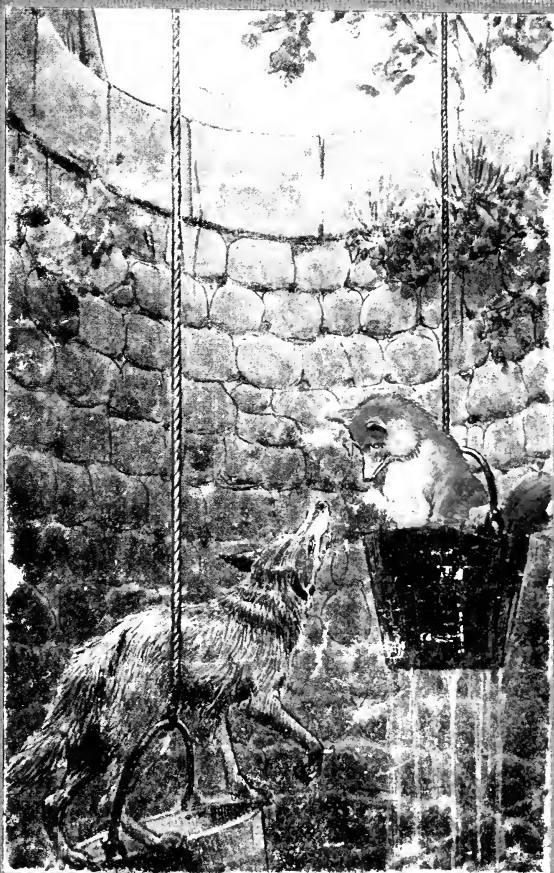


FABLES OF LA FONTAINE F. C. TILNEY

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BY
FREDERICK
COLIN TILNEY



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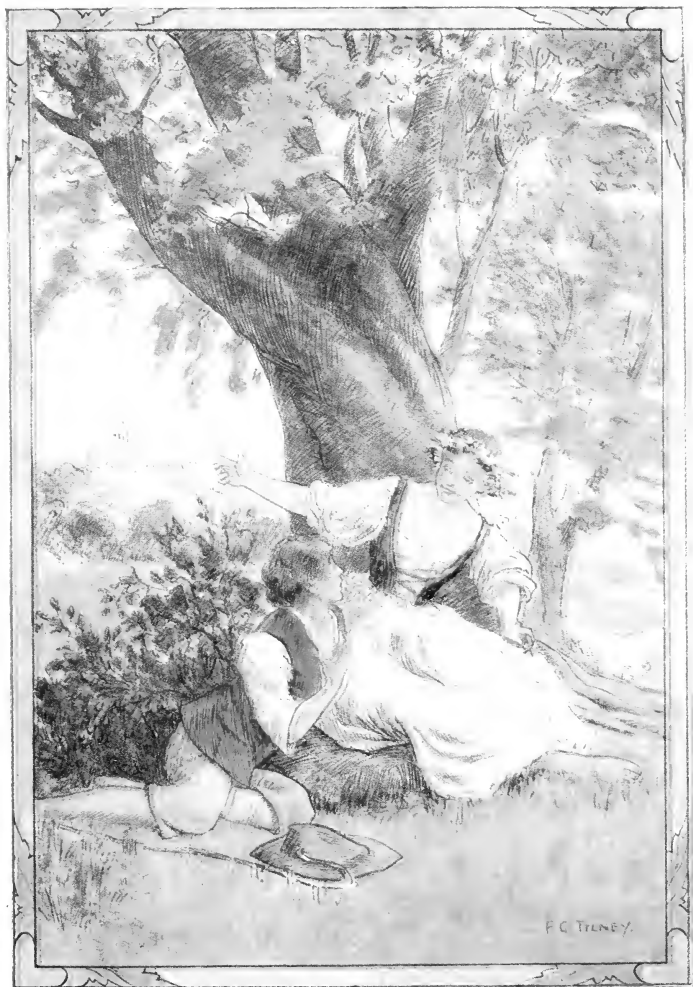
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TALES
FOR
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The heart of Thyrsis left.



THE ORIGINAL
FABLES
OF LA FONTAINE

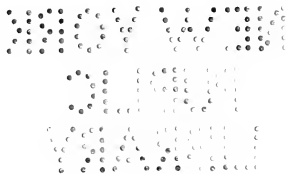
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FREDK. COLIN TILNEY



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PREFACE

IF deep wisdom, gentle satire, polite cynicism, and, above all, irresistible humour are qualities which make a book attractive then La Fontaine's *Fables* should be in the hands of all. Their charm is two-fold; for whilst they induce pleasurable reflection in the reader they delight him by the gaiety of their subject matter.

Notwithstanding the fact that the spell of La Fontaine's verse necessarily disappears when another tongue is employed, his English translators, both Elizur Wright and Walter Thornbury, have courageously attempted to do him justice in prosody. In this little book no such effort has been made, chiefly for the reason that, for any but the unusually gifted, to snatch at rhythm and rhyme is often to let drop the apt and ready word as Æsop's mastiff dropped his dinner. But there is a further excuse for the present writer. Verse has little attraction for children unless it jingles merrily, and that is a thing as impossible as it is undesirable where the claims of a philosophic original make restrictions. Since the spirit is more likely to survive if the letter is not exacting, it is difficult to see why custom looks askance upon prose versions of poetry. But this little book may escape such censure on the ground of its being but a selection from the complete *Fables* of La Fontaine. It presents only those of which the great fabulist was himself the

originator. A selection of some sort being imperative there seemed to be a simple and easy choice in the condition of absolute originality ; particularly as the older fables are given in another volume of this series.

This translation (in which I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my friend Mrs. A. H. Beddoe) is neither "free" nor literal. It sometimes amplifies a thought, much as a musician might amplify the harmonies upon a master's figured bass. But even this is rarely done, and then only with a view to the youthful reader's pleasure and profit. With that view, further, the social and political introductions to the fables have been omitted, as well as the scientific discourses and the allusions to the unfortunate wars of Louis XIV. and other historical matters, all of which would have neither meaning nor interest but for "grown-ups" of a certain class.

F. C. TILNEY.

NEW YORK

1884

WILEY & SONS

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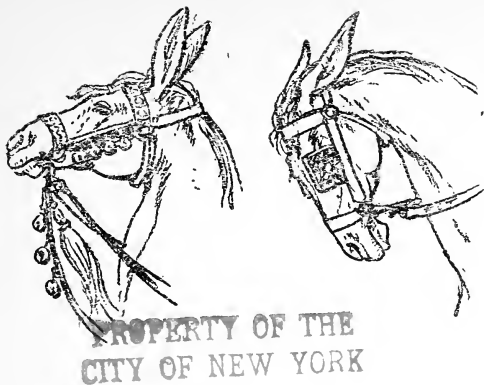
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THE poet Jean de la Fontaine was born at Château-Thierry on July 8, 1621. He was a kindly, merry, and generous man and much beloved. His fables were written in verse and were published in three collections at different times of his life. Many were new versions of existing fables ; but those of his later years were more often original inventions.

All in this book are of La Fontaine's own invention, although several have since appeared in collections of Æsop's fables without the acknowledgment that is La Fontaine's due.

He died on April 13, 1695, at the age of seventy-three.



I

THE TWO MULES

(Book I.—No. 4)

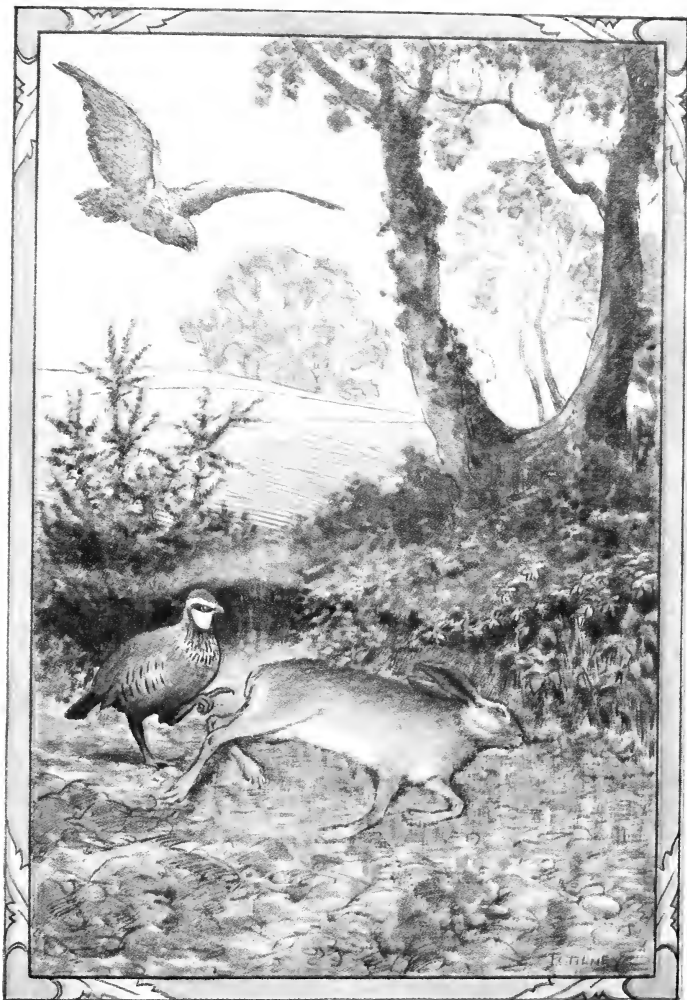
THERE were two heavily-laden mules making a journey together. One was carrying oats and the other bore a parcel of silver money collected from the people as a tax upon salt. This, we learn, was a tax which produced much money for the government, but it bore very hard upon the people, who revolted many times against it.

The mule that carried the silver was very proud of his burden, and would not have been relieved of it if he could. As he stepped out he took care that the bells upon his harness should jingle well as became a mule of so much importance.

Suddenly a band of robbers burst into the road, pounced upon the treasure mule, seized it by the bridle,

and stopped it short. Struggling to defend itself the unhappy creature groaned and sighed as it cried :
“ Is this then the fate that has been in store for me : that I must fall and perish whilst my fellow traveller escapes free from danger ? ”

“ My friend,” exclaimed the mule that carried only the oats, and whom the robbers had not troubled about, “ it is not always good to have exalted work to do. Had you been like me, a mere slave to a miller, you would not have been in such a bad way now ! ”



You boasted of being so swift.



II

THE HARE AND THE PARTRIDGE

(BOOK V.—No. 17)

NEVER mock at other people's misfortune ; for you cannot tell how soon you yourself may be unhappy. Æsop the sage has given us one or two examples of this truth, and I am going to tell you of a similar one now.

A hare and a partridge were living as fellow-citizens very peacefully in a field, when a pack of hounds making an onset obliged the hare to seek refuge. He rushed into his form and succeeded in putting the hounds at fault. But here the scent from his over-heated body betrayed him. Towler, philosophising, concluded that this scent came from his hare, and with admirable zeal routed him out. Then old Trusty, who never is at fault, proclaimed that the hare was gone away. The poor unfortunate creature at last died in his form.

The partridge, his companion, thought fit to soothe his last moments with some scoffing remarks upon his

fate. "You boasted of being so swift," she said, "What has come to your feet, then?"

But even as she was chuckling her own turn came. Secure in the belief that her wings would save her whatever happened, she did not reckon upon the cruel talons of the hawk.

III

THE GARDENER AND HIS LANDLORD

(BOOK IV.—No. 4)

A MAN who had a great fondness for gardening, being half a countryman and half town-bred, possessed in a certain village a fair-sized plot with a field attached, and all enclosed by a quickset hedge. Here sorrel and lettuce grew freely, as well as such flowers as Spanish jasmine and wild thyme, and from these his good wife Margot culled many a posy for her high days and holidays.

This happy state of things was soon troubled by the visits of a hare, and to such an extent that the man had to go to his landlord and lodge a complaint. "This wretched animal," he said, "comes here and stuffs himself night and morning, and simply laughs at traps and snares. As for stones and sticks they make no difference whatever to him. He must be enchanted." "Enchanted!" cried the landlord. "I defy enchantment! Were he the devil himself old Towler would soon rout him out in spite of his tricks. I'll rid you of him, my man, never fear!"

"And when?" asked the man.

"Oh, to-morrow, without more delay!"

The affair being thus arranged, on the morrow came the landlord with all his following. "First of all," he said, "how about breakfast? Your chickens are tender I'll be bound. Come here, my dear," he added, addressing the man's daughter, and then, to her father, "When are you going to let her marry? Hasn't a son-in-law come on the scene yet? My dear fellow, this is a thing that positively must be done you know, you'll have to put your hand in your pocket to some purpose." So saying he sat down beside the damsel, took her hand, held her by the arm, toyed with her fichu, and took other silly and trifling liberties which the girl resented with great self-respect, whilst the father grew a little uneasy in his mind.

Nevertheless, the cooking went on. There was quite a run on the kitchen.

