my task is done,
They throw me out a bone,—
While they eat all the meat.

Wearily, wearily on,
Day passes after day.
In the house I will not stay,
Nor in the hated town."

The first chance of flight improving,
He slyly off did steal;
Till he found, in a field, a wheel
Of a well, which a Mule kept moving.

As his eyes he on it set,
He cried,— "What have we here?
By this it would appear
Here, too, they're roasting meat."

"No meat I roast, but pump
Water," replied the Mule.—
"Let me, now, try a pull;
I'm light, but up I'll jump.

Ah! pretty heavy, is it?
Something harder I must work.
What then? I will not shirk;
'T isn't turning the old spit.

I shall better rations earn,
And more respect compel."—
Here the laborer at the well
Interrupted, in his turn.

"To the spit and kitchen fire
I advise you to go back.
A turnspit strength would lack
For the task to which you aspire."



Now hear the Mule sagacious!
Wisely, sure, he counsels thus;
And one Horatius Flaccus

This same matter does discuss.

How idly doth an author yearn
To undertake, where he must fail!
The little Dog cannot avail
The huge well-wheel to turn.

FABLE XXX.

THE AUTHOR AND THE RAT.

In study of a scholar, sage and mellow,
There dwelt a Rat,—a devil of a fellow,—
Who on naught else his hunger would assuage
But prose and verse of many a learned page.
In vain the Cat watched for him night and day;
Her paws she ne'er could put upon a whisker.
Of cunning traps no shrewd device,
No arsenic hid in sweet confection,
Nor any other bait or mixture,
Ever prepared for rats or mice,
For learned scrolls could cure his predilection;
But with whole pages nightly he made way.

The rascal gnawed, moreover, nothing less,
What our poor Author furnished to the presses,—
His works of eloquence and poesy.
And, as the manuscripts the accursed beast
Had eaten once before, made he
Of printed page still more luxurious feast.

"Ah, what hard luck is mine!" the Author cried.
"I've had enough of writing for these gnawers.
Since all experiments in vain I've tried,
Blank paper now I'll keep within my drawers,—
And nothing else. This mischief must be stayed."

But, lo! too faithful to his wasteful trade,
In pure white paper, without stop or stint,
As heretofore with manuscript and print,
The villanous vermin like destruction made.

At his wit's end, as last resort,
Into his ink he pours, in copious dose,
Corrosive sublimate, and writes
Something; I know not whether verse or prose.
'Tis eaten by the animal perverse,
And quickly ends his sport.
"Happy receipt which mischief sure requites!"
Sarcastic said the Poet, thus relieved.
"Let him, who gnaws too freely, have a care
Lest his malicious insult prove a snare;
And the impatient wight he seeks to bait,
Should write him in corrosive sublimate."



Be moderate, critic,—for unjust abuse
Severe retaliation will excuse;
Silence to keep, beneath invective froward,
Argues an author either dunce or coward.



FABLE XXXI.

THE SQUIRREL AND THE HORSE.

A Steed,—a noble sorrel,—
Docile to spur and rein,
Before a little Squirrel
Went dashing round a plain.

Watching awhile his motions,
So swift, yet regular,
The Squirrel brisk bespeaks him

As follows: "My dear sir,
No great merit
All this deftness,
Grace and lightness—
Such I've often seen before.
With equal spirit,
Just such gambols
I can do, and even more.
I am sprightly,
I am active;
Always lightly
Moving round,
From ground to tree,
And tree to ground,
I am never quiet found."

Checking his pace a moment,
The good colt his gallop stayed,
And in grave tone, as follows,
To the Squirrel answer made:
"Comings and goings,
Turns and twists,
Idle freaks,
Heed who lists.
All this no useful purpose speaks.
Not so futile
My endeavor,
In my duty
Faithful ever.
My master to serve,
I strain every nerve
To be always prompt and clever."



On puerile trifles of the day,
Some time and talents throw away;
And thus the Squirrel's part they play.



FABLE XXXII.

THE FOX AND THE LADY.

A famous gallant, of Parisian renown,
A Fop of the most extravagant taste,
Who silver and gold like water would waste,
With a new suit each day to dazzle the town,—
On the festival day of his lady love placed
On his shoes two paltry buckles of tin;
In order to show, by this frivolous whim,
That he courted not fame, but that fame courted him.

"What beautiful silver, so brilliant and gay!"
Said the lady. "Huzza for the taste and the rule
Of the master of fashion, the pride of our day!"

Thus a volume of nonsense, or, I am a fool,
The world will devour, if subscribed with the name
Of a popular author, established in fame.

FABLE XXXIII.

THE OSTRICH, THE DROMEDARY, AND THE FOX.

A party of beasts assembled for pleasure,—
For beasts, like mankind, thus diversify leisure,—
With a thousand discussions of this and of that,
Were whiling the time in a sociable chat.

Of the different qualities, now they conversed,
That each animal marked; some among them rehearsed
The deserts of the Ant, of the Hound so sagacious;
While some praised the Bee, some the Parrot loquacious.

"True, true," said the Ostrich; "but 'tis clear to me,—very,
That no beast surpasses my friend Dromedary."
"For my part," said Dromedary, "I must declare
That I think we can none with the Ostrich compare."

The assembly, astounded, was puzzled to guess
Why these two should so strange an opinion profess.
Could it be that they both were bulky and strong,
Or that both boasted necks so remarkably long?

Or that Ostrich was known as a simpleton rare,
While the other had surely no wisdom to spare?
Of their mutual ugliness were they both jealous,
Or that each could display a protuberance callous?

Or can it be—"Pooh!" said Reynard the sly;
"Are you all at a loss? then so am not I.
From Barbary both, of the desert, each brother,
As his fellow-countryman, praises the other."



Shrewdly our Fox the riddle has read;
Of writers in plenty the same may be said,
Who, to test a man's genius, ask where he was bred.



FABLE XXXIV.

THE CROW AND THE TURKEY.

