

FABLES AND FABULISTS

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Fables and Fabulists by Thomas Newbigging

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THOMAS NEWBIGGING

**FABLES AND
FABULISTS**



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

FABLES AND FABULISTS:

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ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY

THOMAS NEWBIGGING,

Author of

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

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LONDON:

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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mit

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

SHAKESPEARE : *Coriolanus*.

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

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

ANDREW LANG.

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

MRS. JAMESON.

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



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FABLES AND FABULISTS

CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION OF FABLE.

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

TENNYSON : *The Flower.*

' As clear as a whistle.'

BYRON : *The Astrologer.*

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

First, as *fabula*, it is employed to denote the myths or fictions which, by the aid of imagination and superstition, have clouded, or have become blended with, the history of the remote past. Such are the stories related of Scandinavian and Grecian heroes and gods ; beings, some of whom doubtless had an actual human existence, and were wise and valiant and powerful, or the reverse,

in their day, but around whose names and persons have clustered all the marvellous legends that are to be found in mythological lore. The better name for these is 'romance.'

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

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

The Fable or Apologue has been variously defined by different writers. Mr. Walter Pater, paraphrasing Plato's definition, says that 'fables are medicinable lies or fictions, with a provisional or economized truth in them, set forth under such terms as simple souls can best receive.'^{*} The sophist Aptonius, taking the same view, defines

^{*} 'Plato and Platonism,' by Walter Pater. London Macmillan and Co., 1893, p. 225.