"How ripe are your hams? They look good."

"Sir," replied the flattered host, "they are yours."

"Oh, really now! Well I'll take them, and that right gladly."

The landlord and his family, his dogs, his horses, and his men-servants, all take breakfast with hearty appetites. He assumes the host's place and privileges, drinks his wine and caresses his daughter. After this a crowd of hunters take seats at the breakfast table.

Now everybody is lively and busy with preparations for the hunt. They wind the horns to such purpose that the good man is dumbfounded by the din. Worse than that they make terrible havoc in the poor garden. Good-bye to all the neat rows and beds! Good-bye to the chickory and the leeks! Good-bye to all the pot-herbs!

The hare lies hidden under the leaves of a great cabbage, but being discovered is quickly started, whereupon he rushes to a hole—nay, worse than a hole, a great and horrible gap in the poor hedge, made by the landlord's order, so that they might all burst out of the garden in fine style ; for it would have looked ridiculous for them to ride out at the gate.

The poor man objected. " This is fine fun for princes, no doubt——"; but they let him talk, whilst dogs and men together did more harm in one hour than all the hares in the province would have done in a century.

Little princes, settle your own quarrels amongst yourselves. It is madness to have recourse to kings. You should never let them engage in your wars, nor even enter your domains.

IV

THE MAN AND HIS IMAGE

(BOOK I.—No. 11)

ONCE there was a man who loved himself very much, and who permitted himself no rivals in that love. He thought his face and figure the handsomest in all the world. Anything in the shape of a mirror that could show him his own likeness he took care to avoid ; for he did not want to be reminded that perhaps he was over-rating his beauty. For this reason he hated looking-glasses and accused them of being false. He made a very great mistake in this respect ; but that he did not mind, being quite content to live in the happiness the mistake afforded him.

To cure him of so grievous an error, officious Fate managed matters in such a way that wherever he turned his eyes they would fall on one of those mute little counsellors that ladies carry and appeal to when they are anxious about their appearance. He found mirrors in the houses ; mirrors in the shops ; mirrors in the pockets of gallants ; mirrors even as ornaments on the waist-belts of ladies.

What was he to do—this poor Narcissus ? He thought to avoid all such things by going far away from the haunts of mankind, where he should never have to face

a mirror again. But in the woods to which he retreated a clear rivulet ran. Into this he happened to look and—saw himself again. Angrily he told himself that his eyes had been deluded by an idle fancy. Henceforth he would keep away from the water! This he tried his utmost to do; but who can resist the beauty of a woodland stream? There he was and remained, always with that which he had determined to shun.

My meaning is easily seen. It applies to everybody; for everybody takes some joy in harbouring this very error. The man in love with himself stands for the soul of each one of us. All the mirrors wherein he saw himself reflected stand for the faults of other people, in which we really see our own faults though we hate to recognise them as such. As for the brook, that, as every one knows, stands for the book of maxims which the Duke de la Rochefoucauld¹ wrote.

¹ This fable was dedicated to the Duke de la Rochefoucauld.

V

THE ANIMALS SICK OF THE PLAGUE

(BOOK VII.—No. 1)

ONE of those dread evils which spread terror far and wide, and which Heaven, in its anger, ordains for the punishment of wickedness upon earth—a plague in fact; and so dire a one as to make rich in one day that grim ferryman who takes a coin from all who cross the river Acheron to the land of the dead—such a plague was once waging war against the animals. All were attacked, although all did not die. So hopeless was the case that not one of them attempted to sustain their sinking lives. Even the sight of food did not rouse them. Wolves and foxes no longer turned eager and calculating eyes upon their gentle and guileless prey. The turtle-doves went no more in cooing pairs, but were content to avoid each other. Love and the joy that comes of love were both at an end.

At length the lion called a council of all the beasts and addressed them in these words: “My dear friends, it seems to me that it is for our sins that Heaven has permitted this misfortune to fall upon us. Would it not be well if the most blameworthy among us allowed himself to be offered as a sacrifice to appease the celestial wrath? By so doing he might secure our recovery.

History tells us that this course is usually pursued in such cases as ours. Let us look into our consciences without self-deception or condoning. For my own part, I freely admit that in order to satisfy my gluttony I have devoured an appalling number of sheep ; and yet what had they done to me to deserve such a fate ? Nothing that could be called an offence. Sometimes, indeed, I have gone so far as to eat the shepherd too ! On the whole, I think I had better render myself for this act of sacrifice ; that is, if we agree that it is a thing necessary to the general good. And yet I think it would be only fair that every one should declare his sins as well as I ; for I could wish that, in justice, it were the most culpable that should perish."

"Sire," said the fox, "you are really too yielding for a king, and your scruples show too much delicacy of feeling. Eating sheep indeed ! What of that ?—a foolish and rascally tribe ! Is that a crime ? No ! a hundred times no ! On the contrary your noble jaws did but do them great honour. As for the shepherd, it may be fairly said that all the harm he got he merited, since he was one of those who fancy they have dominion over the animal kingdom." Thus spake the fox and every other flatterer in the assembly applauded him. Nor did any seek to inquire deeply into the least pardonable offences of the tiger, the bear, and the other mighty ones. All those of an aggressive nature, right down to the simple watch-dog, were something like saints in their own opinions.

When the ass stood forth in his turn he struck a different note : nothing of fangs and talons and blood. "I remember," he said, "that once in passing a field

belonging to a monastery I was urged by hunger, by opportunity, by the tenderness of the grass, and perhaps by the evil one egging me on, to enter and crop just a taste, about as much as the length of my tongue. I know that I did wrong, having really no right there."

At these words all the assembly turned upon him. The wolf took upon himself to make a speech proving without doubt that the ass was an accursed wretch, a mangy brute, who certainly ought to be told off for sacrifice, since through his wickedness all their misfortunes had come about. His peccadillo was judged to be a hanging matter. "What! eat the grass belonging to another? How abominable a crime! Nothing but death could expiate such an outrage!" And forthwith they proved as much to the poor ass.

Accordingly as your power is great or small, the judgments of a court will whiten or blacken your reputation.

VI

THE UNHAPPILY MARRIED MAN

(BOOK VII.—No. 2)

IF goodness were always the comrade of beauty I would seek a wife to-morrow ; but as divorce between these two is no new thing, and as there are so few lovely forms that enshrine lovely souls, thus uniting both one and the other delight, do not take it amiss that I refrain from seeking such a rare combination.

I have seen many marriages, but not one of them has held out allurements for me. Nevertheless, nearly the whole four quarters of mankind courageously expose themselves to this the greatest of all hazards, and—the whole four quarters usually repent it.

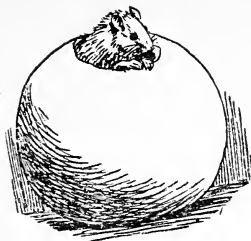
I will tell you of one who, having repented, found that there was nothing for it but to send home again his quarrelsome, avaricious, and jealous spouse. She was one whom nothing pleased ; for her, nothing was right. For her, one rose too late ; one retired too early. First it was this, then it was that, and then again 'twas something else. The servants raged. The husband was at his wit's end. "You think of nothing, sir."

“You spend too much.” “You gad about, sir.” “You are idle.” Indeed she had so much to say that, in the end, tired of hearing such a termagant, he sent her to her parents in the country. There she mixed with those who minded the turkeys and pigs until she was thought to be somewhat tamed, when the husband sent for her again.

“Well, my dear, how have you been getting on? How did you spend your time? Did you like the simple life of the country?”

“Oh, pretty well!” she said, “but what annoyed me was to see the laziness of those people. They are worse there than here. They showed no care whatever for the herds and flocks they were supposed to mind. I didn’t forget to let them know what I thought of them. Of course, they didn’t like it, and they all hated me in the end.”

“Ah! my dear. If you fell foul of people whom you saw for but a moment or so in the day and when they returned in the evening—if you made them tired of you; what will the servants in this house become, who must have you railing at them the whole day long? And what will your poor husband do whom you expect to have near you all day and night too? Return to the village, my dear. Adieu! and if during my life the idea should possess me to have you back again, may I, for my sins, have two such as you for ever at my elbows in the world to come.”



VII

THE RAT RETIRED FROM THE WORLD

(BOOK VII.—No. 3)

THE ancients had a legend which told of a certain rat who, weary of the anxieties of this world, retired to a cheese, therein to live in peace. Profound solitude reigned around the hermit. He worked so hard with his feet and his teeth that in a few days he had a spacious dwelling and food in plenty. What more could he desire? He thrived well, growing large and fat. Blessings are showered upon those who are vowed to simplicity and renunciation!

One day a deputation from Rat-land waited upon him, begging that out of his abundance he would grant a slight dole towards fitting out a journey to a strange country where the rats hoped to get succour in their great war against the cat-tribe. Ratopolis was be-

sieged, and owing to the poverty of the beleaguered republic they were forced to start with empty wallets. They asked but little, believing that in a few days help would arrive. "My friends," said the hermit, "earthly affairs no longer concern me. In what way could a poor recluse assist you? What could he do but pray for the help you need! My best hopes and wishes you may be assured of." With these words this latest among the saints shut his door.

Whom have I in mind, do you think, when I speak of this rat, so sparing of his help? A monk?—Oh, no! A dervish rather, for a monk, I suppose, is at all times charitable.

VIII

THE MAIDEN

(BOOK VII.—No. 5)

A CERTAIN damsel of considerable pride made up her mind to choose a husband who should be young, well-built, and handsome ; of agreeable manners and—note these two points—neither cold nor jealous. Moreover, she held it necessary that he should have means, high birth, intellect ; in fact, everything. But whoever was endowed with everything ?

The fates were evidently anxious to do their best for her, for they sent her some most noteworthy suitors. But these the proud beauty found not half good enough. “ What, men like those ! You propose them for me ! Why they are pitiable ! Look at them—fine types, indeed ! ” According to her one was a dullard ; another’s nose was impossible. With this it was one thing ; with that it was another ; for superior people are disdainful above all things.

After these eligible gentlemen had been dismissed, came others of less worth, and at these too she mocked. “ Why,” said she, “ I would not bemean myself to open the door to such. They must think me very anxious to be married. Thank Heaven my single state causes me no regrets.”

The maiden contented herself with such notions

until advancing age made her step down from her pedestal. Adieu then to all suitors. One year passed and then another. Her anxiety increased, and after anger came grief. She felt that those little smiles and glances which, at the bidding of love, lurk in the countenances of fair maidens were day by day deserting her. Finally, when love himself departed, her features gave pleasure to none. Then she had recourse to those hundred little ruses and tricks of the toilet to repair the ravages of time ; but nothing that she could do arrested the depredations of that despicable thief. One may repair a house gone to ruin : but the same thing is not possible with a face !

Her refined ladyship now sang to a different tune, for her mirror advised her to take a husband without delay. Perhaps also her heart harboured the wish. Even superior persons may have longings ! This one at last made a choice that people would at one time have thought impossible ; for she was very pleased and happy in marrying an ugly cripple.

IX

THE WISHES

(BOOK VII.—No. 6)

WHEN the Great Mogul held empire, there were certain little sprites who used to undertake all sorts of tasks helpful to mankind. They would do housework, stable-work, and even gardening. But if one interfered with them, all would be spoilt.

One of these friendly sprites cultivated the garden of a worthy family living near the Ganges. His duties were performed deftly and noiselessly. He loved not only his master and mistress, but the garden also. Possibly the zephyrs, who are said to be friends of the sprites, helped him in his tasks. At any rate he did his very best, and never ceased in his efforts to load his hosts with every pleasure. To prove his zeal he would have stayed with these people for ever, in spite of the natural propensity of his kind for waywardness. But his mischievous fellow-sprites fell to plotting. They induced the chief of their band to remove him to another field of labour. This the chief promised and, either by caprice or by policy, finally brought about. Orders came that the devoted worker should set out for the uttermost part of Norway, there to take charge of a house which at all times of the year was covered with

snow. So from being an Indian, the poor thing became a Laplander.

"I am forced to leave you," he said to his hosts, "but for what fault of mine this has come to pass I cannot tell. I only know that go I must, and in a very little while too; a month perhaps, or maybe only a week. Make the most of the interval. Fortunately, I can fulfil three wishes for you; but not more than three."

To mankind there is nothing very out-of-the-way in merely wishing. These good people decided that their first wish should be for abundance, and straightway Abundance, by the double-handful, poured gold into their coffers; wheat into their granaries; wine into their cellars. Repletion was everywhere. But, alas, what cares of direction, what account keeping; what time and anxiety this affluence involved!

Thieves plotted against them. Great lords borrowed from them. The prince taxed them. They were, in fact, reduced to misery by this excess of good fortune. At last they could endure it no longer. "Take back this awful overplus of wealth," they cried. "Even the poor are happy in comparison with us, and poverty is more covetable than such riches. Away, then, with these treasures! And thou, sweet Moderation, mother of all peace, sister of repose, come to us again!" With these words, which made their second wish, lo! Moderation returned and they received her with open arms, once again enjoying peace.