A bitter contest once did spring,—
No matter how the fact I know,—
On their respective speed of wing,
Between a Turkey and a Crow.

Which first would reach the appointed station,
Sure you can tell, as well as I,

Without much grave consideration,
If you have ever seen them fly.

"Look here," the loitering Turkey cries
To Crow, half vanished out of view;
"The thought will to my mind arise
That you are black and ugly too.

Moreover, I have always heard,"—
She shouts still louder after him,—
"You are a most unlucky bird,
Foreboding naught but evils grim.

Begone from sight, disgusting beast!
You fairly do my stomach turn;
Making your foul, revolting feast
On carrion corpse that dogs would spurn."

"All this is nothing to the case,"
Answered the Crow, far off in air;
"The only question now in place
Is of our flight a trial fair."



When envious detractors find
In wise men's works, no welcome faults,
They satisfy their spiteful mind
By base and personal assaults.



FABLE XXXV.

THE SILKWORM AND THE CATERPILLAR.

At the very same time, when the gaunt Dromedary
And Ostrich, so ugly, each other bepraised,
In terms so unmeasured and extraordinary,

That the other brutes thought them both utterly crazed,
Till the Fox told the reason, and their wonder dispelled—
In that same assembly arose a discussion
Concerning the Silkworm, artificer skilled
In producing of works of such wonderful fashion.

A silken cocoon some one brought them to see;
They examine—their plaudits are hearty and loud.
And, even the Mole, though as blind as could be,
Concedes it to be a masterpiece proud.
But an old Caterpillar, who his spite could not stifle,
Muttered out of a corner, "This fuss was absurd.

Their wondrous cocoon was a pitiful trifle;
Its admirers all ninnies," he coolly averred.
The beasts at each other looked round in amaze.
"How comes it," say they, "that this creature forlorn,
What the rest of us all are uniting to praise,
He alone, wretched worm, takes upon him to scorn?"
Then up jumped sly Reynard and said, "On my soul,
'Tis easy enough the reason to show;
His mortified rancor he cannot control;
He makes cocoons too, though they 're worthless, we
know."



Laborious Genius! when, stung by the sneer
Of the envious wretch who would rob you of glory,
The loss of your well-deserved laurels you fear,
Then take my advice and tell him this story.



FABLE XXXVI.

THE PURCHASE OF THE ASS.

Yesterday through our street

An Ass did pass,
In trappings most complete—
A gorgeous Ass.
Saddle and halter too
Were both bran new;
With tassels yellow
Or red as rose.
Besides the fellow
Wore plumes and bows
Of ribbons bright.
Bells tinkle light
As on he paced;
And many a prank
And rare device,
With carving nice,
The shears had traced
On breast and flank.

His cunning master,—
As I was told,—
A Gypsy jockey,
The creature sold
To a weak blockhead;
And they said
The Donkey Colt
Had cost the dolt
But a mere song.
In haste along
The exulting buyer
Drove home the beast,—
His pride to feast,
While friends admire
His bargain rare.

"Let me inquire,
Neighbor,"—says one,—
"If blood and bone,
Good as his clothes,
Your purchase shows."

Whereon, with care,
The showy gear
And harness line
To strip he goes.
Beneath the saddle—
At first go off—
They find his withers
With warts all rough,
Like musket balls.
Along the spine,
And on his shoulders,
Six dreadful galls
Appal beholders.
Nothing to say
Of two great gashes,
That hidden lay
Under the girth;
And an old hurt,
From cruel lashes,
Clean to the bone,
Into a tumor
Inveterate grown.
In bitter humor,
"Ah, precious gull!"—
The hapless owner said,—
"Donkey more dull
A thousand fold
Than this brute cull,
I have my money paid
For trumpery vile,
Through Gypsy wile."



Now faith, this queer affair
I often note.
Well it applies
To friends of mine,
Who, at great price,
Buy books, that shine

In bindings rich and rare,
But are not worth a groat.

FABLE XXXVII.

THE OX AND THE GRASSHOPPER.

As in a field the sturdy Ox was ploughing,
A Grasshopper, close by him, shrilly sang out;
"Ah! what a crooked furrow, friend, you're making!
Then the Ox answered,— "Sure, my little lady,
If every other furrow were not drawn straight,
You never would perceive that this was crooked;
Stop, then, reproaches so unjust and futile;
For well I serve my master, and he heeds not
A single failure, in so much accomplished."

Now let the captious critic that presumeth,—
Vain Grasshopper, the useful Ox reproaching,—
To drag to light, from works of sterling merit,
Some petty blemish, take to himself our meaning.

FABLE XXXVIII.

THE MACAW AND THE MARMOT.

A brilliantly-colored Macaw,
A wandering clown, near the spot
Where she hung in a balcony, saw—
A Savoyard, more likely than not.

He was showing—a penny to gain—
An animal ugly and squat;
Which he lauded in high-sounding strain
The creature, it was a Marmot.

The absurd little beast, at his word,
Came out of his box into sight;
When unto him said our gay bird:
"This matter amazes me quite,

That men give their money, to see
Such a comical creature as you,
When they freely may look upon me,
Clad in plumage of exquisite hue.

You may be, for aught that I know,
Some creature of value untold;
But for me, 'tis enough that you show
Yourself to all comers, for gold."

A scribbler, who heard the remark,

Hung his head, and went sneaking away
Because, for his low, dirty work,
He was kept by a printer in pay.

FABLE XXXIX.

THE PORTRAIT.

A spreading contagion, defacing our tongue
With phrases outlandish, our critics bemoan.
But some fools have their notions of purity hung
Upon obsolete terms superseding our own.
Living words they despise as a vulgar intrusion,
And forgotten ones rake from oblivion's gloom.
For a word of advice on such stupid conclusion,
In phrase like their own, we here must find room;
In two dialects, jostling in motley confusion.

Of our own times a Painter—who jealousy felt
That some portraits antique, of a day long bygone
From the connoisseurs won both lauding and gelt—
Determined to make some antiques of his own.
So essaying, one day, the portrait to limn
Of a certain rich man, in high estimate held,
He deemed that a dress of antiquity grim
Would give to his limning the impress of eld.

