

**KRILOFF'S
ORIGINAL FABLES**

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Kriloff's Original Fables by Ivan Andreevich Krilov & I. Henry Harrison

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IVAN ANDREEVICH KRĪLOV & I. HENRY HARRISON

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ORIGINAL FABLES.

TRANSLATED BY

I. HENRY HARRISON.



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P R E F A C E.

IN undertaking to put the fables of Kriloff into English verse, I have been stimulated and encouraged even by the very difficulties of the task, and above all induced to persevere by a profound admiration of his genius, and a conviction that out of Russia he is almost entirely unknown. Translation can in no case, I am only too well aware, come near the original work, if it be one of the highest class, and more especially if of an original and national character. Yet such translations as those of Tasso by Fairfax, and of Shakespeare in German, have nearly fulfilled that impossible requisite, and without translation a large part of the world must necessarily ignore many of the world's greatest literary productions. I cannot pretend to the skill, nay, I may say the sympathetic genius, that reproduced Tasso and Shakespeare, but I may fairly claim some amount of indulgence on the score that the language from which I have translated is far more difficult than either Italian or English to a foreigner, and that the English public generally are never likely to know as much of it as is known of Italian in England, or of English abroad.

I am not ignorant that a translation of Kriloff's fables already exists in English, but then it is in prose, and I am of opinion that the spirit of Kriloff cannot but evaporate

in prose ; that verse alone, even though at a distance, can hope to reproduce something of the idiomatic humour, of the thousand delicacies of thought and style. Prose may give the bare skeleton, but nothing more. I am not criticising the prose translation to which I allude ; indeed, having had the intention in my mind of translating Kriloff in verse some years before it appeared, I have purposely abstained from reading it, and I do not yet know whether my explanations of the fables agree with those of Mr. Ralston or not. I am simply giving my reasons for choosing verse. I have endeavoured, in doing so, as far as the technical exigencies of rhyme and metre permitted, to reproduce the versification of the original. This rule I consider a vital one in all verse translations. It may have some exceptions, and Connington's *Virgil* is a striking proof in point, but can one imagine Dante not in *tertia rima* ? For me Kriloff belongs to a class of writers that require this imitation, provided it be kept within reasonable limits, and I will therefore shortly state what limits I have striven to observe. I may say that the general character of his versification has been followed in every instance, even to the distinguishing traits of particular fables, and that some fables, such as "The Squirrel" (No. 126), are exact reproductions. At the same time, whenever I found that I should be obliged to sacrifice the spirit to the letter, I never hesitated to change, but in such cases, if the form was not exactly Kriloff in one place, it was Kriloff in another, at least in intention, if not in effect. Kriloff's verse is always strictly iambic, and to this it will be seen I have not always adhered, thinking it becomes monotonous in English. The principal change I have made is not using the same number of double rhymes which abound in Kriloff, the Russian, with its manifold inflections and similar terminations for the

same parts of speech, being peculiarly rich in them. As the English language is decidedly poor in this respect, the change was a matter of necessity. Again, I have not scrupled to shorten lines. Kriloff's longer lines are nearly always Alexandrines, and most of his fables contain many of them, but I have frequently preferred our own so-called heroic measure of ten syllables. I must beg my English readers, if I have any, to lay any faults of versification which they detect on me and not on Kriloff, for his verse is always easy and fluent, and admirably suits itself to the subject on hand.

There is another important point of treatment to which I must refer. Nothing caused me greater difficulty than to decide how far I should attempt to render the essentially Russian characteristics of particular fables, and how far it was wiser to replace them by English equivalents. I soon found in practice that this was a question which decided itself. In such fables, for instance, as "The Oracle" (No. 4), the circumstances of which are by no means Russian, a substitution was necessary in the moral not to blunt the real point of the fable, and similar substitutions have been more than once employed. In such fables as "Damian's Fishsoup" (No. 32), or "The Swordblade" (No. 131), all the circumstances of which are essentially Russian, they have been scrupulously preserved. It is worth remark how very few of Kriloff's fables require this minute local accuracy; and the reason, if I am not mistaken, is this, that beyond the particular application of any fable, there is always a wider sense in which it is true applied to any nationality, that is, to all mankind.

This last remark brings me to my best apology for having ventured on this publication, the rare merits of Kriloff, and the universality of his mind. I have dared

to hope that these qualities will cover the defects of translation, and that some few will be found to thank me for introducing them, though at second hand, to such an inexhaustible treasury of true and noble thoughts, of sound judgment, of genial humour, and of poetical fancy.

I have not translated all the original fables, because I do not feel that I can fairly render what I do not sympathize with; and in my judgment the fables I have omitted are sensibly weaker than the rest, sometimes—a rare thing with Kriloff—through the want of a clear decided aim, and sometimes through comparative weakness of execution. For such reasons I have left untranslated twenty-two original fables. Kriloff borrowed in all thirty-eight fables, and I have translated seven of them, as specimens of his way of treating the ideas which he took from others. A reference to the list will show that most of the untranslated borrowed fables are old favourites. I thought it unnecessary to give another version of “The Fox and the Grapes,” “The Wolf and the Lamb,” and others of the same class. To complete the sketch of Kriloff’s work, I have given a list of all the fables, and the sources of all the borrowed ones, and added a classification of the fables according to their subjects. The alphabetical index to the translated fables contains references to the best Russian edition of Kriloff, that by Egoroff, by which the original can easily be found for the purpose of comparison.

I should mention that the Russian editions of Kriloff are not printed chronologically; he purposely separated fables of the same date, and especially those relating to similar subjects, but it appeared to me that I should give a clearer view of the whole by following a chronological than an arbitrary order. In another point I have differed from the Russian editions; they all print the fables in an