Thus at the end of these two wishes they were exactly where they were in the first place, and so it is with all who are given to wishing, and wasting in dreams the time they had better have spent in doing. But

being philosophical people they laughed, and the sprite laughed with them. To profit by his generosity when he had left them, they hazarded their third wish and asked for wisdom. Wisdom is a treasure which never embarrasses.

X

THE DAIRY-WOMAN AND THE PAIL OF MILK

(Book VII.—No. 10)

A YOUNG country woman named Perrette set out one morning from her little dairy-farm with a pail of milk, which she cleverly balanced upon her head over a pad or cushion. She hurried with sprightly steps to the market town, and so that she might be the less encumbered, wore a kirtle that was short and light—in truth a simple petticoat—and shoes low and easy. As she went, her thoughts ran upon the price to be gained for her milk, and she schemed a way to lay out the sum in the purchase of one hundred eggs. She was sure that with care and diligence these would yield three broods. “It would be quite easy to me,” she said, “to raise the chicks near the house. The fox would be clever who would not leave me enough to buy one pig. A pig would fatten at the cost of a little bran, and when he had grown a fair size I should make a bargain of him for a good round sum. And then, considering the price he will fetch, what is to prevent my putting into our stable a cow and a calf? I can fancy how the calf will frisk about among the sheep!” Thereupon Perrette herself frisked for joy, transported with the picture of her affluence. Over toppled the



Overtopped the milk.

milk ! Adieu to calf and cow and pig and broods ! This lady of wealth had to leave, with tearful eyes, her dissipated fortunes, and go straight to her husband framing excuses to avoid a beating.

The farce became known to the whole countryside, and people called Perrette by the name of " Milkpail " ever after.

Who has never talked wildly ? Who has never built castles in Spain ? Wise men as well as milkmaids ; sages and fools, all have waking dreams and find them sweet ! Our senses are carried away by some flattering falsehood, and then wealth, honours, and beauty seem ours to command.

Alone with my thoughts I challenge the bravest. I dethrone monarchs and the people rejoicing crown me instead, showering diadems upon my head. Then lo ! a little accident happens to bring me back to my senses, and I am Poor Jack as before.

XI

THE PRIEST AND THE CORPSE

(BOOK VII.—No. 11)

THERE was a funeral. The dead body was progressing sadly towards its last resting place ; and following, rather gladly, was the priest who meant to bury it as soon as possible.

The dead man, in a leaden coffin, was borne in a coach, and was properly shrouded in that robe the dead always wear be it summer or winter. As for the priest, he sat near it, intoning as hard as he could all sorts of orisons, psalms, lessons, verses, and responses, in the hope that the more he gave the more would be paid for. "Leave it to me, Mr. Deadman," his actions seemed to say. "I'll give you a nice selection ; a little of everything. It's only a matter of fees, you know." And the Rev. John Crow kept his eye on his silent charge as if he expected some one would make off with it. "Mr. Deadman," his looks proclaimed, "by you I shall receive so and so much in money, so and so much in wax candles, and, possibly, a little more in incidental profits.

On the strength of these calculations he promised himself a quarter-cask of the best wine the neighbourhood could offer. Beyond that he settled that a certain very attractive niece of his, as well as his housekeeper Paquette, should both have new dresses.

Whilst these pleasant and generous thoughts were running in his mind there came a terrific shock. The car overturned. The Rev. John Crow's head was broken by the coffin which fell upon him. Alas for the poor priest ! he went to heaven with the parishioner he thought only to bury.

In reality, life over and over again is nothing but the fate of the Rev. John Crow who counted on his dead, and of Perrette who counted on her chickens.

XII

THE MAN WHO RAN AFTER FORTUNE AND THE MAN WHO WAITED FOR HER IN HIS BED

(BOOK VII.—No. 12)

Who does not run after Fortune ?

I would I were in some spot whence I could watch the eager crowds rushing from kingdom to kingdom in their vain chase after the daughter of Chance !

They are indeed but faithful followers of a phantom ; for when they think they have her, lo ! she is gone ! Poor wretches ! One must pity rather than blame their foolishness. " That man," they say with sanguine voice, " raised cabbages ; and now he is Pope ! Are we not as good as he ? " Ah ! yes ! a hundred times as good perhaps ; but what of that ? Fortune has no eyes for all your merit. Besides, is Papacy, after all, worth peace, which one must leave behind for it ? Peace—a treasure that once was the possession of gods

alone—is seldom granted to the votaries of Dame Fortune. Do not seek her ; and then she will seek you. That is the way with women !

There once were two friends, who lived comfortably and prospered moderately in a village ; but one of them was always wishing to do better. One day he said to the other, “ Suppose we left this place and tried our luck elsewhere ? You know that a prophet is never received in his own country ! ”

“ You try, by all means,” returned his friend, “ but as for me, I am contented where I am. I desire neither better climate nor better possibilities. You please yourself. Follow your unquiet spirit. You’ll soon return, and I shall sleep soundly enough awaiting you.”

So the man of ambition, or the money-grubber, whichever you like to call him, took to the road, and arrived next day at a place where, if anywhere, Dame Fortune should be found, namely, the court. He stayed at court for some long time, never missing an opportunity to put himself in the way of favours. He was in evidence when the king went to bed, when he arose, and on all other propitious occasions.

“ What’s amiss ? ” he said at last. “ Fortune, I am convinced, dwells here ; for I have seen her the guest now of this one and now of that one. How is it that I cannot entertain the capricious creature ? I must try her elsewhere. I have already been told that the people of this place are exceedingly ambitious. Evidently there is no room for me here. So, adieu ! gentleman of the court, and follow to the bitter end

this will-o'-the-wisp ! They tell me that Dame Fortune has temples in Surat. Very well ! We will go there."

He embarked at once. What hearts of bronze have humankind ! The man who first attempted this awful route and defied its terrors must have had a heart of adamant. Often did our traveller turn his eyes towards his little home as first pirates, then contrary winds, then calms, then rocks—all agents of death—in turn assailed him. Strange it is that men should take such pains to meet death, since it will come only too quickly to them in their homes !

Our adventurer arrived in India. There they told him that Japan was the place where Fortune dispensed her favours. He hurried there. The sea wearied of carrying him about. In the end all the profit his long voyages brought him was the lesson which he learnt from savages, and that was : " Stop in your own country and let Nature instruct you." Japan, India, or anywhere else ; no one place was better than another as a hunting ground for Fortune ; so the conclusion was forced upon him that he had been wiser had he stayed in his own village. At last he renounced all these ungrateful wanderings and returned to his own country ; and as he caught sight of his homestead from afar he wept for joy, and cried : " Happy is the man who, staying in his home, finds constant occupation in adjusting his desires to his surroundings. To him the court, the sea, and the land of Fortune are but hearsay. Thou, fickle Dame, flaunting before our eyes dignities and wealth, dost cause us to follow after these allurements to the ends of the earth, only to find them empty shams. Henceforth I wander no more, for

here at home a hundred times more success shall I find."

Having registered this vow against Fortune the wanderer came to the door of his friend, and lo ! there sat Fortune, waiting on the threshold, whilst his friend slumbered within.

XIII

AN ANIMAL IN THE MOON

(BOOK VII.—No. 18)

WHILST one philosopher tells us that men are constantly the dupes of their own senses, another will swear that the senses never deceive. Both are right. Philosophy truly affirms that the senses will deceive so long as men are content to take upon trust the evidence the senses bring. But if this evidence is weighed, measured, and tested by every available resource of science the senses can deceive no one.

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In England, not long ago, when a large telescope was levelled to observe the moon, the observer was astounded to see what he took to be some new animal in this lovely planet. Everybody was excited about the marvellous appearance. Something had occurred up above there which, without doubt, must betoken great changes of some sort. Who could tell but that all the dreadful wars that were then convulsing Europe had not been caused by it? The king, who patronised the sciences, hastened to the observatory to see the sight,

and see it he did. There was the monster right enough!

And what was it after all?—Nothing but a poor little mouse that had by some unlucky chance got in between the lenses of the telescope. Here was the cause of all the devastating wars! Everybody laughed. . . .

XIV

THE FORTUNE-TELLERS

(BOOK VII.—No. 15)

REPUTATIONS may be made by the merest chances, and yet reputations control the fashions. That is a little prologue that would fit the case of all sorts of people. Everywhere around one sees prejudices, scheming, and obtuseness ; but little or no justice. Nothing can be done to stem this torrent of evil. It must run its course. It always has been and always will be.

A woman in Paris once made it her profession to tell fortunes. She became very popular and had great success. Did anybody lose a bit of finery ; had any one a sweetheart ; had any wife a husband she was tired of ; any husband a jealous wife, to the prophetess such would run simply to be told the thing that it was comforting to hear.

The stock-in-trade of this fortune-teller consisted

merely of a convincing manner, a few words of scientific jargon, a great deal of impudence, and much good luck. All these things together so impressed the people that as often as not they would cry, "Miraculous!" In short, although the woman's ignorance was quite twenty-three carat she passed for a veritable oracle.

Notwithstanding the fact that this oracle only lived in a garret, she found so many ready to pay her well for her shams that she soon grew rich enough to improve the position of her husband, to rent an office, and buy a house.

The garret being left empty was shortly tenanted by another woman to whom all the town—women, girls, valets, fine gentlemen—everybody in fact swarmed, as before, to consult their destiny. The former tenant had built up such a reputation that the garret was still a sibyl's den, in spite of the fact that quite a different creature dwelt in it. "I tell fortunes? Surely you're joking! Why, gentlemen, I cannot read, and as for writing, I never learnt more than to make my mark." But these disclaimers were useless. People insisted on having their fortunes told, and she had to do it. In consequence, she put by plenty of money, being able to earn, in spite of herself, quite as much as two lawyers could. The poverty of her home was a help rather than a hindrance. Four broken chairs and a broom-handle savoured of a witch's frolic.

If this woman had told the truth in a room well-furnished she would have been scorned. The fashion for a garret had set in, and garret it must be.

In her new chambers the first fortune-teller waited

in vain ; for it was the outward sign alone that brought customers, and the sign was poverty.

I have seen in a palace a robe worn awry win much distinction and success, such crowds of followers and adherents did it draw. You may well ask me why !



The garret was still a syzil's den.

XV

THE COBBLER AND THE FINANCIER

(BOOK VIII.—No. 2)

THERE was once a cobbler who was so light hearted that he sang from morning to night. It was wonderful to watch him at his work, and more wonderful still to hear his runs and trills. He was in fact happier than the Seven Sages.

This merry soul had a neighbour who was exactly the reverse. He sang little and slept less ; for he was a financier, and made of money, as they say. Whenever it happened that after a sleepless night he would doze off in the early morning, the cobbler, who was always up betimes, would wake him up again with his joyful songs. “ Ha ! ” thought the man of wealth, “ what a misfortune it is that one cannot buy sleep in the open market as one buys food and drink ! ” Then an idea

came to him. He invited the cobbler to his house, where he asked him some questions.

“ Tell me, Master Gregory, what do you suppose your earnings amount to in a year ? ”

“ In a year,” laughed the cobbler, “ that’s more than I know. I never keep accounts that way, nor even keep one day from another. So long as I can make both ends meet, that’s good enough for me ! ”

“ Really ! ” replied the financier. “ But what can you earn in one day ? ”

“ Oh, sometimes more and sometimes less. The mischief of it is that there are so many fête days and high-days and fast-days crowded into the year, on which, as the priest tells us, it is wicked to work at all ; and worse still he keeps on finding some new saint or other to give weight to his sermons. If it were not for that, cobbling would be a fine paying game.”

At this the wealthy man laughed. “ Look here, my friend, to-day I’ll lift you to the seats of the mighty ! Here is a hundred pounds. Guard them and use them with care.”

When the cobbler held the bag of money in his hand he imagined that it must be as much as would be coined in a hundred years.

Returning home he buried the cash in his cellar. Alas ! he buried his joy with it, for there were no more songs. From the moment he came into possession of this wealth, the love of which is the root of all evil, his voice left him, and not only his voice, but his sleep also. And in place of these came anxiety, suspicion, and alarms ; guests which abode with him constantly. All day he kept his eye on the cellar door. Did a cat

make a noise in the night, then for a certainty that cat was after his money.

At last, in despair, the wretched cobbler ran to the financier whom he now no longer kept awake. "Oh, give me back my joy in life, my songs, my sleep ; and take your hundred pounds again."

XVI

THE POWER OF FABLE

(Book VIII.—No. 4)

IN the old, vain, and fickle city of Athens, an orator,¹ seeing how the light-hearted citizens were blind to certain dangers which threatened the state, presented himself before the tribune, and there sought, by the very tyranny of his forceful eloquence, to move the heart of the republic towards a sense of the common welfare.