For a second Velasquez he counted to stand—
When the traits of the sitter, to perfect content,
Having deftly depicted—with grave collar and band,
And glittering gauds, he a costume besprent
That had figured, whilom, as stately and grand.

To his patron the work he carries with speed.
He, his form thus yclad with wonderment saw;
By such odd gear full sorely astounded, I rede,—

Though the face of the portrait showed dainty and brow.

This antick his patron, to quip him, devised—
The Painter a guerdon to grant, to his gree—
In a chest, as heir-loom from his ancestry prized,
Some old coins had been lying for centuries three;
Of the first of the Charles' and fifth Ferdinand,
Of Philip the second and Philip the third:
A purse full of these he placed in the hand
Of the Painter abashed—but ne'er said a word.

"With these coin—or, as certes, I rather might say—
These medals, to market if I chance for to his,"—
Quoth our limner,— "when victuals I needed, I pray,
How, with such, could I chaffer my cheer to supply?"

"But sith," said the other, "you've pranked me out there
In a guise, that was once brave and lordly,—'tis true,
But which no living man but a beadle would wear;
As you 've painted me, so I have paid you.
Take your picture again, and paint round my throat
A cravat, instead of that collar and band—
Yon satin slashed doublet exchange for my coat,
And my rapier, too, for that basket-hilt brand;
Not one, in the city's whole compass, there is
Who, in trappings like these, would guess at my phiz.
Paint me like myself, and the price I'll lay down
In good money, current in country or town."



Hold, now. If we laugh at the farcical notion
Of this modern Painter, and deem it so droll,
Why may we not laugh at the Author's devotion,
His ideas who drapes in antiquity's stole;—
Who shocks us with phrases all mouldy with age;
Thinks oddity graceful;—and purity's self
Considers his style, when he darkens his page
With expressions forgotten and laid on the shelf;—
And believes that no term by pure taste is forbid,

If it only were good in the time of the Cid?

FABLE XL.

THE TWO INNS.

Coming to a little town,
The mountain's skirts within,
Two youthful travellers, seeking rest,
Looked round them for an Inn.

Of two rival Inns, the host,
Each, with a thousand offers,
Did the wayfarers accost.

To give offence to neither
Was their natural desire;
So, in the house of either,
Apartments one doth hire.

Of the mansions twain,
Each guest chooseth, for himself,
In which he will remain.

To a house that stretched
Around its ample courts.
Its broad front palatial,
One traveller resorts.

A quartered scutcheon shone
Over the lofty gate,
Sculptured deep in stone.

Less grand the other Inn
Appeared unto the sight,
But, comfort and good cheer within

Its patron's trust requite.

Chambers, its walls did screen,
Of pleasant temperature,
All light, and bright, and clean.

But its rival, the huge palace,
With its architecture bold,
Was narrow, dark and dirty,
And miserably cold.

A portal tall and sightly,—
Within inclement garrets,
With tiled roof covered slightly.

Its inmate comfortless,
Did a weary sojourn make;
And bewailed unto his comrade,
Next day, his sad mistake.

His friend thus answer gives:
"In like manner many a book
Its reader's hopes deceives."

FABLE XLI.

THE TEA-PLANT AND SAGE.

From China, once, the Tea-plant coming,
Met with the Sage upon his way.
"Friend,"—said the latter,— "whither roaming?"

"For Europe, where for me they pay
A generous price,"—quoth Tea,— "I'm bound."

"And I,"—said Sage,— "to China's market go;

Where I am held in reverence profound
For beverage or for medicine, you know.
In Europe no good fortune waits on me;
A worthless herb, not comparable to thee,
But quite too common there—to shine.
I to your home am sent, and you to mine.
Good luck attend you to my native shore!
For never yet was any nation known,
But gold and praises will profusely pour
On foreign products, while it slights its own."



This sarcasm some abatement may admit,
For varying fancies are the soul of trade;
But, of the comment, application fit,
In literary borrowings, may be made.
For what, in general, doth good service render,
In special cases sometimes proves a blunder.

Now, I am sure that I can Spaniards show,
Who will eternally be quoting
Whole pages out of Tasso or Boileau;
Yet never think or care to know
What language Garcilaso wrote in.



FABLE XLII.

THE CAT, THE LIZARD, AND THE CRICKET.

Creatures there are, of wondrous skill
To rid themselves of every ill,
By use of vegetable specific—
Their sound construction organic
Preserving by their lore botanic.
They know all herbs medicinal—diuretic,
Narcotic, purgative, emetic,

Febrifuge, styptic and prolific,
Cephalic, too, and sudorific.

A Cat, theoretic and empirical,
There was,—a pedant most rhetorical,—
That talked in lofty style, magniloquent
As any grave professor eloquent,—
Seeking for vegetables salutiferous,
Said to a Lizard,—"Ah! what pangs mortiferous
I must, to cure this turgidness hydropsical,
Swallow some essence of leaves heliotropical."

Lizard, at this bombastic speech astounded,—
That with big terms professional resounded,—
Naught better knew what Puss did gabble on,
Than if she spoke in tongue of Babylon.
But the ridiculous charlatan, he saw,
With Sunflower leaves was stuffing out her maw.
"Aha!"—said he,—"learned Signora Dropsical,
I know now what's your essence heliotropical!"

A silly Cricket heard the dialogue;
And, though he knew naught of this catalogue
Of words so overwhelming and so curious,
Honored the Cat with an eulogium glorious.
For some there are who pomp for merit take;
And, of what's clear and simple, mockery make.



Lovers of phrases hyperbolic,
And turgid aphorisms diabolical,
Exhausting all the dictionary's store
Of giant-worded and bombastic lore,—
Though meaningless and inappropriate all,—
Upon your mouthing verbiage dogmatical
Reflects this polysyllabic apologue enigmatical.

FABLE XLIII.

