

KRILOF AND HIS FABLES

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Krilof and His Fables by W. R. S. Ralston

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W. R. S. RALSTON

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BY W. R. S. RALSTON, M.A.
Of the British Museum



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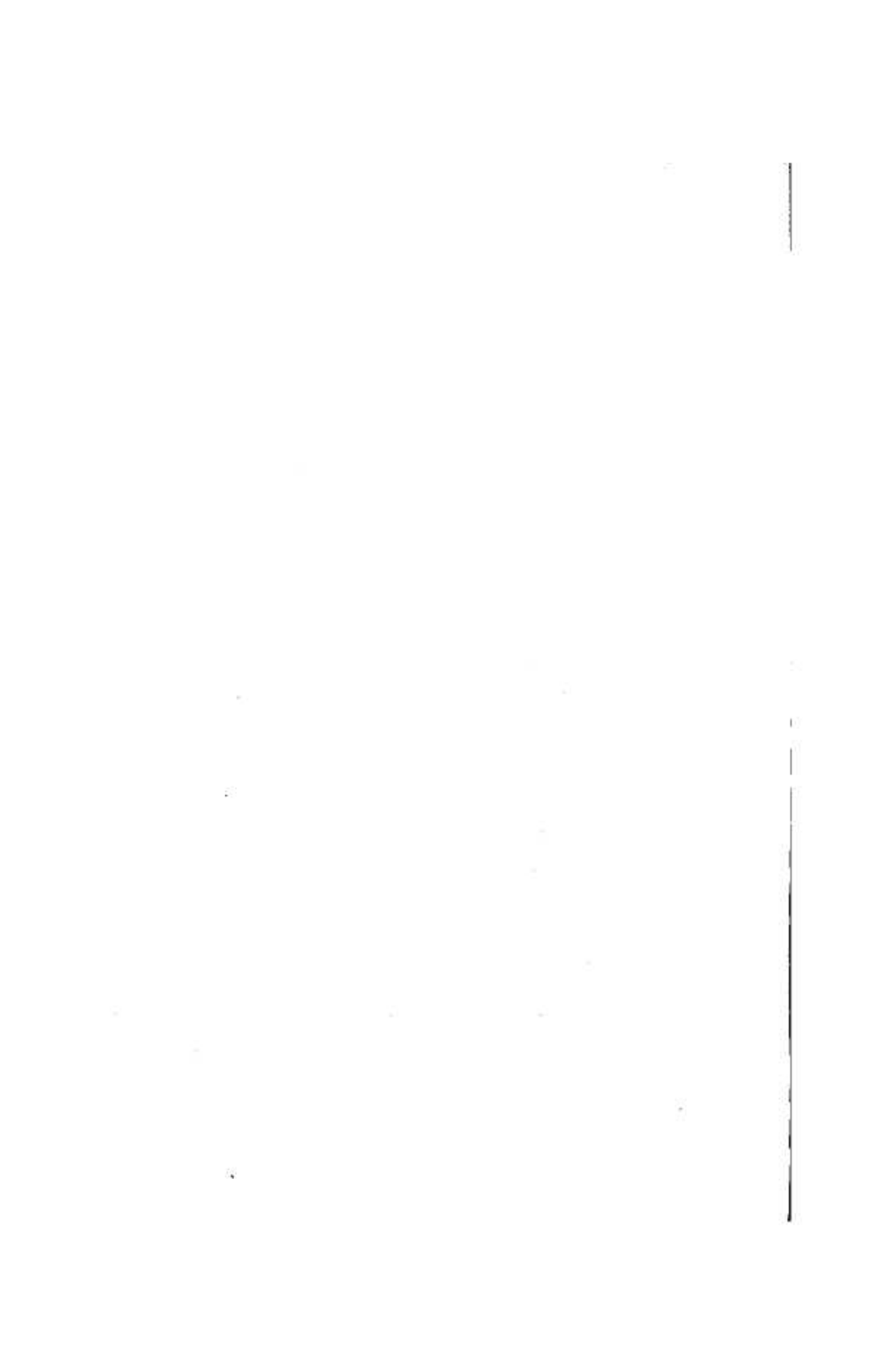
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Тѣхъ русскихъ, которымъ попадется этотъ переводъ
уважаемаго баснописца, переводчикъ покорнѣйше про-
ситъ принять въ соображеніе, что иллюстрированіе книги
нисколько отъ него не зависѣло.



PREFACE.

THE poems of which a literal prose translation is now offered to the English reader enjoy a popularity in their native land which they can scarcely expect to obtain in a foreign country. At home they live on the lips and in the memories of old and young, of rich and poor, and have become a sort of national heirloom; abroad they run the risk of being regarded as little more than quaint curiosities. Much of their special excellence depends upon the choice felicity of their language and the artistic structure of their verse; it is, therefore, scarcely possible for any one to form a fair idea of their original merits who makes their acquaintance only after they have been interpreted into alien prose. But, even in a foreign dress, I think that they cannot fail to interest and to please such readers as will make fair allowance for the disadvantages under which they labour. Their brilliance has naturally been dimmed, and their music has

been altogether stilled; but their shrewd insight into the thoughts and motives of the human heart, their ingenious interpretation of the inarticulate sentiments which prevail in the world of brutes, and their faculty of relating a story clearly and concisely, all these remain; and all these can be appreciated by the foreign reader. The pictures of Russian life, also, which their words offer are perfectly intelligible to all who take the trouble to study them, and will convey to a stranger's mind a far more correct idea of Russian manners and customs than he can gain from the cleverest illustrations which fancy can suggest to an artist whose knowledge of the subject is imperfect. In the stories, for instance, of "The Two Peasants," "The Peasant in Trouble," "The Three Moujiks," "The Peasant and the Labourer," and several others of the same class, a store of information will be found respecting the sayings and doings of the common people of Russia, those many millions of fellow-Europeans of whom we know much less than we do of the Chinese or the American Indians. Still more interesting should be the protests which some of them offer against the oppression and corruption which so long prevailed in Russia; against the manner in which the strong trod down the weak, and the rich ground the faces of the poor. It is pleasant to mark the generous sympathy with wronged weakness, the hardy indignation against guilty strength, which prompted Krilof to pen such apologues as those of "The Peasants and the River," "The Bear among the Bees," and "The Dancing Fish." Such stories as these can never be entirely divested of their attraction, even when