

**BREVIARY TREASURES.  
SELECTIONS FROM  
ARISTOPHANES AND  
LUCIAN**

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Breviary Treasures. Selections from Aristophanes and Lucian by Lucian Aristophanes

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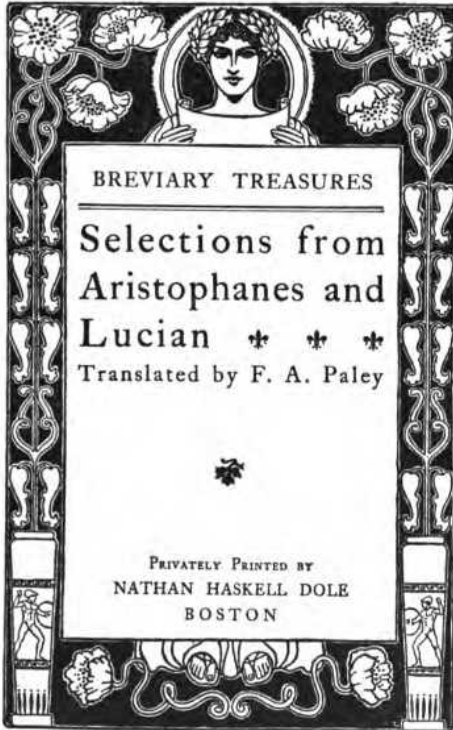
**LUCIAN ARISTOPHANES**

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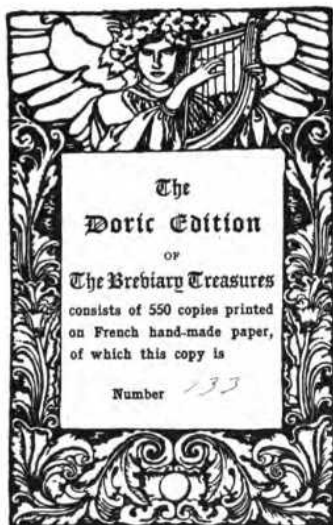
Aristophanes (English, 1904, Paley)



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## INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to Homer, the Immortal Gods had occasional opportunity for indulging in merriment. The serious side of human life or their own affairs did not entirely occupy them. It might be imagined that they regarded men and women as enacting tragedies and comedies for their delectation. Perhaps the tragedy preponderates; it certainly does for the actors. Even those of us who recognize that we are performing comedies and farces, and who, by the very fact that we are selected for such parts, must see the fun of it, else we should act them as dully as "Bottom the Weaver" and the other clowns in "Pyramus and Thisbe" — even we, I say, use our fortunate sense of humour as a palliative to the pathos of our real existence. Blessed indeed is the sense of humour. It is a balm, a cordial. Great men who lack it are vastly less great because they lack it.

Certain nations characteristically lean

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to the serious or the comic. One searches with great expenditure of labour for humorous or witty literature delivered to us by the Romans. What there is will probably send a tap-root into Greek soil. Plautus and Terence were at most adapters if not translators. The Coliseum and the rule of the *pollice verso* were not keyed to Comedy. No doubt in the cultivated and brilliant society which Mæcenas and Augustus gathered around them there was display of wit. Horace was gifted with it. Catullus showed sparks of it. But the satirists were too grim and savage to observe the amenities. Not until Martial do we find much scope for citation.

With the Greeks, on the other hand, wit and humour were spontaneous and indigenous. It begins with Homer. Aristophanes is full of quotable passages. There are hundreds of witty sayings that have come down to our day and passed current in every age and still go from hand to hand. The whole field of Greek literature is rich in epigrammatic sentences.

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The present volume is devoted almost wholly to brief selected passages from Aristophanes and Lucian. Aristophanes's life covered the last half of the fourth century B. C., and he died in 388. Lucian was born in Syria and lived from 125 until 180 A. D. In their treatment of the Gods they are surprisingly similar. The skeptical insolence of their arraignment is only equalled by the keenness of their satire. Both of them wonderfully combine wit and humour. There is the flash and also the radiance. Consequently, even under the veil of a translation, much of what they wrote is as perennially young and as modern as if written for the men of our day. A few of the best epigrams of Martial, a Spaniard, whose life covered the last half of the first century of our era, are added.

These three authors, thus brought into comparison, show Greek and classic wit and humour to the highest advantage.

N. H. D.