THE CONCERT OF THE BEASTS.

Attention—noble auditory!
While the rebeck I tune;
And be prepared with plaudits soon,
When ye have heard my story.

Certain of the subject beasts
Of the mighty Lion's court
An entertainment musical,
To make his Royal Highness sport
Upon his birth-day festival,
Devised,—to grace the occasion gay,
And pleasure to insure,
They organized an orchestra
To make success secure.
As often it doth happen,
Little wisdom was displayed,
In choosing actors competent,
That understood their trade.

Naught was said about the Nightingale,
Of the Blackbird not a word;
Of Lark or Linnet no one thought,
Or the Canary-bird.
Singers, much less accomplished
But more self-satisfied,
Took upon themselves the charge
The music to provide.
Before the time appointed
To electrify all hearts,
Each musician loudly vaunted
How they would play their parts.
At length the choir the prelude
Commenced within the hall,
Before the expectant multitude,—

Adroit performers all—
Two lusty Crickets treble sang;
Frog and locust took their place
To do up the contra-alto;
Hog and Donkey grunted base;
While, to make up the melody,
Two Hornets brisk the tenor try.
With what delicious cadence
And accent delicate
The orchestra resounded,
Sure I need not here repeat;
I'll only say, that most
Stopped up their ears, at once;
But, from deference to their host,
Their annoyance sought to hide,
At the barbarous dissonance,
That echoed far and wide.

Frog saw, by the wry faces,
That no bravo's cheering shout
Or glad applause awaited them;
And sprang the choir from out.
"The stupid Ass is out of tune
Most shockingly," said he.

"No—'tis the treble," Donkey brayed,
"That mars the harmony."

"The Hog, he fairly spoils the whole,"
A squeaking Cricket cried.

"No, no!"—said Chucky,—
"on my soul,
I say the Locust, worse than all,
Out of all time and tune doth squall."

"That speech becomes you very ill!
Mind what you say!"—in accents shrill,
Locust angrily replied.
"'Tis plain that those confounded tenors,

The Hornets, are the real sinners!"

The Lion silenced the dispute:
"Before the concert was begun
Each puffed-up and conceited brute
Was bragging loud—yea, every one;
And challenged confident applause,
As if, to him alone, were due,
The honor of the harmony
Produced by your melodious crew.
Now the experiment is made,
And your incompetence betrayed—
On your own shares, ye all are dumb,
In this outrageous pandemonium,
And, to avoid presumptuous shame,
Each on his neighbor lays the blame.
Now get ye gone—and from my sight
Forever banished be.
The day beware, that e'er ye dare
Again to sing to me!"



Such, Heaven grant to be
The issue of the fray,
When writers, two or three,
Their scanty wits uniting,—
If the book should make its way
Each arrogates the praise;
If not—the blame he lays
On his comrade's wretched writing.



FABLE XLIV.

THE SWORD AND THE SPIT.

Sheer, sharp and trusty, tempered well,

A Sword, as good as from the skilful hand
Of famous smith Toledan ever fell,
The shock of many a combat did withstand.
In turn, it several masters truly served,
And brought them safe through dangers many.
Though better fate it well deserved,
At auctions sold for paltry penny,
Some luckless chance—who ever would have thought it?—
At last, into an inn's dark corner brought it.
There—like an useless thing—upon a pin
Hung up, it ate itself away
In useless rust, until the maid, one day,
By order of the innkeeper, her master,—
A precious blockhead, too, he must have been,—
Into the kitchen took it,—sad disaster!—
To spit a hen. Degrading—shame upon her!—
What once had been a blade of proof and honor.

While this was going on within the inn,
A certain stranger, newly come to court,—
A clown, that would a modish life begin,—
Did to a cutler for a sword resort.
The cutler saw that, for the case in hand,
The sword was but an idle ornament;
And, if the hilt could but inspection stand,
No matter what the blade might be—so sent
His booby customer, for the time, away;—
"A sword should ready be another day."
The rogue, then, takes an old and battered spit,
Which, in his kitchen, service long had done;
He cleans, and polishes, and sharpens it;
And sells it to the unsuspecting clown,—
In such transactions miserably raw,—
For the good sword of Thomas d'Ayala.
An arrant knave, as gallows e'er did cure,—
The innkeeper as great a blockhead,—sure.



With equal knavery and stupidity,

May not we charge these vile translators
Who, with their works, in wretched rivalry,
We see infesting all the world of Letters?
One, with bad versions, famous writers fits—
Thus turning noble swords to vulgar spits.
Another clothes vile works in sounding words;
Then, seeks to sell his spits for trusty swords.

FABLE XLV.

THE UNFORTUNATES.

A man who, from his birth, was dumb
And deafer than a mole,
Some trifle to arrange was set
With a blind man, cheek by jowl.

The blind man spoke by signs
Which the mute did plainly mark;
When, in like way, he said his say,
His friend was in the dark.

In this odd predicament,
They, for friendly aid, accost
A passing comrade of them both,
Who his right arm had lost.

The gestures of the mute
He explained in language good;
And the blind man, from his mouth,
The whole matter understood.

To close this curious scene
And conference singular,
A contract it behoved
Of the bargain to prepare.

"Friends,"—said the one-armed man,—
"I must here give up the task;
But the schoolmaster will come
And write it, if you ask."

"How can a cripple lame,"—
Said the blind man,—"hither come?
Why, he can hardly stir.
We must go to him at home."

The cripple then the compact
To paper did transfer;
The blind and maimed man dictate;
The mute was messenger.

For this purpose any two
Were enough,—and even more.
But, of such a hapless crew,
It took no less than four.



Were it not that in Alcarria,
A little while ago.
This very matter happened,—
As a thousand gossips know,—
It might have been surmised
That, some one contrived the story,
To hit off the plan devised
By weak aspirants for glory,
Who club their pens and brains
Some wondrous work to try,
By their united pains,
Which would each alone defy.

FABLE XLVI.

THE COCKS.

