

**THE FABLES OF ÆSOP; WITH  
INSTRUCTIVE APPLICATIONS.  
ILLUSTRATED WITH ONE  
HUNDRED ENGRAVINGS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649580439

The Fables of Æsop; With Instructive Applications. Illustrated with One Hundred Engravings  
by Æsop & Samuel Croxall

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Cover @ 2017

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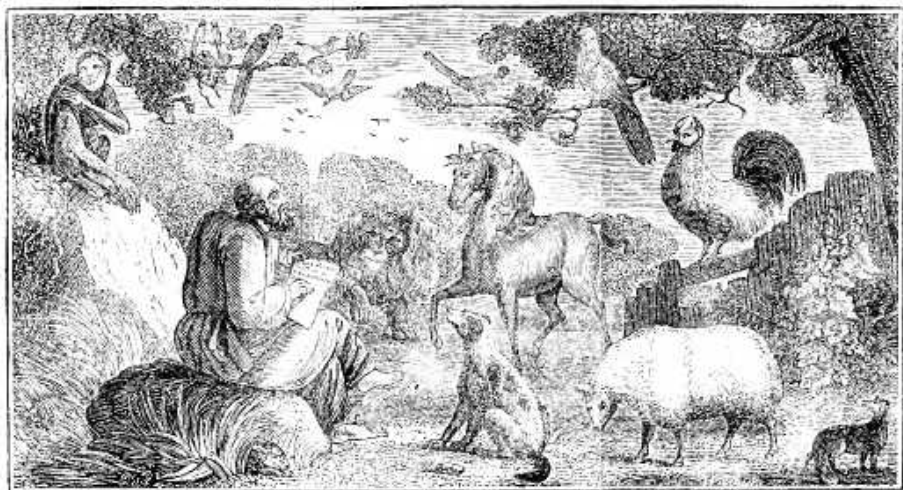
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BY  
SAMUEL CROXALL, D.D.

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HALIFAX:

MILNER AND BOWSER,

1857.

## PREFACE.

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So much has been already said concerning Æsop and his writings, both by ancient and modern authors, that the subject seems to be quite exhausted. The different conjectures, opinions, traditions, and fables, which from time to time we have had given to us of him, would fill a large volume; but they are, for the most part, so inconsistent and absurd, that it would be but a dull amusement for the reader to be led into such a maze of uncertainty, since Herodotus, the most ancient Greek historian, did not flourish till near a hundred years after Æsop.

As for his *Life*, with which we are entertained in so complete a manner before most of the editions of his *Fables*, it was invented by one Maximus Planudes, a Greek monk; and, if we may judge of him from that composition, just as judicious and learned a person as the rest of his fraternity are at this day observed to be. Sure there never were so many blunders and childish dreams mixed up together, as are to be met with in the short compass of that piece. For a monk, he might be very good and wise; but in point of history and chronology, he shews himself to be very ignorant. He brings Æsop to Babylon in the reign of King Lycorus, a king of his own making, for his name is not to be found in any catalogue, from Nabonassar to Alexander the Great, Nabonadius, most probably, reigning in Babylon about that time. He sends him into Egypt in the days of Nectabeno, who was not in being till two hundred years afterwards; with some other gross mistakes of that kind, which sufficiently show us that his *Life* was a work of invention, and



that the inventor was a bungling poor creature. He never mentions Æsop's being at Athens, though Phœdrus speaks of him as one that lived the greatest part of his time there; and it appears that he had a statue erected in that city to his memory, done by the hand of the famous Lysippus. He writes of him as living at Samos, and interesting himself in a public capacity in the administration of the affairs of that place; yet takes not the least notice of the Fable which Aristotle tells us he spoke in behalf of a famous demagogue there,\* when he was impeached for embezzling the public money; nor does he, indeed, give us the least hint of such a circumstance. An ingenious man might have laid together all the materials of this kind that are to be found in good old authors, and, by the help of a bright invention, connected and worked them up with success: we might have swallowed such an imposition well enough, because we should not have known how to contradict it. But in Phœdrus's case the imposture is doubly discovered; first, as he has the unquestioned authority of antiquity against him; secondly (and if the other did not condemn him), as he has introduced the witty, discreet, and judicious Æsop, quibbling in a strain of low, monastic waggery, and as archly dull as a mountebank's jester.