But the people neither heard nor heeded. Then the orator had recourse to more urgent arguments and stronger metaphors, potent enough to touch hearts of stone. He spoke in thunders that might have raised the dead ; but his words were carried away on the wind. The beast of many heads² did not deign to hear the launching of these thunderbolts. It was engrossed in something quite different. A fight between two urchins was what the crowd found so engaging ; not the orator's warnings.

What then did the speaker do ? He tried another plan. " Ceres," he began, " made a voyage one day

¹ Elizur Wright explains that the orator was Demades.

² Horace spoke of the Roman people as a beast with many heads.

with an eel and a swallow. After a time the three travellers were stopped by a river. This the eel got over by swimming and the swallow by flying——”

“Well! what about Ceres? What did she do?” cried the crowd with one voice.

“She did what she did!” retorted the speaker in anger. “But first she raged against you. What! Does it take a child’s story to open your ears, you who should be eager for any news of the peril that menaces; you, the only state in Greece that takes no heed? You ask what Ceres did. Why do you not ask what Philip¹ does?”

At this reproach the assembly was stirred. A mere fable brought them open-eared to all the orator would say.

We are all Athenians in this respect. I myself am, even as I point this moral. I should take the utmost pleasure now in hearing “The Ass’s Skin”² told to me. The world is old, they say: so it is; but, nevertheless, it is as greedy of amusement as a child.

¹ Philip of Macedon, who was at war against the Greeks.

² An old French nursery tale.

XVII

THE DOG WHO CARRIED HIS MASTER'S DINNER

(BOOK VIII.—No. 7)

OUR hands are no more proof against gold than our eyes are proof against beauty. There are but few who guard their treasures with care enough.

A certain dog who had been taught to carry to his master the mid-day meal was one day trotting along with the savoury burden slung around his neck. He was tempted to take a taste himself; but knew that it would be wrong to do so, and being a temperate, self-governed dog he refrained. We of the human race allow ourselves to be tempted by covetable things often enough; but, strange as it is, there seems to be more difficulty in teaching mankind to resist temptation than there is in teaching dogs to do so.

On this particular day the dog was met by a mastiff who at once wanted the dinner, but did not find it so easy to capture as he thought; for our dog put it down and stood guard over it. There was a mighty tussle. Soon others arrived; curs that were used to knocks and kicks while picking up a living in the streets. Seeing that he should be badly over-matched, and that his master's dinner was in danger of being devoured by

the crowd, he bethought himself how he too might have his share, if shared it must be. So he very wisely exclaimed, "No fighting, gentlemen, my bit will suffice me. Do as you please with the rest." With these words he snapped up a portion, upon which all the rest began to pull and jostle to their utmost and feasted merrily.

In this I seem to see the picture of one of those unfortunate towns or states which occasionally have suffered from the greed of their ministers and officials. Each functionary has an eye to his own advantage, and the smartest sets a pattern for the others. The way in which the public funds disappear is amusing. If one sheriff or provost, having a scruple of conscience, finds a trifling argument in defence of the public interest the others show him that he is a fool if he utters half a word. So, with a very little trouble, he gives way, and often becomes the leading offender.

XVIII

THYRSIS AND AMARANTH

(BOOK VIII.—No. 13)

A SHEPHERD who was deeply in love with a shepherdess was sitting one day by her side trying to find words to express the emotions her charms created in his breast.

“ Ah ! Amaranth, dear,” he sighed, “ could you but feel, as I do, a certain pain which, whilst it tears the heart, is so delightful that it enchants, you would say that nothing under heaven is its equal. Let me tell you of it. Believe me, trust me. Would I deceive you ? You, for whom I am filled with the tenderest sentiments the heart can feel ! ”

“ And what, my Thyrsis, is the name you give this pleasing pain ? ”

“ It is called love,” said Thyrsis.

“ Ah ! ” responded the maiden, “ that is a beautiful name. Tell me by what signs I may know it, if it come to me. What are the feelings it gives one ? ”

Thyrsis, taking heart of grace, replied with much ardour : “ One feels an anguish beside which the joys of kings are but dull and insipid. One forgets oneself, and takes pleasure in the solitudes of the woods. To glance into a brook is to see, not oneself, but an ever-haunting image. To any other form one’s eyes are blind. It may be that there is a shepherd in the village

at whose voice, at the mention of whose name, you will blush ; at the thought of whom you will sigh. Why, one knows not ! To see him will be a burning desire, and yet you would shrink from him."

"Oho !" said Amaranth. "Is this then the pain you have preached so much ! It is hardly new to me. I seem to know something of it." The heart of Thyrsis leapt, for he thought that at last he had gained his end ; when the fair one added, "'Tis just in this way that I feel for Cladimant !"

Imagine the vexation and misery of poor Thyrsis !

How many like him, intending to work solely for themselves, prove only to have been stepping stones for others.

XIX

THE RAT AND THE ELEPHANT

(BOOK VIII.—No. 15)

AN uncommonly small rat was watching an uncommonly big elephant and sneering at the slowness of his steps.

The enormous animal was heavily laden. On his back rose a three-storied howdah, wherein were accommodated a celebrated sultana, her dog, her cat, her monkey, her parrot, her old servant, and all her household. They were going upon a pilgrimage.

The rat wondered why all the people should express astonishment at seeing this enormous bulk—"As if the fact of occupying more or less space implied that one was the more or less important accordingly! What is it you admire in him, you men? If it is only the weight of his body which fills the children with terror, then we rats, small as we are, consider ourselves not one grain less than the elephant." He would have said more; but the cat, bounding out of her cage, let him see in an instant that a rat is not an elephant.

XX

THE HOROSCOPE

(BOOK VIII.—No. 16)

OUR destiny is frequently met in the very paths we take to avoid it.

A father had an only son whom he loved excessively. His devoted affection caused him to be so anxious as to the boy's welfare that he sought to learn from astrologers and fortune-tellers what fate was in store for the son and heir. One of these soothsayers told him that an especial danger lay with lions, from which the youth must be guarded until the age of twenty was reached, but not after. The father, to make sure of this precaution, upon the issue of which depended the life of his loved one, commanded that by no chance should the boy ever be permitted to go beyond the threshold of the house. Ample provision was made for the satisfaction of all the wishes proper to youth in the way of play with his companions, jumping, running, walking, and so forth. As the age approached when the spirits of youth yearn for the chase, he was taught to hold that sport in abhorrence.

But temperament cannot be changed by persuasion and counsel, nor by enlightenment. The young man, eager, ardent, and full of courage, no sooner felt the

promptings of his years than he sighed for the forbidden pleasures. The greater the hindrance the stronger the desire. Knowing the reason of his galling restrictions, and viewing day by day in his palatial home the hunting scenes pictured in paint and tapestry on every wall, his excitement became unrestrained.

Once his eye fell upon a pictured lion. "Ah! Monster!" he exclaimed in a transport of indignation. "It is to you that the shade and fetters in which I live are due!" With that he struck the lion's form a heavy blow with his fist. Hidden under the tapestry a great nail offered its cruel point, and upon this his hand was impaled. The wound grew beyond the reach of medical skill, and in the end this life, so guarded and cherished, was lost by means of the very care taken to preserve it.

The same jealous precaution proved fatal to the poet *Æschylus*. It is said that some fortune-teller menaced him with the fall of a house as his doom, upon which he at once left the town and made his bed in the open fields, far from roofs and beneath the sky. But an eagle flew by overhead carrying in its talons a tortoise, and seeing the bald head of the poet beneath, which it mistook for a stone, the bird let fall its prey in order to break the shell of the tortoise. Thus were the days of poor *Æschylus* ended.

From these two examples it would seem that this art of fortune-telling, if there be any truth in it, causes one to fall into the very evil one would be in dread of when one consulted it. But I will demonstrate and maintain that the art is false. I do not believe that Nature

would have tied her own hands, and ours also, to the extent of marking our fate in the heavens. For our fate depends upon certain combinations of time, place, and people ; not upon the combinations of charlatans. A shepherd and a king are born under the same planet : one carries the sceptre ; the other the crook. The planet Jupiter willed it so ! But what is this planet Jupiter ? A body without senses. Whence comes it then that its influence works so differently on these two men ? Further, how could its influence, if it had any, penetrate through endless voids to our world ?

Do not attach too much importance to the two instances I have related. This beloved son and the good man Æschylus are beside the mark.

Nevertheless, however blind and lying is the fortune-teller's art, it may yet hit home once in a thousand times. That is just a matter of chance.



XXI

JUPITER AND THE THUNDER- BOLTS

(Book VIII.—No. 20)

ONE day, as Jupiter seated on high looked down upon the world, he was incensed at the faults committed by mankind. "Let us," he said, "have some other occupants in the regions of the universe in place of these present inhabitants who importune and weary me. Go you to Hades, Mercury, and bring hither the cruellest of the furies. This time, O race that I have too tenderly nurtured, you shall perish."

After this outburst the temper of the god began to cool.

O ye sovereigns of this world, to whom it has been given to be the arbiters of our destinies, let a night

intervene between your wrath and the storm which may follow !

Mercury, light of wing and sweet of tongue, descended to the abode of the dread sisters Tisiphone, Megæra, and Alecto, and his choice fell upon the latter, the pitiless one. She, feeling proud of the preference, grew so arrogant as to swear by Pluto that the whole of the human brood should soon people his domains. But Jupiter did not approve of the vow this member of the Eumenides had sworn, and he sent her back to Hades. At the same time he launched a thunderbolt upon one particularly perfidious race of men. This, however, being hurled by a father's arm, mercifully fell in a desert, causing less ruin than alarm. What followed from this was simply that the wicked brood took heart at such indulgence and did not trouble to mend their ways. Then all the gods in Olympus complained, until he who controls the clouds swore by the Styx that further storms should be sent and that they should not fail as the other had.

The Olympians only smiled at this. They told Jupiter that as he was the father it would be better if he left in other hands the making of thunderbolts. Vulcan undertook the task. Soon his furnaces glowed with bolts of two kinds ; one that hits its mark with a deadly unerring—and that is the sort which any of the Olympian gods will hurl ; whilst the other sort was that which becomes scattered on its course and does damage only to the mountain tops, or perchance is even lost on the way. It is this kind of thunderbolt that Jupiter sends. His fatherly heart permits him to use no other.

XXII

EDUCATION

(BOOK VIII.—No. 24)

ONCE upon a time there were two dogs, one named Lurcher and the other Cæsar. They were brothers; handsome, well-built, and plucky, and descended from dogs who were famous in their day. These two brothers, falling into the hands of different masters, found their destinies likewise in different spheres; for whilst one haunted the forests, the other lurched about a kitchen.

The names to which they now answered were not, however, the names that were first given them. The influence of each one's career upon his nature brought about a new name and a new reputation; for Cæsar's nature was improved and strengthened by the life he led, whilst Lurcher's was made more and more despicable by a degraded existence. A scullion named him Lurcher; but the other dog received his noble name on account of his life of high adventure. He had held many a stag at bay, killed many a hare, and otherwise risen to the position of a Cæsar among dogs. Care was taken that he should not mate indiscriminately, so that his descendants' blood should not degenerate. On the other hand, poor Lurcher bestowed his affections wherever he would and his brood became populous.

He was the progenitor of all turn-spits in France ; a variety which became common enough to form at last a race in themselves. They show more readiness to flee than to attack, and are the very antipodes of the Cæsars.

We do not always follow our ancestors, nor even resemble our fathers. Want of care, the flight of time, a thousand things, cause us to degenerate.

Ah ! how many Cæsars, failing to cultivate their best nature and their gifts, become Lurchers !

XXIII

DEMOCRITUS AND THE PEOPLE OF ABDERA

(BOOK VIII.—No. 26)

How I have always hated the opinions of the mob ! To me, a mob seems profane, unjust, and rash, putting false construction on all things, and judging every matter by a mob-made standard.

Democritus had experience of this. His countrymen thought him mad. Little minds ! But then, no one is a prophet in his own country ! The people themselves were mad, of course, and Democritus was the wise man. Nevertheless the error went so far that the city of Abdera¹ sent a messenger to the great physician Hippocrates, requesting him both by letter and by spoken word to come and restore the sage's reason.

“ Our citizen,” said the spokesman with tears in his eyes, “ has lost his wits, alas ! Study has corrupted Democritus. If he were less wise we should esteem

¹ A city on the shores of Thracia.

him much more. He will have it that there is no limit to the number of worlds like ours and that possibly they are inhabited with numberless Democrituses. Not satisfied with these wild dreams, he talks also of atoms—phantoms born only in his own empty brain. Then, measuring the very heavens, though he remains here below to do it, he claims to know the universe; yet admits that he does not know himself. Time was when he could control debates, now he mutters only to himself. So come, thou divine mortal, for the patient's case is a bad one."

Hippocrates, though he had little faith in these people, went nevertheless. Now mark, I beg of you, what strange meetings fate may bring about in this life! Hippocrates arrived just at the time when this man, who was supposed to have neither sense nor reason, happened to be searching into a question as to whether this very reason was seated in the heart or in the head of men and beasts.