A Cock, that was well known
As a champion brave and stout,
And a Chicken but half grown
Squabbled something about,—
But what, to me's unknown,—
And, after furious din,
At last got up a very pretty battle;
In which the chick such fight did show,
And the old one around so sharply rattle,
That, with a loud, exultant crow,
He claimed the honors of the field to win.
Then the seraglio's vanquished lord,—
His rival out of hearing of his tongue,—
Said, "Ah! in time he'll make a pretty bird,
But, now, poor fellow, he is very young."

No more he dared himself to match
With the young hero; but again
With an old Cock he had a scratch,—
Of many fights, a veteran,—
Who hardly left him plume or crest.
Whereon he muttered to the rest,
"The fine old fellow!—surely it would be
Unfair to thrash so old a chap as he."



Let him that will in strife engage
On any question literary,
Pay less attention to the age
Than talents of his adversary.

FABLE XLVII.

THE MONKEY AND THE MAGPIE.

To her friend, the crafty Monkey,
Said a Magpie,—"If you'll go
With me unto my dwelling,
I've some pretty things to show.
For, sure you know, I've skill
A thousand things to steal.
You shall see them, if you will,
Where I my hoard conceal
In my chest." Replied her friend:
"I'll wait on you with pleasure."
So their course forthwith they bend
To see the Magpie's treasure.

And there, my lady Magpie
Proceeded to produce,
First, an old colored garter,
Then a hoop that ladies use,—
Two petty coins, a buckle,
Of a knife a shabby handle,
A blade of broken scissors,
And a little bit of candle,
The battered tip of scabbard
Worn out in ancient war,
A scrap of gauze and half a comb,
Three pegs of a guitar,—
With an endless lot of knick-knacks,
That good for nothing were.

"What think you now, friend Monkey?
Don't you envy me my pelf?
Upon my word, no other bird
Is so wealthy as myself."
A shrewd grimace the Monkey made,
And to Magpie answered she:
"This is all an idle story,
And your wealth mere trumpery.
In your faithful chest you bury
Every petty, straggling waif;
Not that they all are worth a groat,

But because it keeps them safe.
Look at my jaws, dear gossip;
You see, beneath them here,
I have two nice snug magazines,
Or chops, if you prefer.

These I contract at pleasure,
Or expand them, when I please.
What I like, I eat at leisure,—
And the residue in these
I stow, there safely to remain
Till I shall hungry be again.
Old rags and wretched rubbish
You, foolish bird, lay by;
Sweet nuts and tender filberts,
And racy sweetmeats—I,—
Meat, and whatever else is good,
In time of need, to serve as food."



Shall the Monkey's lecture shrewd
To the Magpie only go?
The advice, I think, is good
For those who make a show
Of a medley incoherent,
Where no meaning is apparent.



FABLE XLVIII.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE SPARROW.

A Nightingale her voice one day was tuning
In notes to match an organ's sonorous swell;
When by her cage a chattering Sparrow roaming
Stopped—his surprise at her attempt to tell.

"I marvel much, that such strange pains you take;
That you, who sing so sweetly and so well,
Your imitators, thus, your models make;
For sure, the notes the organ's pipes that swell,
It owes to imitation of your song."

"Nevertheless," replies the Nightingale,—
"Though it had learned of me, I would not fail
From it, in turn, instruction to derive.
And you will see the good results ere long.
To imitate my native bursts it sought;
I wish my untutored strains to modify
By the deep rules of science it has taught.
And thus, good sir, you see, that by and by,
My natural talent will by education thrive."



Has the caprice some learned fancy crossed,
That hours to study given are labor lost?
Who wisest is, will ever study most.



FABLE XLIX.

THE GARDENER AND HIS MASTER.

A copious fountain played
In a garden's flowery bed,
And served to form a basin
Where many fish were fed.

Of the watering of his flowers
The Gardener thought alone;
And drained it dry, till due supply
For carp and tench was gone.

His Master soon the mischief saw,

And scolds the careless sinner.
"The flowers I love; but also like
My mess of fish for dinner."

The Gardener, grown crusty,
So reads his Master's whim,
That he lets the plants go thirsty,
That carp and tench may swim.

In the garden, shortly after,
The indignant owner found
His flowers, all dry and withered,
Upon the parching ground.

"Booby! you need not water waste,
And leave me not a fish to taste;
Nor yet deny—to save the fish—
A single flower to grace the dish,"



Though the maxim may be trite,—
Unless you have the skill,
Taste and profit to unite,—
Lay by the author's quill.



FABLE L.

THE TWO THRUSHES.

A Thrush, with years grown gray,
And wise as well as old,
His grandson asked one day,—
An unpractised youth and bold,—
With him to go straightway,
Their morning flight to hold,
Where a well-stocked vineyard lay—

On its luscious fruit to prey.

"Where may this vineyard be?"—
The youngling answered coy,—
"And what fruit is there?"—"We'll see.
Learn how to live, my boy,"
Said the grandsire. "Come with me,
And a banquet rich enjoy."
As he spoke the words, he shew
Where thick the clusters grew.

The pert young pilferer saw;—
"Is this the fruit you puff?
Who would think you were so raw?
What puny, withered stuff!
Pooh! It isn't worth a straw.
Now, bigger fruit enough,
And better far than any here
I know of, in a garden near.

A single grape, I'll swear,
Will prove better than it all.
But we'll make a trial fair,"
When they reach the garden wall,
The fledgling shouts—"Look there—
How big and nice! I call
That fruit, indeed—no trash."
Reader, it was a yellow calabash.



It may not much surprise
That young birds by chaff are caught;
But that, by men reputed wise,
Books should, for bulk, be bought,
And valued for their size,
Is stranger, is it not?
If a good work, 'tis great of course;
If bad, the more there is the worse.

FABLE LI.

THE LACE-MAKERS.

Near a lace-weaver, lived
A man who made silver and gold galloons.
"Now, who would have believed,
Neighbor," said he, "that, even for more doubloons,
Three yards of your light lace are sold
Than ten of mine, though wrought in heavy gold!"