That there was a life of Æsop, either written or traditionary, before Aristotle's time, is pretty plain; and that there was something of that kind extant in Augustus's reign, is, I think, as undoubted: since Phœdrus mentions many transactions of his during his abode at Athens. But it is as certain that Phœdrus met with nothing of this kind, or, at least, that he met not with the accounts with which they were furnished, because of the omissions before mentioned, and consequently with none so authentic and good. He seems to have thrown together some merry conceits which occurred to him in the course of his reading, such as

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\* Arist. Rhet. Eb. II. cap. 21.

he thought were worthy of Æsop, and very confidently intrudes them upon us for his. But when at last he brings him to Delphos (where he was put to death by being thrown down from a precipice), that the Delphians might have some colour of justice for what they intended to do, he favours them with the same stratagem which Joseph made use of to bring back his brother Benjamin; they clandestinely convey a cup into his baggage, overtake him upon the road, and after a strict search find him guilty; upon that pretence carry him back to the city, condemn, and execute him.

As I would neither impose upon others, nor be imposed upon, I cannot, as some have done, let such stuff pass for the Life of the great Æsop. Planudes has little authority for any thing he has delivered concerning him; nay as far I can find, his whole account, from the beginning to the end, is mere invention, excepting some few circumstances, such as the place of his birth, and of his death; for in respect of the time in which he lived, he has blundered egregiously, by mentioning some incidents as contemporary with Æsop, which was far enough from being so. Xanthus, his supposed master, put his wife into a passion by bringing such a piece of deformity into her house as the author is supposed to be. Upon this the master reproaches his slave for not uttering something witty, at a time that seemed to require it so much; and then Æsop comes out slapdash, with a satirical reflection upon women, taken from Euripides, the famous Greek tragedian. Now Euripides happened not to be born till about fourscore years after Æsop's death. What credit, therefore, can be given to anything Planudes says of him?

As to the place of his birth, I will allow, with the generality of those who have written about him, that it might have been some town in Phrygia Major. That he was by condition a slave, we may conclude from what Phædrus\*

\* Lib. 2. Fab. 9; and Lib. 3. Fab. 10.

relates of him. But whether at both Samos and Athens, he does not particularly mention: though I am inclined to think it was at the latter only, because he often speaks of him as living at that place, and never at any other; which looks as if Phœdrus believed that he had never lived any where else. Perhaps he might have been in that low condition in the former part of his life; and therefore Phœdrus, who had been of the same rank himself, might love to enlarge upon this circumstance, since he does not choose to represent him in any higher sphere. But, however, granting that he was once a slave, we have great authority that he was afterwards not only free, but in high veneration and esteem with all that knew him, especially all that were eminent for wisdom and virtue. Upon the credit of Plutarch, we fix the life of Æsop in the time of Croesus, king of Lydia, with whom he was in such esteem, as to be deputed by him, to consult the oracle at Delphos, and be sent as his envoy to Periander, king of Corinth; which was about three hundred and twenty years after the time in which Homer lived, and five hundred and fifty before Christ.

It is not material for us to know the little trifling circumstances of his life; no whether he lived at Samos or Athens, whether he was a slave or a freeman, whether handsome or ugly. He has left us a legacy in his writings that will preserve his memory dear and perpetual among us. What we have to do, therefore, is to show ourselves worthy of so valuable a present, and to act in all respects, as near as we can to the will and intention of the donor. They who are governed by reason need no other motive than the mere goodness of a thing to incite them to the practice of it. But men for the most part, are so superficial in their enquiries, that they take all upon trust, and have no taste for any thing but what is supported by the vogue of others, and which it is inconsistent with the fashion of the world not to admire.

As an inducement, therefore, to such as these to like the