Sitting in leafy shade, beside a brook, and with many a volume at his feet, he was occupied wholly with a study of the convolutions of the brain; and thus absorbed, as his manner was, he scarcely noticed the advance of his friend the learned physician. Their greeting was soon over as you may imagine, for the sage is at all times chary of time and speech. So having put aside mere trifles of conversation, they reasoned upon man and his mind, and next fell to talking upon ethics.

It is not necessary that I should here enlarge upon what each had to say to the other on these matters.

The little tale suffices to show that we may rightly take exception to the judgments of the mob. That being so, in what sense is it true, as I have read in a certain passage, that the voice of the people is the voice of God ?



XXIV

THE ACORN AND THE PUMPKIN

(Book IX.—No. 4)

WHAT God does is done well. Without going round the world to seek a proof of that, I can find one in the pumpkin.

A villager was once struck with the largeness of a pumpkin and the thinness of the stem upon which it grew. "What could the Almighty have been thinking about?" he cried. "He has certainly chosen a bad place for a pumpkin to grow. Eh zounds! Now I would have hung it on one of these oaks. That would have been just as it should be. Like fruit, like tree! What a pity, Hodge," said he, addressing himself, "that you were not on the spot to give advice at the

Creation which the parson preaches about. Everything would have been properly done then. For instance; wouldn't this acorn, no bigger than my little finger, be better hanging on this frail stem? The Almighty has blundered there surely! The more I think about these fruits and their situations, the more it seems to me that it is all a mistake."

Becoming worried by so much reflection our Hodge cast himself under an oak saying, "A man can't sleep when he has so much brain." Then he at once dropped off into a nap.

Presently an acorn fell plump upon his nose. Starting from sleep, he put his hand up to see what had happened and found the acorn caught in his beard, whilst his nose began to pain and bleed. "Oh, oh!" he cried, "I am bleeding. How would it have been if a heavier mass than this had fallen from the tree: if this acorn had been a pumpkin? The Almighty did not intend that, I see. Doubtless he was right. I understand the reason why perfectly now."

So praising God for all things Hodge took his way home.

XXV

THE SCHOOLBOY, THE PEDANT, AND THE OWNER OF A GARDEN

(Book IX.—No. 5)

A YOUNGSTER, who was doubly foolish and doubly a rogue—in which perhaps he savoured of the school he went to—was given, they say, to robbing a neighbour's garden of its fruit and flowers. This may have been because he was too young to know better, and perhaps because teachers do not always mould the minds of young people in the right way.

The owner of the garden boasted in each season the very best of what was due. In spring he could show the most delightful blossoms and in autumn the very pick of all the apples.

One day he espied this schoolboy carelessly climbing a fruit tree and knocking off the buds, those sweet and fragile forerunners of promised fruit in abundance. The urchin even broke off a bough, and did so much other damage that the owner sent a message of complaint to the boy's schoolmaster. This worthy soon appeared, and behind him a tribe of the scholars, who swarmed into the orchard and began behaving worse than the first one. The schoolmaster's plan in thus aggravating the injury was really to make an opportunity for delivering them all a good lesson, which they should

remember all their lives. He quoted Virgil and Cicero ; he made many scientific allusions and ran his discourse to such a length that the little wretches were able to get all over the garden and despoil it in a hundred places.

I hate pompous and pedantic speeches that are out of place and never-ending ; and I do not know a worse fool in the world than a naughty schoolboy—unless indeed it be the schoolmaster of such a boy. The better of them would never suit me as a neighbour.

XXVI

THE SCULPTOR AND THE STATUE OF JUPITER

(BOOK IX.—No. 6)

ONCE a sculptor who saw for sale a block of marble was so struck with its beauty that he could not resist the temptation to buy it. When it was in his studio he thought to himself, "Now what shall my chisel make of it? Shall it be a god, a table, or a basin? It shall be a god. And I, myself, shall ordain that the god shall poise a thunderbolt in his hand. So tremble, mortals, and worship! Behold the lord of the earth!"

The artist set to work and expressed so powerfully the attributes of the god that those who saw it averred that it only lacked speech to be Jupiter himself. It is said that the sculptor had scarcely completed the statue when he became so overawed as to fear and tremble before the work of his own hands.

The poet of old, likewise, greatly dreaded the hate and the wrath of the gods he himself created: a weakness which left little to choose between him and the sculptor.

These traits are those of childhood. The minds of children are always anxious lest any one should maltreat their dolls. The emotions invariably give the lead to

the intellect, and this fact accounts for the great error of paganism. For that error has been prompted by the emotions of men in all the peoples of the earth. Men uphold with fanatic zeal the interests of the unreal creatures of their imagination. Pygmalion became enamoured of the Venus¹ he had created, and in the same way every one tries to turn his dreams into reality. Man remains as ice before truth, but catches fire before illusion.

¹La Fontaine forgets. It was Galatea whose image Pygmalion created and whom Venus brought to life.

XXVII

THE OYSTER AND THE PLEADERS

(BOOK IX.—No. 9)

ONE day two pilgrims espied upon the sands of the shore an oyster that had been thrown up by the tide. They devoured it with their eyes whilst pointing at it with their fingers ; but whose teeth should deal with it was a matter of dispute.

When one stopped to pick up the prey the other pushed him away saying : “ It would be just as well first to decide which of us is to have the pleasure of it. He who first saw it should swallow it, and let the other watch him eat.”

“ If you settle the affair that way,” replied his companion, “ I have good eyes, thank God.”

“ But my sight is not bad either,” said the other, “ and I saw it before you did, and that I’ll stake my life upon.”

“ Well, suppose you did see it, I smelt it.”

During this lively interlude Justice Nincompoop arrived on the scene, and to him they appealed to judge their claims. The justice very gravely took the oyster, opened it, and put it into his mouth, whilst the two claimants looked on. Having deliberately swallowed the oyster, the justice, in the portentous tones of a Lord Chief Justice, said, “ The court here awards each of

you a shell, without costs. Let each go home peaceably."

Reckon what it costs to go to law in these days. Then count what remains to most families. You will see that Justice Nincompoop draws all the money and leaves only the empty purse and the shells to the litigants.



Deliberately swallowed the oyster.

XXVIII

THE CAT AND THE FOX

(BOOK IX.—No. 14)

THE cat and the fox, in the manner of good little saints, started out upon a pilgrimage. They were both humbugs, arch-hypocrites, two downright highwaymen, who for the expenses of their journey indemnified themselves by seeing who could devour the most fowls and gobble the most cheese.

The way was long and therefore wearisome, so they shortened it by arguing. Argumentation is a great help. Without it one would go to sleep. Our pilgrims shouted themselves hoarse. Then having argued themselves out, they talked of other things.

At length the fox said to the cat, "You pretend that you're very clever. Do you know as much as I? I have a hundred ruses up my sleeve."

"No," answered the cat, "I have but one; but that is always ready to hand, and I maintain that it is worth a thousand other dodges."

Then they fell again to disputing one against the other on each side of the question, the whys and the wherefores, raising their voices higher and higher. Presently the sudden appearance of a pack of hounds stopped their noise.

The cat said to the fox, "Now, my friend, ransack

that cunning brain of yours for one of your thousand ruses. Fetch down from your sleeve one of those certain stratagems. As for me, this is my dodge." So saying, he bounded to a tall tree and climbed to its top with alacrity.

The fox tried a hundred futile doublings ; ran into a hundred holes ; put the hounds at fault a hundred times ; tried everywhere to find a safe place of retreat, but everywhere failed between being smoked out of one and driven out of another by the hounds. Finally, as he came out of a hole two nimble dogs set upon him and strangled him at the first grip.

Too many expedients may spoil the business. One loses time in choosing between them and in trying too many. Have only one ; but let it be a good one.

XXIX

THE MONKEY AND THE CAT

(Book IX.—No. 17)

BERTRAND was a monkey and Ratter was a cat. They shared the same dwelling and had the same master, and a pretty mischievous pair they were. It was impossible to intimidate them. If anything was missed or spoilt, no one thought of blaming the other people in the house. Bertrand stole all he could lay his hands upon, and as for Ratter, he gave more attention to cheese than he did to the mice.

One day, in the chimney corner, these two rascals sat watching some chestnuts that were roasting before the fire. How jolly it would be to steal them they thought: doubly desirable, for it would not only be joy to themselves, but an annoyance to others.

“Brother,” said Bertrand to Ratter, “this day you shall achieve your master-stroke: you shall snatch some chestnuts out of the fire for me. Providence has not fitted me for that sort of game. If it had, I assure you chestnuts would have a fine time.”

No sooner said than done. Ratter delicately stirred the cinders with his paw, stretched out his claws two or three times to prepare for the stroke, and then adroitly whipped out first one, then two, then three of the chestnuts, whilst Bertrand crunched them up

between his teeth. In came a servant, and there was an end of the business. Farewell, ye rogues !

I am told that Ratter was by no means satisfied with the affair.

And princes are equally dissatisfied when, flattered to be employed in any uncomfortable concern, they burn their fingers in a distant province for the profit of some king.

XXX

THE TWO RATS, THE FOX, AND THE EGG¹

(Book X.—No. 1)

Do not take it ill if, in these fables, I mingle a little of the bold, daring, and fine-spun philosophy that is called new.

They say that the lower animals are mere machines : that everything they do is prompted, not by choice, but by mechanism, coming about as it were by springs. There is, they say, neither feeling nor soul—nothing but a mechanical body. It goes just as a watch or clock goes, plodding on with even motion, blindly and aimlessly.

Open such a machine and examine it ; what do we find ? Wheels take the place of intelligence. The first wheel moves the second, and that in turn moves a third, with the result that, in due time, it strikes the hour.

According to these new philosophers, that is exactly the case with an animal. It receives a blow in a certain spot, this spot conveys the sensation to another spot, and so the message goes on from place to place

¹ At the time when this was written there was much discussion among the learned in France as to the powers of reasoning in animals.

until the brain receives it and the impression is made. That is all very well, but how is the impression made ?

It is necessarily made, without passion, without will, say these philosophers. They tell us that the common idea is that an animal is actuated by emotions which we know as sorrow, joy, love, pleasure, pain, cruelty, or some other of these states ; but that it is not so. Do not deceive yourself, they say.

“ What is it then ? ” I ask. A watch, indeed ! And pray what of ourselves ?

Ah, well ! that is perhaps another thing altogether. This is the way Descartes expounds the theory—Descartes, that mortal who, if he had lived in pagan times, would have been made a god, and who holds a place between man and the higher spirits, just as some I could name—beasts of burden with long ears—hold a place between man and the oysters. Thus, I say, reasons this author : “ I have a gift beyond any possessed by others of God’s creatures, and that is the gift of thought. I know of what I think.”

But from positive science we know that although animals may think, they cannot reflect upon what they think. Descartes goes further and boldly states that they do not think at all. That is a statement which need not worry us.

Nevertheless, when in the woods the blast of a horn and the baying of hounds agitates the fleeing quarry ; when he vainly endeavours, with all his skill, to confuse and muddle the scent which betrays him to his pursuers ; when, an aged beast with full-grown antlers, he puts in his place a younger stag and forces it to carry on the chase with its fresher bait of the scent of its

younger body, and thus carry off the hounds and preserve his days—then surely this beast has reasoned. All the twisting and turning, all the malice, deception, and the hundred stratagems to save his life are worthy of the greatest chiefs of war ; and worthy of a better fate than death by being torn to pieces ; for that is the supreme honour of the stag.

Again ; when the partridge sees its young in danger, before their wings have strength enough to bear them away from death, she makes a pretence of being wounded and flutters along with a trailing wing, enticing the huntsman and his dogs to follow her, and thus by turning away the danger saves her little ones. And when the huntsman believes that his dog has seized her, lo ! she rises, laughs at the sportsman, wishes him farewell, and leaves him confused and watching her flight with his eyes.

Not far from the northern regions there is a country where life goes on as in the early ages, the inhabitants being profoundly ignorant. I speak now of the human creatures. The animals are indeed surprisingly enlightened ; for they can construct works which stop the ravages of swollen torrents and make communication possible from bank to bank. The structures are safe and lasting, being founded upon wood over which is laid a bed of mortar. The beavers are the engineers. Each one works. The task is common to all, and the old ones see that the young ones do not shirk their labour. There are many taskmasters directing and urging.

To such a colony of cunning amphibians the republic of Plato itself would be but an apprentice affair. The

beavers erect their houses for the winter time, and make bridges of marvellous construction for passing over the ponds ; whilst the human folk who live there, though this wonderful work is always before their eyes, can but cross the water by swimming.

That these beavers are nothing but bodies without minds nothing will make me believe. But here is something better still. Listen to this recital which I had from a king great in fame and glory. This king, defender of the northern world, whom I now cite, is my guarantee : a prince beloved of the goddess of Victory. His name alone is a bulwark against the empire of the Turks. I speak of the Polish king.¹ A king, it is understood, can never lie.