"That my articles exceed
In value, sir, so very much your own,
Is not strange; although, indeed,
You work in gold, and I in thread alone.
For skill is known to all
To be of greater worth than raw material."

Let those, at style who sneer,
And, to regard the matter only, condescend,
Note that—as here
A simple thread doth precious gold transcend—
So elegance and finish give
That form to thought, by which great works shall live.

FABLE LII.

THE HUNTER AND HIS FERRET.

Well tired, and exhausted
With the heat of the sun,
But loaded with rabbits,
A Hunter turned home.

Near by—to a neighbor
He met in the way—
He recounted the labor
And spoils of the day.

"A long tramp,—my old lad,
All day did I trudge;
But the luck is not bad,
If I am the judge.

Since the break of the day
I 've been out in the sun;
Hot enough, I should say,—
But fair business I've done.

Without too much bragging,
I say and repeat it,—
No hunter in bagging
The conies can beat it."

The Ferret's quick ear,
In his box as he hung,
His master did hear—
His own praise while he sung.

His sharp nose he poked
Through its lattice of wire;
"Now surely you joked,—
I should like to inquire,—

That I did the work,
Can you truly deny?
These rabbits of yours,
Who caught them but I?

So little desert,
In my toils do you see,
That you never can make

Some slight mention of me?"



That this cogent remark
The master might sting,
A body might think;
But it did no such thing.

He was cool as some writers,
Who play the mean game—
To borrow from others,
Yet breathe not their name.



FABLE LIII.

THE PIG, THE COCK, AND THE LAMB.

In a court-yard a poultry-house did lie,
Where a brisk Cock around at pleasure ran;
Behind the court, in a convenient sty,
Lay a stout Pig—fat as an alderman.
In the same yard, a little Lamb there lived;
And good companions, too, were all the three;
As may be very easily believed,
For such in farmers' yards we often see.

"Now, with your leave,"—the thrifty Pig, said he,
To the meek Lamb,—"what a delightful lot!
And what a peaceful, happy destiny,
The livelong day to slumber! Is it not?
Upon the honor of a Pig, I say,
That, in this wretched world, there's no such pleasure,
As to snore merrily the time away,
Let the world wag, and stretch yourself at leisure."

But, in his turn, the Cock the Lamb addressed,

Soon after Piggy did his dissertation end;
"To be with health and active vigor blest,
One must sleep sparingly, my little friend.
In hot July, or frosty winter day,
With the bright stars to watch, is the true way.
Sleep numbs our senses with a stupid sloth;
In fact unnerves the mind and body both."

The Lamb hears both, and knows not which to trust.
He never guesses—simple little elf—
That the fine rule, by each laid down, is just
That others ought to do what suits himself.



So among authors,—some there are who never
Think any doctrine sound, or maxim clever,
Or rules as good for others' guidance own,
Excepting such as they have hit upon.



FABLE LIV.

THE FLINT AND THE STEEL.

The Steel the Flint abused
Most bitterly one day,
For the unfeeling way,
In which his sides he bruised,
To chip out the brilliant sparks.
After some sharp remarks
They parted company;
And the Steel cries out, "Good-by!
Unless with me you 're used,
Of little worth you'll be!"
"Not much," said Flint,— "and yet, beyond a doubt,
Just what yourself are worth, the Flint without."



This little tale of ours,
Let each writer bear in mind,
Who deep study has not joined
To native powers.

In the flint, no fire we find
Without the help of steel;
Nor does Genius aught avail
Without the aid of Art.
Long as they work apart,
They both are sure to fail.

FABLE LV.

THE JUDGE AND THE ROBBER.

A villain was by hands of justice caught,
Just as of cash, and even of his life,
At the sharp point of murderous knife,
A luckless wayfarer to rob, he sought
The Judge upbraids him with his crime—
He answered: "Sir, from earliest time
I've been a rogue, practised in petty theft;
When buckles, watches, trunks and cloaks,
And swords, I stole from other folks.
Then, fairly launched upon my wild career,
I houses sacked. Now—no compunction left—
On the highways I rob, without a fear.
Let not your worship, then, make such a stir,
That I should rob and slay a traveller—
Nor of the matter make a charge so sore!
I've done such things these forty years, and more."

Do we the bandit's wretched plea allow?
Yet writers give no worthier excuse,

Who justify, by argument of use,
Errors of speech or of expression low—
Urging the long-lived blunders of the past
Against the verdict by sound critics cast.

FABLE LVI.

THE HOUSEMAID AND THE BROOM.

A Housemaid once was sweeping out a room
With a worn-out and very dirty Broom;
"Now, hang you for a Broom!"—said she in wrath—
"For, with the filth and shreds you leave behind
Where'er you go, you 're making, to my mind,
More dirt than you clean up upon your path."

The botchers who, devoid of skill, pretend
The faults of others' writings to amend,
But leave them ten times fuller than before;
Let not these blockheads fear that I shall score
Their paltry backs—I leave their blundering trade
To the apt censure of the serving-maid.

FABLE LVII.

THE LIZARDS.

A Naturalist, cruel as a Turk,
Two Lizards in his garden catches,
And coolly sets himself at work
To anatomize the little wretches.
The plumpest now he has dissected,

And torn the reptile limb from limb;
With microscope he then inspected
Intestines, paws, and tail, and skin;
He pulls apart, for scrutiny,
The loin and belly, neck and eye:
Then takes his pen—again he looks—
A little writes and recapitulates—
The memoranda enters in his books;
To fresh dissection then himself betakes.
Some curious friends, by chance, dropped in to see
The subject of his shrewd anatomy.
One wonders—questions one proposes—
While others yet turn up their noses.

This done, the scientific man
Gave o'er, exhausted with his labors.
The other Lizard jumped and ran,
In his old haunts, to join his neighbors.
To them, in friendly chat, he stated
The matters we have just related.

