

**THE BOOK OF
FABLES: CHIEFLY
FROM AESOP**

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The Book of Fables: Chiefly from Aesop by Horace E. Scudder

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HORACE E. SCUDDER

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THE BOOK OF FABLES

CHIEFLY FROM ÆSOP

CHOSEN AND PHRASED

BY
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. W. HERRICK



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1885

PREFACE.

THOSE who have to do with the early education of children are often hard put to find a literature for them which shall seem worth their while when reading has become a comparatively easy task. The first books put into a child's hands are necessarily simple ; but the simplicity is below the child's intelligence. During the period when he is mastering the several combinations in which a boy, a rat, and a cat can be placed, and is acquiring the power of reading at sight, he is listening to books which are by no means so barren in their simplicity, and as soon as he is able to read the little stories which he finds in the early readers he leaves them behind ; they have served their purpose, and he never recurs to them.

But literature, for the sake of which the art of reading is acquired, is never left behind, and it

becomes of importance to give children, as soon as may be, forms of enduring literature on which they may exercise their newly-acquired power. The simplest, most child-like form is the Fable, and there are good reasons why a book of fables should be the first real book which a child reads.

In the first place, the fable is short. The child has the pleasure of reading an entire story at one sitting. Then it is of animals, and animals are the natural companions of the child. Again, it is interesting and novel; it appeals to his imagination, for it represents the animal as having human properties; and it suggests a plain moral. It is true, the morality of the fable is usually a prudential one, but prudence is a virtue which comes early in the lessons of life. We may rest with confidence in the worth of stories which have been tested by generations and centuries of use.

The child, therefore, who reads the classic fables has begun his acquaintance with permanent literature. He is reading what the world has chosen to remember. He is applying his new power to that which is worth while. He is beginning to receive the impressions which literature has made upon human life, and the early

impressions which he thus receives will never become even consciously faint. That is to say, there never will come a time in his life when the fable may not still give him pleasure; while the time has already come when the reading-book which he read last week can no longer excite his interest or attention. Every one will recognize the important step which a child has taken when he has entered the current of the world's lasting literature.

There is a great mass of fables, for every people has its own; but the intelligent reader of the world's literature, especially that which is familiar to English-speaking people, will easily name a certain number which meet him at many turns in life, — fables which have yielded proverbs and familiar sayings, and have passed into the common currency of intercourse; which appear as allusions in higher literature, and a knowledge of which is assumed by writers. It has been my pleasure to choose these, and collect them as those which every child should know as a matter of course. They are the fables which he will most surely meet when he reads books or hears speakers.

In presenting these fables, however, for chil-

dren's use, I have had another and distinct task, and I have tried to indicate my work by a single word on the title-page. I have chosen these fables, and I have phrased them. That is, I have not felt at liberty to disturb the old stories in any particular. With Halm's collection of *Æsop's Fables* before me, I have written them out, not in a literal translation from the Greek, nor in a paraphrase. I have simply preserved the exact lines of the story, but have used phrases which would present no extraordinary difficulties to a child. It has not been my purpose to turn the fables into words of one syllable, for such words and the construction which they compel often produce an artificial effect, of greater difficulty to the young reader than the more natural arrangement of words which may happen to have two syllables, or sometimes even three. I have wished to write out the fables in the Greek order of incident, but not in the nearest English order of construction, and I have used the conversational form whenever the original permitted.

By this means I hope I have at once kept close to *Æsop*, when *Æsop's Fables* were in the case, and close also to the movements of a child's mind.

In the instance of fables from other sources, I have, in the main, sought to make them conform to the pattern set by *Æsop*. I have never lost sight of the use of the book as one to be read by a child, rather than to a child, and I should be entirely willing to sacrifice any credit I might have secured for literary form if I have thrown the stories into a form which is simple, clear, intelligible, and interesting to the readers for whom I intend the book.

H. E. S.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,
June, 1882.