He says, then, that upon the frontiers of his kingdom there are animals that have always been at war among themselves, their passion for fighting having been handed down from father to son. These animals, he explains, are allied to the fox. Never has the science of war been more skilfully pursued among men than it is pursued by these beasts, not even in our present century. They have their advanced out-posts, their sentinels and spies ; their ambuscades, their expedients, and a thousand other inventions of the pernicious and accursed science Warfare, a hag born, herself, of Styx,² but giving birth to heroes.

¹ The allusion is to Sobieski, whose victory over the Turks made him famous throughout Europe in 1673. La Fontaine had frequently met him in the salons of the cultured ladies of France.

² A nymph of one of the rivers of Hades named after her. She became the mother of Zelus (zeal), Nike (victory), Kratos (power), and Bia (strength).

Properly to sing of the battles of these four-footed warriors Homer should return from beyond the shores of Acheron.¹ Ah! could he but do so, and bring with him too the rival of old Epicurus,² what would the latter say as to the examples I have narrated? He would say only what I have already said, namely, that in the lower animals natural instinct is sufficient to explain all the wonders I have told: that memory leads the animal to repeat over and over again the actions it has made before and found successful.

We, as human beings, do differently. Our wills decide for us; not the bestial aim, nor the instinct. I walk, I speak, I feel in me a certain force, an intelligent principle which all my bodily mechanism obeys. This force is distinct from anything connected with my body. It is indeed more easily conceived than is the body itself, and of all our movements it is the supreme controller. But how does the body conceive and understand this intelligent force? That is the point! I see the tool obeying the hand; but what guides the hand? Who guides the planets in their rapid courses? It may be some angel guide controls the whirling planets; and in like manner some spirit dwells in us and controls all our machinery. The impulse is given—the impression made—but how, I do not know! We shall only learn it in the bosom of God; and to speak frankly, Descartes himself was no wiser. On that point we all are equals. All that I know is that this intelligent controlling spirit does not exist in the lower animals. Man alone is its temple.

¹ Also a river of Hades, the realm of the dead.

² Descartes is meant as the rival of the old philosopher Epicurus.

Nevertheless, we must allow to the beasts a higher plane than that of plants, notwithstanding the fact that plants breathe.

Is there any explanation to what I shall now relate? Two rats who were seeking their living had the good fortune to find an egg. Such a dinner was amply sufficient for folks of their species, they had no need to look for an ox. With keen delight and an appetite to match they were just about to eat up the egg between them, when an unbidden guest appeared in the shape of Master Reynard the fox. This was a most awkward and vexatious visitation. How was the egg to be saved from the jaws of him? To wrap it up carefully and carry it away by the fore paws, or to roll it, or to drag it, were methods as impossible as they were hazardous. But Necessity, that ingenious mother, furnished the never-failing invention. The sponger being as yet far enough away to give the rats time to reach their home, one of them lay upon his back and took the egg safely between his arms whilst the other, in spite of sundry shocks and a few slips, dragged him home by the tail.

After this recital, let any one who dare maintain that animals have no powers of reason.

For my part if I had the portioning of these faculties I would allow as much reasoning power in animals as in infants, who evidently think from their earliest years, from which fact we may conclude that one can think without knowing oneself. I would, similarly,

grant the animals a reason, not such as we possess, but far above a blind instinct. I would refine a speck of matter, a tiny atom—extract of light—something more vivid and lively than fire ; for since wood can turn to flame, cannot flame, being further purified, teach us something of the rarity of the soul ? And is not gold extracted from lead ? My creatures should be capable of feeling and judgment ; but nothing more. There should be no argument from apes.

As to mankind, I would have their lot infinitely better. We men should possess a double treasure ; firstly, the soul common to us all, just as we happen to be, sages or fools, children, idiots, or our dumb companions the animals ; secondly, another soul in common, in a certain degree, with the angels, and this soul, independent of us though belonging to us, should be able to reach to heavenly heights, whilst it could also dwell within a point's space. Having a beginning it should be without end. Things incredible but true. During infancy this soul, itself a child of heaven, should appear to us only as a gentle and feeble light ; but as the faculties grew, the stronger reason would pierce the darkness of matter enveloping our other imperfect and grosser soul.

XXXI

THE DOG WITH HIS EARS CROPPED

(BOOK X.—No. 9)

“WHAT have I done to be treated in this way? Mutilated by my own master! A nice state to be in! Dare I present myself before other dogs? O ye kings over the animals, or rather tyrants of them, would any creature do the same to you?”

Such were the lamentations of poor Fido, a young house-dog, whilst those who were busy cropping his ears remained quite untouched by his piercing and dolorous howls.

Fido believed himself to be ruined for life; but he very shortly found that he was a gainer by the maiming. For being by nature disposed to pilfer from his companions, it would come within his experience to have many misadventures wherein his ears would be torn in a hundred places.

Aggressive dogs always have ragged ears. The less they have for other dogs' teeth to fasten upon the better.

When one has but a single weak place to defend, one protects it against an onset. Witness Master Fido armed with a spiked collar, and having no more ears to catch hold of than are on my hand. Even a wolf would not have known where to take him.

XXXII

THE LIONESS AND THE SHE-BEAR

(BOOK X.—No. 13)

MAMMA lioness had lost one of her cubs. Some hunter had made away with it, and the poor unfortunate mother roared out her wailings to such an extent that all the inhabitants of the forest were seriously disturbed. The spells of the night, its darkness and its silence, were powerless to hush the tumult of the queen of the forest. Sleep was driven from every animal within hearing.

At last the she-bear rose up and coming to the wailing lioness said, "Good Gossip, just one word with you. All those little ones that have passed between your teeth, had they neither fathers nor mothers?"

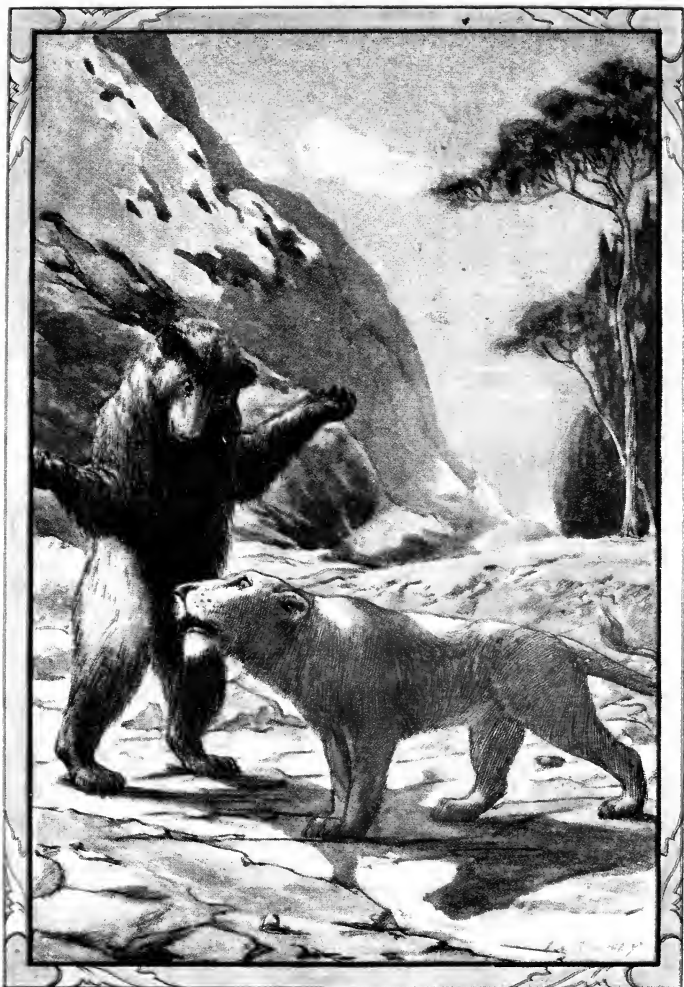
"To be sure they had."

"Then if that be so, and as none have come to mourn their dead in cries which would split our heads: if so many mothers have borne their loss silently, why cannot you be silent also?"

"I? I be silent? Unhappy I? Ah! I have lost my son! There is nought for me but to drag out a miserable old age."

"But pray tell me what obliges you to do so."

"Alas! Destiny. It is Destiny that hates me."



Why cannot you be silent also?

Those are the words that are for ever in the mouths of us all.

Unhappy human kind, let this address itself to you. I hear nothing but the echoing murmur of trifling complaints. Whoever, in like case, believes himself the hated of the gods, let him consider Hecuba,¹ and he will render thanks for their clemency.

¹ Hecuba was the wife of Priam, King of Troy. When that city fell Hecuba was chosen by Ulysses as part of his share in the spoils. She was changed into a dog for avenging the death of her son whose eyes had been put out by the King of Thracia, and she finally ended her life by casting herself into the sea.

XXXIII

THE RABBITS

(BOOK X.—No. 15)

WHEN I have noticed how man acts at times, and how, in a thousand ways, he comports himself just as the lower animals do, I have often said to myself that the lord of these lower orders has no fewer faults than his subjects.

Nature has allowed every living thing a drop or two from the fount at which the spirits of all creatures imbibe.

I will prove what I say.

If at the hour when night has scarcely passed and day hardly begun I climb into a tree, on the edge of some wood, and, like a new Jupiter from the heights of Olympus, I send a shot at some unsuspecting rabbit, then the whole colony of rabbits, who were enjoying their thyme-scented meal with open eyes and listening ears upon the heath, immediately scamper away.

The report sends them all to seek refuge in their subterranean city.

But their great fright is soon over; the danger quickly forgotten. Again I see the rabbits more light-hearted than ever coming close under my death-dealing hand.

Does not this give us a picture of mankind? Dispersed by some storm, men no sooner reach a haven than they are ready again to risk the same winds and the same distress. True rabbits, they run again into the death-dealing hands of fortune.

Let us add to this example another of a more ordinary kind.

When strange dogs pass through any spot beyond their customary route there is a grand to-do. I leave you to picture it. All the dogs of the district with one idea in their heads join forces, barking and biting, to chase the intruder beyond the bounds of their territory.

So, it may be, a similar joint-interest in property or in glory and grandeur leads such people as the governors of states, certain favoured courtiers, and people of a trade to behave exactly like these jealous dogs. All of us, as a rule, rob the chance-comer and tear him to pieces. Vain ladies and men of letters are usually so disposed. Woe betide the newly-arrived beauty or a new writer!

As few as possible fighting round the cake! That's the best way!

I could bring a hundred examples to bear upon this

subject ; but the shorter a discourse is the better. I take the masters of literature for my model in this and hold that in the best of themes something should be left unsaid for the reader to consider about. Therefore this discourse shall end.

XXXIV

THE GODS WISHING TO INSTRUCT A SON OF JUPITER

(BOOK XI.—No. 2)

JUPITER had a son, who, sensible of his lofty origin, showed always a god-like spirit. Childhood is not much concerned with loving ; yet to the childhood of this young god, loving and wishing to be loved was the chief concern. In him, love and reason which grow with years, outraced Time, that light-winged bearer of the seasons which come, alas ! only too quickly.

Flora,¹ with laughing looks and winning airs, was the first to touch the heart of the youthful Olympian. Everything that passion could inspire—delicate sentiments full of tenderness, tears, and sighs—all were there : he forgot nothing. As a son of Jupiter he would by right of birth be dowered with greater gifts than the sons of other gods ; and it seemed as though all his behaviour were prompted by the reminiscence that he had indeed already been a lover in some former state, so well did he play the part.

Nevertheless, it was Jupiter's wish that the boy should be taught, and assembling the gods in council he said, " So far, I have never been at fault in the con-

¹ The Goddess of Spring and of Flowers, was also regarded by the Greeks as the Goddess of Youth and its pleasures.

duct of the universe which I have ruled unaided ; but there are various charges which I now have decided to distribute amongst the younger gods. This beloved child of mine I have already counted upon. He is of my own blood and many an altar already flames in his honour. Yet to merit his rank among the immortals it is necessary that he should possess all knowledge."

As the god of the thunders ceased the whole assembly applauded. As for the boy himself, he did not appear to be above the wish to learn everything.

" I undertake," said Mars, the god of war, to teach him the art by which so many heroes have won the glories of Olympus and extended the empire."

" I will be his master in the art of the lyre," promised the fair and learned Apollo.

" And I," said Hercules with the lion's-skin, " will teach him how to overcome Vice and quell evil passions, those poisonous monsters which like Hydras¹ are ever reborn in the heart. A foe to effeminate pleasures, he shall learn from me those too seldom trodden paths that lead to honour along the tracks of virtue."

When it came to Cupid, the god of love, to speak he simply said, " I can show him everything."

And Cupid was right ; for what cannot be achieved with wit and the desire to please ?

¹ The Hydra was a monster with one hundred heads. If one was cut off two grew in its place unless the wound was stopped by fire.