"You need not doubt it, friends,"—said he,—
"For everything myself did see.
The livelong day this man did spend
Over the body of our friend.
If, in us, attributes so rare
Are worth such pains in writing down,
To call us vermin who shall dare?
'Tis gross abuse—as all must own.
Now, noble brothers, our high station
Let us with dignity maintain, I pray.
Sure, we are worthy great consideration—
Whatever spiteful folks may say."



It is not worth the while to natter
The pride of writers we despise.
'Tis honoring too much the matter,
To condescend to criticize.

Their paltry trash in serious way
To note—your pains will never pay.

Of Lizards to make great account,
Gives them occasion to surmise
Their claims to be of some amount,
In the impartial public's eyes—
"Whatever spiteful folks may say."

FABLE LVIII.

THE WATCHES.

A knot of friends, invited to a feast,
At table sat—a loitering guest,
Who came long after all the rest,
Sought for his tardiness to make excuse:
And, by his comrades for a reason pressed,
Drew out his Watch, and, holding it on high,
Replied—"Tis you are out of time, not I.
"Tis two precisely—wherefore this abuse?"

"Absurd!" they answered. "Friend, your Watch is slow.
The rest of us came near an hour ago."

"But"—said the loiterer—"what needs argue more?
I trust my Watch, as I have said before."

Now let each wiser man this reference take
To foolish authors, who gross blunders make;
Then quote—in order to make good their stand—
The first authority that comes to hand.

But with our story we will now go on.
The guests all round next eagerly began
To pull their Watches out to test the fact,—

For all men like to prove their words exact;—
One at the quarter stood; at half, another;
One made it six and thirty minutes past;
This fourteen more, that ten less than the last.
No single Watch agreed with any other.
Then, all was doubt and question and vexation.
By luck, their entertainer chanced to be
A great proficient in astronomy.
He, his Chronometer by observation
Carefully set, consulted—and the hour
Was three o'clock and just two minutes more.
Thus he concluded all the disputation:
"To quote opinion and authority
Against the truth, if any one can see
The use—no point needs unsupported be.
For all can surely see, and must admit, forsooth,
Many opinions there may be—but only one is truth!"

FABLE LIX.

THE MOLE AND OTHER ANIMALS.

Some four-footed creatures
Assembled one day,
At the game of the blind man
Together to play.

A Dog and a Monkey,
Brimful of his tricks—
With a Fox, Hare and Eat,
And a Squirrel—made six.

The Monkey, he blinded
The eyes of the whole;
Because of his hands
He had better control.

A Mole heard their frolic;
And said,—"Surely I
For this fun am just fitted—
I think I will try."

He asks to come in;
The Monkey agreed.
Some mischief, I doubt not,
He had in his head.

The Mole, at each step,
Would stumble and blunder.
With his skin-covered eyes,
It was, clearly, no wonder.

At the very first trial,—
As well may be thought,—
Without much ado,
His Moleship was caught.

To be blind-man, of course,
To him it now fell:
And who was there fitted
To act it so well?

But, to get up a sham—
With affected surprise,
Said he,—"What are we doing?
You've not blinded my eyes."



If a creature purblind
Thus pretends he can see,
Will the blockhead confess himself
Stupid—think ye?

FABLE LX.

THE ROPE-DANCER.

As an unpractised urchin lessons took
In dancing, of a veteran of the ring,
On slack or tight rope,—it is all one thing,—
The youngster said,—"Good master, prithee, look;
How this great staff bothers and wearies me,
Which you call balance-pole or counterpoise!
In rope-dancing, what use one can devise
For such a clumsy load, I cannot see.
Why should you wish my motions so to fetter?
I lack not strength, nor yet activity.
For instance, now—this step and posture—see
If I, without the pole, can't do it better.

Look, master, there's not one whit of trouble in it."
As he says this, he throws the pole away—
"What's coming now? What are you doing, pray?"
He's flat upon his back in half a minute!

"At your best friend you grumble—silly wretch,"—
The master said,—"and if you choose to scout
The aid of art and method,—you'll find out
This is not the last tumble you will catch."

FABLE LXI.

THE OWL AND THE TOAD.

A red Owl was sitting quietly
Up in his hole, in a hollow tree,
Where he chanced to catch the curious eye
Of a great Toad that was hopping by.

"Holloa, up there, Sir Solitary!"—
Spoke out the Toad, with accent merry,—
"Poke out your head, and let us see,
Handsome or ugly, whether you be."

"I have never set up for an elegant beau,"—
Answered the Owl to the Toad below.
"To attempt by daylight to make a great show,
Will hardly do for me—well I know.

"And for you, my good sir,—displaying your grace
So jauntily now, in the day's broad face,—
Don't you think it would far better be,
If you hid in another hole, like me?"

Alas! how few of us authors live
By the good advice the Owl doth give!
All the nonsense we write, get printed we must;
Although, to the world, it be dry as the dust.
The lesson, my comrades, is good—let us learn it
It often would be much better to burn it.
But conspicuous toads we rather would be,
Than modest owls in our own hollow tree.

FABLE LXII.

THE OIL-MERCHANT'S ASS.

Once on a time, an Ass,—
An Oilman's hack,—
Bearing upon his back
A huge skin filled with oil,
With foot o'er-worn by toil,
Into his stable sought to pass;
But, stumbling, struck his nose

The cruellest of blows
Upon the door's projecting clamp.
"Now, is it not a shame,"—
Poor Donkey did exclaim,—
"That I, who every day
Carry tuns of oil, my way
Into my own stable cannot find,
More than if I were stone-blind,
For want of one poor lamp?"

Much I fear, that those who glory
In buying books they never read,
Fare as ill,—
And deserve no more;—but, if they will
Grow wiser, let them heed this story.

FABLE LXIII.

THE CONNOISSEURS.

A quarrel rose, both long and loud,
A well-stocked wine-cellar within,
Where wine-bibbers—a goodly crowd—
Tasted and argued, talked and sipped again.

