AESOP'S FABLES: A NEW VERSION CHIEFLY FROM ORIGINAL SOURCES

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THOMAS JAMES & JOHN TENNIEL

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Trieste

ÆSOP'S FABLES:

A New Version,

CHIEFLY FROM ORIGINAL SOURCES,

BY

THE REV. THOMAS JAMES, M. A.

VICAR OF SIBERTOFT AND THEDDINGWORTH, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF BATH AND WELLS.

WITH MORE THAN SIXTY ILLUSTRATIONS,

DESIGNED BY

JOHN TENNIEL.

"Equidem omni cura morem servabo Senis;
Sed si libuerit aliquid interponere
Dictorum sensus ut delectet varietas,
Bonus in partes, lector, accipias velim."—Phædrus.

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Introduction

TO THE

LIFE AND FABLES OF ÆSOP.

In the days of Crœsus, King of Lydia, when Amasis was Pharaoh of Egypt, and Peisistratus lorded it over the Athenians—between five and six hundred years before the Christian era—lived Æsopus, no inapt representative of the great social and intellectual movement of the age which he adorned.

Born a slave, with no outward circumstances of fortune to recommend him to the notice of the great, he forced his way by his mother-wit into the courts of princes, and laid the foundation of a fame, more universal, and perhaps more lasting in its influence, than that of all the Seven Wise Men of Greece, his worthy contemporaries.

Up to this time, whatever wisdom from without had guided the councils of princes, had been derived from the traditionary lore of courts, or from

the verses of bards, hallowed by time, or impromptued for the occasion. Writing was as yet only known in the inscription on the public marble, or on the private tablet. Religion and History were handed down from mouth to mouth, and, the better to be remembered, were committed to metre. With the sixth century before Christ commences the era of Written Classic Literature. The great convulsion of the Eastern nations, and the first direct and sustained intercourse of the Oriental with the Grecian mind, tended to call forth all the latent energies of either people. New combinations of governments, and strange commixtures of races, required new systems of politics, and more stringent and definite laws. Hence this is the age of Wise Men and of Prose. Even wealthy Crœsus discovered that knowledge was power, and assembled around him from every nation all who had gained a reputation for superior wisdom.

The flights of imagination began to give way to the serious business of life. It was an age of grave talkers, and inquisitive travellers,—of gathering the works of the great Poets to preserve the wisdom of antiquity, and of collecting facts for the use of the new order of things. Distinctions of birth and country were less heeded, and Wit was listened to even from the lips of a foreign slave. It was even able to emancipate itself, not

only from the bondage of custom, but from actual bodily slavery, and Æsop came to the court of Crœsus, from his old master Iadmon, a free man—working his way to fame by a more honourable road than that of his fellow-servant "Rhodopis the fair," the celebrity of whose beauty and wealth at such a time, tells in a word how she had abused the one, and acquired the other.[a] Æsop's fame had probably preceded him, but less as a Sage than as a Wit. He seems a stepping-stone between the poetry which had gone before, and the prose that followed, making the politics and morals of the day his study, but clothing his lectures in the garb of Imagination and Fancy. There is no doubt that he quickly grew in favour with Crœsus by the mode in which he imparted his knowledge. While Solon held the schoolmaster's rod over the philosophical monarch, Æsop conciliated alike his will and his reason by timely drollery and subtlely-conveyed advice.[b] To this freedom from avowed dictation, was added a little well-directed flattery. He knew, that to be tolerated in courts, he must speak to please, or not speak at all;[c] and when all the Seven Sages had given judgment, the

[a] Herod. II. 134, 135.

[b] Παίζων ἐν σπουδῇ.—Agathiæ Epigr. ap. Brunk.

[c] ὡς ἥκιστα ἢ ὡς ἥδιστα.—Plutar. vit. Sol. p. 94.

Phrygian was sometimes set down as a better man than they all.[d]

If we should hence look upon him as little more than a court-jester, we shall be doing him great wrong. He came to amuse, but he remained to instruct; and Crœsus probably learnt more home-truths from his fictions,[e] than from all the serious disquisitions of his retained philosophers. Wherever he went he lifted up his voice in the same strain. At Corinth he warned his hearers against mob-law, in a fable which Socrates afterwards turned into verse.[f] At Athens, by the recital of "The Frogs and Jupiter," he gave a lesson both to prince and people.[g] His visit to Delphi seems to have had less of a political object. He was sent as a commissioner by Crœsus to distribute some payment due to the Delphians,[h] and in the discharge of this duty incurred the displeasure of the citizens of that world's centre,—whose character seems to have been at all times but little in accordance with the sacred privileges they assumed. Probably even more from fear of his wit than from displeasure at his award,—and, judging from the event, without any plea of jus-

[d] μᾶλλον ὁ φρύξ. Suid. in voc.—Apostolius Cent. XII. adag.
[e] σοφοῖς μύθοις καὶ πλάσμασι καίρια λέξας.—Agath. Epigr.
[f] Plat. Phæd. c. 12.—Diog. Laert. II. 42. [g] Phædr. I. 2.
[h] Aristoph. Vesp. 1446.—Schol. ad. loc.

tice,—the Delphians raised against him the vulgar cry, too often successful, of impiety and sacrilege. For once his ready weapon failed in its effect. He is said to have appealed to their reverence for the laws of hospitality, by the fable of "The Eagle and the Beetle," the germ probably of the existing story: but he appealed in vain. Their craft was in danger; and the enraged guardians of the temple of the great God of Greece, hurled the unfortunate fable-maker headlong from one of the Phædrian precipices.[i]

He was not unavenged. Plagues cursed the scene of his murder, and the conscience-smitten Delphians, many years afterwards, seeing in their calamities, as well they might, a punishment for their evil deed, proclaimed, again and again, their readiness to give compensation for his death to any one who could prove a title to the self-imposed fine. No other claimant appearing, it was awarded at length to Iadmon, the grandson of Iadmon of Hephæstopolis, Æsop's old master. The proverb of "Æsop's blood," in after times gave warning to his countrymen, that a murdered man's blood will not cry to heaven in vain.[k]

There are no further authentic notices of Æsop's life, but there are abundant proofs of the

[i] Babrii. frag. ap. Apollon.—Suid. v. φαιδριάς.
[j] Herod. II. 134. [k] Αἰσώπειον ἆιμα. Zonaras. p. 90.