XXXV

THE LION, THE MONKEY, AND
THE TWO ASSES

(Book XI.—No. 5)

KING LION, thinking that he would govern better if he took a few lessons in moral philosophy, had a monkey brought to him one fine day who was a master of arts in the monkey tribe. The first lesson he gave was as follows :—

“ Great King, in order to govern wisely a prince should always consider the good of the country before yielding to that feeling which is commonly known as self-love, for that fault is the father of all the vices one sees in animals. To rid oneself of this sentiment is not an easy thing to do, and is not to be done in a day. Indeed, merely to moderate it is to achieve a good deal, and if you succeed so far you will never tolerate in yourself anything ridiculous or unjust.”

“ Give me,” commanded the king, “ an example of each of those faults.”

“ Every species of creature,” continued the philosopher, “ esteems itself in its heart above all the others. These others it regards as ignoramuses, calling them by many hard names which, after all, hurt nobody. At the same time this self-love, which sneers at other tribes and other kinds of beasts, induces the individual to heap praise

upon other individuals of his own species, because that is a very good way of praising oneself too. From this it is easy to see that many talents here below are in reality but empty pretence, assumption, and pose, and a certain gift of making the most of oneself, better understood by ignorant people than by learned.

“The other day I followed two asses who were offering the incense of flattery to each other by turns, and heard one say, ‘My Lord, do you not think that man, that perfect animal, is both unjust and stupid? He profanes our august name by calling every one of his own kind an ass who is ignorant, or dull, or idiotic; and he calls our laughter and our discourse by the term “braying.” It is very amusing that these human people pretend to excel us!’

“‘My friend,’ said his companion, ‘it is for you to speak, and for them to hold their tongues. They are the true brayers. But let us speak no more of them. We two understand each other; that is sufficient. And as for the marvels of delight your divine voice lets fall upon our ears, the nightingale herself is but a novice in comparison. You surpass the court musician.’

“To this the other donkey replied, ‘My lord, I admire in you exactly the same excellencies.’

“Not content with flattering each other in this way, these two asses went about the cities singing aloud each other’s praises. Either one thought he was doing a good turn to himself in thus lauding his companion.

“Well, your majesty, I know of many people to-day, not among asses, but among exalted creatures, whom heaven has been pleased to raise to a high degree, who would, if they dared, change their title of ‘Excel-

lency ' to that of ' Majesty.' I am saying more than I should, perhaps, and I hope your majesty will keep the secret. You wished to hear of some incident which would show you, among other things, how self-love makes people ridiculous, and there I have given you a good instance. Injustice I will speak of another time, it would take too long now."

Thus spoke the ape. No one has ever been able to tell me whether he ever did speak of injustice to his king. It would have been a delicate matter, and our master of arts, who was no fool, regarded the lion as too terrible a king to submit to being lectured too far.

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XXXVI

THE WOLF AND THE FOX IN THE WELL

(Book XI.—No. 6)

WHY does Æsop give to the fox the reputation of excelling in all tricks of cunning? I have sought for a reason, but cannot find one. Does not the wolf, when he has need to defend his life or take that of another, display as much knowingness as the fox? I believe he knows more, and I dare, perhaps with some reason, to contradict my master in this particular.

Nevertheless, here is a case where undoubtedly all the honour fell to the dweller in burrows.

One evening a fox, who was as hungry as a dog, happened to see the round reflection of the moon in a well, and he believed it to be a fine cheese. There were two pails which alternately drew up the water. Into the uppermost of these the fox leapt, and his weight caused him to descend the well, where he at once discovered his mistake about the cheese. He became extremely worried and fancied his end approaching, for he could see no way to get up again but by some other hungry one, enticed by the same reflection, coming down in the same way that he had.

Two days passed without any one coming to the well. Time, which is always marching onward, had, during



Descended by his greater weight.

two nights, hollowed the outline of the silvery planet, and Reynard was in despair.

At last a wolf, parched with thirst, drew near, to whom the fox called from below, "Comrade, here is a treat for you! Do you see this? It is an exquisite cheese, made by Faunus¹ from milk of the heifer Io.² If Jupiter were ill and lost his appetite he would find it again by one taste of this. I have only eaten this piece out of it; the rest will be plenty for you. Come down in the pail up there. I put it there on purpose for you."

A rigmarole so cleverly told was easily believed by the fool of a wolf, who descended by his greater weight, which not only took him down, but brought the fox up.

We ought not to laugh at the wolf, for we often enough let ourselves be deluded with just as little cause. Everybody is ready to believe the thing he fears and the thing he desires.

¹ The benign spirit of the fields and woods.

² A priestess who was changed by Hera, wife of Zeus, into a white heifer.

XXXVII

THE MICE AND THE SCREECH- OWL

(BOOK XI.—No. 9)

It is not always wise to say to your company, "Just listen to this joke" or "What do you think of this for a marvel?" for one can never be sure that the listeners will regard the matter in the same way that the teller does. Yet here is a case that makes an exception to this good rule, and I maintain that it is in truth wonderful, and, although it has the appearance of being a fable, it is in reality absolute fact.

There was once an extremely old pine-tree which an owl, that grim bird which Atropus¹ takes for her interpreter, had made to serve as his palace. But there were other tenants lodging in its cavernous and time-rotted trunk. These were mice, well fed, positive balls of fat, but not one of them had a foot. They had all been mutilated. The owl had nipped their feet off with his beak, whilst feeding and fostering them with wheat from neighbouring stacks.

It must be confessed that this bird had reasoned.

Doubtless, in his time, when hunting mice, he had found that after bringing them home they escaped

¹ One of the three Fates, the first and second being Clotho and Lachesis. They spun, measured, and cut off, respectively, the thread of life for men at their birth.

again from the trunk, and to prevent the recurrence of such a loss the artful rascal had thenceforth nipped off the feet of all he caught, keeping them prisoners and eating them one to-day and one to-morrow. To eat them all at once would have been impossible. He had his health to think of. His forethought, which went quite as far as ours, extended to bringing them grain for their subsistence.

If this is not reasoning, then I do not understand what reasoning is. See what arguments he used :—

“ When these mice are caught they run away, therefore I must eat them as I catch them. What all? Impossible! But would it not be well to keep some for a needy future? If so, I must keep them and feed them too, without their escaping. But how’s that to be done? Happy thought! Nip off their feet!”

Now find me among human beings anything better carried out. Did Aristotle and his followers do any better thinking, by my faith?

NOTE.—This is not a fable. The thing actually occurred, although marvellous enough and almost incredible. I have perhaps carried the forethought of this owl too far, for I do not pretend to establish in animals a line of reasoning; but in this style of literature a little exaggeration is pardonable.



XXXVIII

THE COMPANIONS OF ULYSSES

(BOOK XII.—No. 1)

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THAT great hero-wanderer Ulysses had been with his companions driven hither and thither at the will of the winds for ten years, never knowing what their ultimate fate was to be. At length they disembarked upon a shore where Circe, the daughter of Apollo, held her court. Receiving them she brewed a delicious but baneful liquor, which she made them drink. The result of this was that first they lost their reason, and a few moments after, their bodies took the forms and features of various animals ; some unwieldy, some small. Ulysses alone, having the wisdom to withstand the temptation of the treacherous cup, escaped the metamorphosis. He, besides possessing wisdom, bore the

look of a hero and had the gift of honeyed speech, so that it came about that the goddess herself imbibed a poison little different from her own ; that is to say, she became enamoured of the hero and declared her love to him. Now was the time for Ulysses to profit by this turn of events, and he was too cunning to miss the opportunity, so he begged and obtained the boon that his friends should be restored to their natural shapes.

“ But will they be willing to accept their own forms again ? ” asked the nymph. “ Go to them and make them the offer.”

Ulysses, glad and eager, ran to his Greeks and cried, “ The poisoned cup has its remedy, and I come to offer it to you. Dear friends of mine, will you not be glad to have your manly forms again ? Speak, for your speech is already restored.”

The lion was the first to reply. Making an effort to roar he said, “ I, for one, am not such a fool. What ! renounce all the great advantages that have just been given me ? I have teeth. I have claws. I can pull to pieces anything that attacks me. I am, in fact, a king. Do you think it would suit me to become a citizen of Ithaca once more ? Who knows but that you might make of me a common soldier again. Thank you ; but I will remain as I am.”

Ulysses, in sad surprise, turned to the bear. “ Ah, brother ! what form is this you have taken, you who used to be so handsome ? ”

“ Well, really ! I like that ! ” said the bear in his way. “ What form is this ? you ask. Why it is the form that a bear should have. Pray who instructed you that one form is more handsome than another ? Is it your

business to judge between us? I prefer to appeal to the sight of the gentler sex in our ursine race. Do I displease you? Then pass on. Go your ways and leave me to mine. I am free and content as I am, and I tell you frankly and flatly that I will not change my state."

The princely Greek then turned to a wolf with the same proposals, and risking a similar rebuff said: "Comrade, it overwhelms me that a sweet young shepherdess should be driven to complain to the echoing crags of the gluttonous appetite that impelled you to devour her sheep. Time was when you would have protected her sheepfold. In those days you led an honest life. Leave your lairs and become, instead of a wolf, an honest man again."

"What is that?" answered the wolf. "I don't see your point. You come here treating me as though I were a carnivorous beast. But what are you, who are talking in this strain? Would not you and yours have eaten these sheep, which all the village is deploring, if I had not? Now say, on your oath, do you really think I should have loved slaughter any less if I had remained a man? For a mere word, you men are at times ready to strangle each other. Are you not, therefore, as wolves one to another? All things considered, I maintain as a matter of fact that, rascal for rascal, it is better to be a wolf than a man. I decline to make any change in my condition."

In this way did Ulysses go from one to another making the same representations and receiving from all, large and small alike, the same refusals. Liberty, unbridled lust of appetite, the ambushes of the woods,

all these things were their supreme delight. They all renounced the glory attaching to great deeds.

They thought that in following their passions they were enjoying freedom, not seeing that they were but slaves to themselves.

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XXXIX

THE QUARREL BETWEEN THE DOGS AND THE CATS AND BETWEEN THE CATS AND THE MICE

(Book XII.—No. 8)

DISCORD has always reigned in the universe ; of this our world furnishes a thousand different instances, for with us the sinister goddess has many subjects.

Let us begin with the four elements. Here you may be astonished to observe that they are, throughout, in antagonism to each other. Besides these four potentates how many other forces of all descriptions are everlastingly at war !

In bygone times there was a house which was full of cats and dogs who lived together like amicable cousins, for this reason : Their master had made a hundred irrevocable laws and rules, settling their

respective tasks, their meals, and every other incident of their lives, and at the same time he threatened with the whip the first one who should promote a quarrel. The kindly, almost brotherly nature of this union was very edifying to the neighbours.

But at last the concord ceased. Some little favouritism in the bestowal of a bone, or a dish of food, caused the outraged remainder to raise furious protests. I have heard some chroniclers attribute the discord to an affair of love and jealousy. At any rate, whatever the origin, the altercation speedily fired both hall and kitchen, and divided the company into partisans for this cat or for that dog.

A new rule was made, which exasperated the cats, and their complaints deafened the whole neighbourhood. Their advocate advised returning absolutely to the old rules and decrees. The law books were searched for, but could nowhere be found. And that was no wonder, for the books which had been hidden in a corner by one set of partisans at first had been at last devoured by mice. This gave rise to another law-suit, which the mice lost and had to pay for.

Many old cats, cunning, subtle, and sharp, and bearing a grudge against the whole race of mice beside, lay in wait for them, caught them, and cleared them out of the house, much to the advantage of the master of the establishment.

So, returning to my moral, one cannot find under heaven any animal, any being, any creature who has not his opponent. This appears to be a law of nature. It would be time wasted to seek for a reason. God does

well whatever he does. Beyond that I know nothing ; but I do know that people come to high words over nothing three times out of four. Ah, ye human folk ! even at the age of sixty you ought to be sent back to the schoolmaster.

XL

THE WOLF AND THE FOX

(Book XII.—No. 9)

A FOX once remarked to a wolf, "Dear friend, do you know that the utmost I can get for my meals is a tough old cock or perchance a lean hen or two. It is a diet of which I am thoroughly weary. You, on the other hand, feed much better than that, and with far less danger. My foraging takes me close up to houses; but you keep far away. I beg of you, comrade, to teach me your trade. Let me be the first of my race to furnish my pot with a plump sheep, and you will not find me ungrateful."

"Very well," replied the obliging wolf. "I have a brother recently dead, suppose you go and get his skin and wear it." This the fox accordingly did and the wolf commenced to give him lessons. "You must do this and act so, when you wish to separate the dogs from the flocks." At first Reynard was a little awkward, but he rapidly improved, and with a little practice he reached at last the perfection of wolfish strategy. Just as he had learned all that there was to know a flock approached. The sham wolf ran after it spreading terror all around, even as Patroclus wearing¹ the armour

¹ At the Siege of Troy. He was mistaken for Achilles.

of Achilles spread alarm throughout camp and city, when mothers, wives, and old men hastened to the temples for protection. "In this case, the bleating army made sure there must be quite fifty wolves after them, and fled, dog and shepherd with them, to the neighbouring village, leaving only one sheep as a hostage.