The occasion was, that many tried
Veterans their voices did combine,
With obstinacy, rude and flagrant,
That no such drinks our times supplied,
No such delicious, luscious wine,
As days gone by—so generous, fine,
So ripe, so mellow and so fragrant.
In the opinion of the rest,
The later wines were deemed the best.
Their opponents' theory they abuse;

Their notion termed exaggeration,—
Mere trashy, idle declamation
Picked up from interested Jews,
Who glosing tales for cheatery use.

Of either side the rabid hum
The cellar filled to overflowing;
When an old toper chanced to come—
A famous connoisseur and knowing.
Said he then,—letting slip an oath,—
"By jolly Bacchus, the divine,"—
Among such worthies 'tis a strong one—
"Better than I, for choice of wine,
No one is fitted, by my troth,
To tell the right one from the wrong one.
So cease, good friends, your idle din.
You see that I am from Navarre.
In cask, or bottle, jug or skin,
Hogshead or tub, or earthen jar,
I've tasted of the juice of grape,
Of every kind, in every shape.
To taste, distinguish and to judge,
And surely to lay down the law,
In any vintage, I'll not grudge,
From Xeres' plains to Tudela.
From Malaga unto Peralta,
From the Canary Isles to Malta,
From Valdepeñas to Oporto,
Their wines I know—and many more, too.
I tell you now, 'tis folly great
To think that every cask of wine,
Which on its head bears ancient date,
By age will mellow and refine.
Time cannot make the poor wine good;
If mean it was, in its first hour,
It will be washy still and crude,
In nothing changed, but turning sour.
Worth no jot more this hour, you know,
Than vinegar a century ago.

New wines, from time to time, there are,—
Though some despise for being new,—
Which very safely may compare
With any wines that ever grew.
Those you despise—although surpassed,
Occasionally, in times long past,
By certain vintages—yet may
Tickle the palates of a future day.
Enough—to settle the dispute—
Bad wine I hold in low repute,
And ever do eschew.
But when 'tis good, I drain the flask;
And never vex myself to ask,
If it be old or new."



Many a learned bore
Keeps up a constant bother;
One praising ancient lore—
Modern alone, another.
By no such foolish question vexed,
I take the jolly toper's text;
The good, whate'er it is, I use;
The bad, without a word, refuse.



FABLE LXIV.

THE FROG AND THE HEN.

Once on a time, a noisy Frog
Heard a Hen cackling near his bog;
"Begone!" said he; "your clamor rude
Disturbs our quiet neighborhood.
What's all this shocking fuss about, I beg?"—
"Nothing, dear sir, but that I've laid an egg."

"A single egg! and therefore such a rout?"—

"Yes, neighbor Frog, a single egg, I say.
Are you so troubled, when I'm not put out
To hear your croaking all the night and day?
I boast that I have done some little good, though small;
Hold you your tongue! You do no good at all."

FABLE LXV.

THE BEETLE.

For a fable a subject I have,
Which would do very well,—but for rhymes
To-day my muse is too grave;

As she always will be at odd times—
And the topic for somebody stands,
Whose fancy more cheerily chimes.

For this writing of fables demands
That in verse our ideas should flow;
Which not always are matched to our hands,

A Beetle contemptible, now,
Of said fable the hero I choose;—
For I want one paltry and low.

Of this insect, every one knows
That—although from no filth he refrains—
He will ne'er eat the leaf of a rose.

Here the author should lavish his pains,
While, as well as his talents allow,
This astonishing taste he explains.

To wind up the whole, let him show,
By a sentence pithy and terse,
Just what he could have us to know.

And so let him trick out his verse,
With adornments according to taste;
But this moral conclusive rehearse;

That, as the flowers' beautiful queen
With no coarse, filthy beetle agrees;
So, some tasteless writers no keen
Or delicate fancy can please.

FABLE LXVI.

THE RICH MAN'S LIBRARY.

In Madrid, there was a rich man—and, they say,
That ten times as stupid, as rich, he was too;—
Whose magnificent mansion made ample display
Of furniture gorgeous and costly and new.

"It vexes me much, that a house so complete,"—
To this wealthy dolt, said a neighbor one day,—
"Should a Library lack,—an ornament great,—
So useful and elegant, too, by the way."

"To be sure," said the other, "how strange that the case
To me never occurred; I'll supply the want soon.
There is time enough yet; and, in the first place,
I devote to the purpose the northern saloon.

Send a cabinet-maker to put up some shelves,
Capacious, well finished,—no matter for cost,
Then, in buying some books, we will busy ourselves;—
To make it all perfect, no time shall be lost."

The cases are done; the owner he comes,
Inspects and approves: "And now,"—said the snob,—
"I must go out and look up some twelve thousand tomes.
'Pon my honor, 'twill be a pretty good job.

I am almost discouraged—of money a deal
It will take; and 'tis work for a century, too.
Will it not be much better the cases to fill,
With books made of pasteboard, as good to the view?

Just think now—why not? A painter I know,
For such little jobs precisely the man;
Can write titles out fair, and make pasteboard to show
Like leather or parchment, if any one can."

And now to the work,—books precious and rare,
Both modern and ancient, he caused to be painted;
And, besides printed volumes, he also takes care
To have manuscripts, too, in same guise represented.

The precious old fool then, each day, set apart
Some hours to wander his library round;
Till, learning the titles of many by heart,
He thought himself grown to a scholar profound.

Truly, what better needs the student,—contented
Of books, nothing more than their titles, to know
Than to own a collection right skilfully painted,
Of genuine volumes presenting the show?

FABLE LXVII.

THE VIPER AND THE LEECH.

"A strangely inconsistent crew!"—

Said the Viper to the simple Leech,—
"Men fly from me and seek for you;
Although they get a bite from each."

"All very true,"—the Leech replied,—
"But the two things are different quite.
I bite the sick, to give them aid;
To kill the sound and well, you bite."

Now, gentle reader, with you take
This counsel, as we part:
And always due distinction make,
If from the lash you smart.
Great is the difference between
Correction kind and malice keen.

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