This remaining sheep our thief instantly seized and was making off with it. But he had not gone more than a few steps when a cock crew near by. At this signal, which habit of life had led him to regard as a warning of dawn and danger, he dropped his disguising wolf-skin and, forgetting his sheep, his lesson, and his master, scampered off with a will.

Of what use is such shamming? It is an illusion to suppose that one is really changed by making the pretence. One resume's one's first nature upon the earliest occasion for hiding it.

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A guide for the footsteps of love.

XLI

LOVE AND FOLLY

(BOOK XII.—No. 14)

EVERYTHING to do with love is mystery. Cupid's arrows, his quiver, his torch, his boyhood : it is more than a day's work to exhaust this science. I make no pretence here of explaining everything. My object is merely to relate to you, in my own way, how the blind little god was deprived of his sight, and what consequences followed this evil which perchance was a blessing after all. On the latter point I will decide nothing, but will leave it to lovers to judge upon.

One day as Folly and Love were playing together, before the boy had lost his vision, a dispute arose. To settle this matter Love wished to lay his cause before a council of the gods ; but Folly, losing her patience, dealt him a furious blow upon the brow. From that moment and for ever the light of heaven was gone from his eyes.

Venus demanded redress and revenge, the mother and the wife in her asserting themselves in a way which I leave you to imagine. She deafened the gods with her cries, appealing to Jupiter, Nemesis, the judges from Hades, in fact all who would be importuned. She represented the seriousness of the case, pointing out

that her son could now not make a step without a stick. No punishment, she urged, was heavy enough for so dire a crime, and she demanded that the damage should be repaired.

When the gods had each well considered the public interest on the one hand and the complainant's demands upon the other, the supreme court gave as its verdict that Folly was condemned for ever more to serve as a guide for the footsteps of Love.

XLII

THE FOREST AND THE WOOD- CUTTER

(BOOK XII.—No. 16)

A WOODCUTTER had broken or lost the handle of his hatchet and found it not easy to get it repaired at once. During the time, therefore, that it was out of use, the woods enjoyed a respite from further damage. At last the man came humbly and begged of the forest to allow him gently to take just one branch wherewith to make him a new haft, and promised that then he would go elsewhere to ply his trade and get his living. That would leave unthreatened many an oak and many a fir that now won universal respect on account of its age and beauty.

The innocent forest acquiesced and furnished him with a new handle. This he fixed to his blade and, as soon as it was finished, fell at once upon the trees, despoiling his benefactress, the forest, of her most cherished ornaments. There was no end to her bewailings : her own gift had caused her grief.

Here you see the way of the world and of those who

follow it. They use the benefit against the benefactors. I weary of talking about it. Yet who would not complain that sweet and shady spots should suffer such outrage. Alas! it is useless to cry out and be thought a nuisance : ingratitude and abuses will remain the fashion none the less.

XLIII

THE FOX AND THE YOUNG TURKEYS

(BOOK XII.—No. 18)

SOME young turkeys were lucky enough to find a tree which served them as a citadel against the assaults of a certain fox. He, one night, having made the round of the rampart and seen each turkey watching like a sentinel, exclaimed, "What! These people laugh at me, do they? And do they think that they alone are exempt from the common rule? No! by all the gods! no!"

He accomplished his design.

The moon shining brilliantly seemed to favour the turkey folk against the fox. But he was no novice in the laying of sieges, and had recourse to his bag of rascally tricks. He pretended to climb the tree; stood upon his hind legs; counterfeited death; then came to life again. Harlequin himself could not have acted so many parts. He reared his tail and made it gleam in the moonshine, and practised a hundred other pleasantries, during which no turkey could have dared to go to sleep. The enemy tired them out at last by keeping their eyes fixed upon him. The poor birds became dazed. One lost its balance and fell. Reynard

put it by. Then another fell and was caught and laid on one side. Nearly half of them at length succumbed and were taken off to the fox's larder.

To concentrate too much attention upon a danger may cause us to tumble into it.

XLIV

THE APE

(Book XII.—No. 19)

THERE is an ape in Paris to whom a wife was once given ; and he, imitating many another husband, beat the poor creature to such an extent that she sighed all the breath out of her body and died.

Their son uttered the most doleful howls as a protest to this terrible business.

The father laughs now. His wife is dead and he already has found other lady companions, whom, no doubt, he beats in the same way ; for he haunts the taverns and is frequently tipsy.

Never expect anything good from people who imitate, whether they be apes or authors. Of the two the worst kind is the imitating author.

XLV

THE SCYTHIAN PHILOSOPHER

(BOOK XII.—No. 20)

A CERTAIN austere philosopher of Scythia, wishing to follow a pleasant life, travelled through the land of the Greeks, and there he found in a quiet spot a sage, one such as Virgil has written of ; a man the equal of kings, the peer almost of the gods, and like them content and tranquil.

The happiness of this sage lay entirely in his beautiful garden. There the Scythian found him, pruning hook in hand, cutting away the useless wood from his fruit trees ; lopping here, pruning there, trimming this and that, and everywhere aiding Nature, who repaid his care with usury.

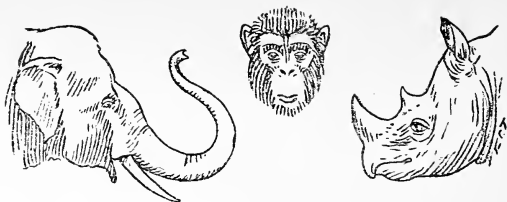
“ Why this wrecking ? ” asked the philosopher. “ Is it wisdom thus to mutilate these poor dwellers in your garden ? Drop that merciless tool, your pruning hook. Leave the work to the scythe of time. He will send them, soon enough, to the shores of the river of the departed.”

“ I am taking away the superfluous,” answered the sage, “ so that what is left may flourish the better.”

The Scythian returned to his cheerless abode and, taking a bill-hook, cut and trimmed every hour in the day, advising his neighbours to do likewise and

prescribing to his friends the means and methods. A universal cutting-down followed. The handsomest boughs were lopped ; his orchard mutilated beyond all reason. The seasons were disregarded, and neither young moons nor old were noted. In the end everything languished and died.

This Scythian philosopher resembles the indiscriminating Stoic who cuts away from the soul all passions and desires, good as well as bad, even to the most innocent wishes. For my own part, I protest against such people strongly. They take from the heart its greatest impulses and we cease to live before we are dead.



XLVI

THE ELEPHANT AND JUPITER'S APE

(BOOK XII.—No. 21)

ONCE in the olden times the elephant and the rhinoceros disputed as to which was the more important, and which should, therefore, have empire over the other animals. They decided to settle the point by battle in an enclosed field.

The day was fixed, and all in readiness, when somebody came and informed them that Jupiter's ape, bearing a caduceus, had been seen in the air. The fact of his holding a caduceus¹ proved him to be acting as official messenger from Olympus, and the elephant immediately took it for granted that the ape came as ambassador with greetings to his highness. Elated with this idea he waited for Gille, for that was the name of the ape, and thought him rather tardy in presenting his credentials. But at length Master Gille did

¹ The wand or official staff of Hermes.

salute his excellency as he passed, and the elephant prepared himself for the message. But not a word was forthcoming.

It was evident that the gods were not giving so much attention to these matters as the elephant supposed.

What does it matter to those in high places whether one is an elephant or a fly ?

The would-be monarch was reduced to the necessity of opening the conversation himself. "My cousin Jupiter," he began, "will soon be able to watch a rather fine combat from his supreme throne, and his court will see some splendid sport."

"What combat ?" asked the ape rather severely.

"What ! Do you not know that the rhinoceros denies me precedence : that the Elephantidæ are at war with the Rhinocerotidæ ? You surely know these families : they have some reputation."

"I am charmed to learn their names," replied Master Gille. "We are little concerned about such matters in our vast halls."

This shamed and surprised the elephant. "Eh ! What, then, is the reason of your visit amongst us ?"

"Oh, it was to divide a blade of grass between two ants. We care for all. As for your affair, nothing has been said about it in the council of the gods. The little and the great are equal in their eyes."

XLVII

THE LEAGUE OF RATS

(BOOK XII.—No. 26)

THERE was once a mouse who lived in terrible fear of a cat that had lain in wait watching for her. She was in great anxiety to know what she could do to escape the threatening danger.

Being prudent and wise she consulted her neighbour, a large and important rat. His lordship the rat had taken up his abode in a very good inn, and had boasted a hundred times that he had no fear for either tom-cat or she-cat. Neither teeth nor claws caused him any anxious thought.

“ Dame Mouse,” said this boaster, “ whatever I do, I cannot, upon my word, chase away this cat that threatens you without some help. But let me call together all the rats hereabouts and I’ll play him a sorry trick or two.”

The mouse curtsied humbly her thanks and the rat ran with speed to the head-quarters; that is to say to the larder, where the rats were in the habit of assembling. Arriving out of breath and perturbed in mind he found them making a great feast at the expense of their host.

“ What ails you ? ” asked one of the feasters.
“ Speak ! ”

“ In two words,” answered he, “ the reason for my

coming among you in this way is simply that it has become absolutely necessary to help the mice ; for Grimalkin is abroad making terrible slaughter among them. This, the most devilish of cats, will, when she has no mice left, turn her attention to the eating of rats."

"He says what is true," cried they all. "To arms, to arms!" Nothing could stem the tide of their impetuosity ; although, it is said, a few she-rats shed tears. It was no matter. Every one overhauled his equipment, and filled his wallet with cheese. To risk life was the determination of all. They set off, as if to a fête, with happy minds and joyful hearts.

Alas, for the mouse ! These warriors were a moment too late. The cat had her already by the head. Advancing at the double the rats ran to the succour of their good little friend ; but the cat swore, and stalked away in front of the enemy, having no intention of surrendering her prey.

At the sound of the cat's defiance, the prudent rats, fearing ill fate, beat a safe retreat without carrying any further their intended onslaught. Each one ran to his hole, and whenever any ventured out again it was always with the utmost caution to avoid the cat.

XLVIII

THE ARBITER, THE HOSPITALLER, AND THE HERMIT

(BOOK XII.—No. 28)

THREE saints, all equally zealous and anxious for their salvation, had the same ideal, although the means by which they strove towards it were different. But as all roads lead to Rome, these three were each content to choose their own path.

One, touched by the cares, the tediousness, and the reverses which seem to be inevitably attached to lawsuits, offered, without any reward, to judge and settle all causes submitted to him. To make a fortune on this earth was not an end he had in view.

Ever since there have been laws, man, for his sins, has condemned himself to litigation half his lifetime. Half or three-quarters, I should say, and sometimes the whole. This good conciliator imagined he could cure the silly and detestable craze for going to law.

The second saint chose the hospitals as his field of labour. I admire him. Kindly care taken to alleviate the sufferings of mankind is a charity I prefer before all others.

The sick of those days were much as they are now—peevish, impatient, and ever grumbling. They gave our poor hospitaler plenty of work. They would

say, " Ah ! he cares very particularly for such and such. They are his friends, hence we are neglected."

But bad as were these complaints they were nothing to those which the arbiter had to face. He got himself into a sorry tangle. No one was content. Arbitration pleased neither one side nor the other. According to them the judge could never succeed in holding the balance level. No wonder that at last the self-appointed judge grew weary.

He betook himself to the hospitals. There he found that the self-sacrificing hospitalier had nothing better to tell of his results. Complaints and murmurs were all that either could gain.

With sad hearts they gave up their endeavours and repaired to the silent wood, there to live down their sorrows. In these retreats, at a spot sheltered from the sun, gently tended by the breezes, and near a pure rivulet, they found the third saint, and of him they asked advice.

"Advice," said he, "is only to be sought of yourselves ; for who, better than yourselves, can know your own needs ? The knowledge of oneself is the first care imposed upon mankind by the Almighty. Have you obeyed this mandate whilst out in the world ? If there you did not learn to know yourselves, these tranquil shades will certainly help you ; for nowhere else is it possible. Stir up this stream. Do you now see yourselves reflected in it ? No ! How could you, when the mud is like a thick cloud between us and the crystal ? But let it settle, my brothers, and then you will see your image. The better to study yourselves live in the desert."

The lonely hermit was believed and the others followed his wise counsel.

It does not follow that people should not be well employed. Since some must plead; since men die and fall ill, doctors are a necessity and so also are lawyers. These ministers, thank God, will never fail us. The wealth and honours to be won make one sure of that. Nevertheless, in these general needs one is apt to neglect oneself. And you, judges, ministers, and princes, who give all your time to the public weal; you, who are troubled by countless annoyances and disappointments, disheartened by failure and corrupted by good fortune—you do not see yourselves. You see no one. Should some good impulse lead you to think over these matters, some flatterer breaks in and distracts you.

This lesson is the ending of this work. May the centuries to come find it a useful one. I present it to kings. I propose it to the wise. What better ending could I make ?

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