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FABLES

**BY
RONALD ROSS**

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OF HENRY YOUNG AND SONS OF SOUTH CASTLE STREET,
LIVERPOOL, FOR TWO SHILLINGS AND SIX PENCE.**

Entered at Stationers' Hall

For my Children

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*These Fables were written in India
between the years 1880 and 1890*

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An Expostulation with Truth

Uttered by the Well Meaning Poet

Altho' you live aloft so far,
Transcendent Goddess, in your star,
Pray, try to see us as we are.

Consider—and be more forgiving—
Life is not reasoning but believing,
And we must work to get our living.

Expound with logic most exact
And rightly marshal every fact—
D'you think we thank you for your act?

D'you think we've nothing else to do
But to distinguish false from true?—
We're lawyers, doctors, parsons too.

But for our little fond delusions
We'd never come to our conclusions,
And then—just think of the confusions!

You pain us when you contradict.
Your presence would the less afflict
If you were not so very strict.

Dear Lady, take this sober view,
It matters little what is true—
The world is not the place for you.

I rede you therefore, go away;
Or, if you really mean to stay,
Let's hear your views another day.

Ariel and the Hippopotamus

Dedicated to Rural Magnates

Fine Ariel, serf to Prospero,
Sped on the Great Meridian
For jetty pearls from Andaman
To make a chaplet to declare
The beauty of Miranda's hair,
When at the desert African,
Out of his master's ken, and slow,
Lag'd on his errand, loth to go:
For sweltering Sol with leaden beam
Made stagnant all the windy stream
And suck'd from earth a stifling steam.
There idling still, the lazy Sprite
Beheld below, beneath his flight,
The Lord of Rivers, blackly bright,
Who, planted in a marshy bed,
On mighty rushes munching fed
And sigh'd for more the more he sped.
'Good day, my lord; I hope you're well,'
Quoth then the jocund Ariel.
'Why, thank'ee, Sir, sound as a bell;
Save I'd complain, did I but choose,
My appetite's so poor I lose
Half this fine fodder. What's the news?'
'Great Sir, the news I brought away
Is not so good, I'm sad to say—
Jove has the gout again to-day.'
'Why,' said the Hippopotamus,
'That ain't no call to make a fuss;
I've had the same and am no wuss.'
'Tis said that Cytherea, queen
Of beauty, weds to-day at e'en
The sooty Vulcan hump'd and mean.'
'There,' said the Hippopotamus,
'That party I will not discuss.
She might have me and do no wuss.'
'Apollo, lord of lay and lyre,
Hath seated now his Heavenly Choir
Upon Parnassus' starry spire.'
'Foh!' said the Hippopotamus,
'For that I do not care a cuss,
And they may sing until they bus'!
'Jove, sad for Io, hath aver'd
No sound of laughter shall be heard
One year in Heav'n, nor witty word.'
'Ah!' said the Hippopotamus,
'That there don't suit the likes of us.
I vow I won't be muzzled thus.'
'Farewell, Sir,' quoth the lissom Sprite;
'Behoves me tear me from your sight.
I must about the world ere night.'

'Farewell, young friend,' responded he;
'The work I have to do you see.
But if you hear the Thund'rer sigh
For counsel, Mars for an ally,
Dian for love, I think that I—
I pray you say a word for me.'

The Frog, the Fairy, and the Moon

Dedicated to Lovers

The Frog that loved the Changing Star
Was worship'd by a Fairy,
Who made for him a waistcoat trim
Of silk and satin, soft and airy,
Button'd with eyes of fireflies
In manner military.
And more to move his languid love
A crimson cap she made him,
According to many, plumed with antennae
Of moths that rob the flowers' honey;
And with her kisses, lovers' money,
For that she gave she paid him.
She fed him too, till he was blue,
With endearing terms on caddis worms;
And caught for him the wriggling germs
Of midges; and with tender pats
She wiled and woo'd him while he chew'd 'em:
Till he said, 'Bother! I love another.
I love the Star I see afar,
That changeth oft her fires so soft
From blue to red and red to blue;
And that is why I love not you.
Therefore I pray you take away
Your tedious arm, which does me harm
Because it makes me feel too warm.
But give to me my new guitar
That I may sing to yonder Star.'
With that he gaped and guggled so
The Fairy into fits did go;
And he bounded near and bounded far,
Strumming the strings of his guitar,
And tried to reach the Changing Star.
And all the while with his splay feet
Kept time unto the music meet.
With hat and waistcoat on he sprang,
And as he bounded still he sang.
And this the Saga says is why
The Frog he always jumps so high;
For, though the Star is very far,
To reach it he must ever try,
Until it's time for him to die.

As for the foolish Fay, 'tis wist,
She wept herself into a mist,
Which wanders where the Clouds are strewn
About the deathbed of the Moon,
When with wan lips, in sudden swoon
(Because her unkind lord, the Sun,
Will ever from her loveless run),
She cries amid her Starry Maids:

‘Ah me, alas, my beauty fades!’—
And so sinks down into the Shades.

The Troll and the Mountain

Dedicated to the Great

Said the Troll to the Mountain, 'Old fellow, how goes it?'
The Mountain responded, 'My answer—suppose it.'
Said the Troll, 'Dear old friend, you are grumpy to-day.'
Said the Mountain, 'I think you had best run away.'
The Troll said, 'You suffer, old boss, from the blues.'
The Mountain retorted, 'I may if I choose.'
'Ah, that,' cried the Troll, 'is effect of the liver.'
'Take care,' quoth the Hill, 'or I'll give you the shiver.'
'By my cap and its feather,' the Spirit replies,
'You'll be getting too portly without exercise.'
'You pert little fly,' said the Rock in a rage,
'I will teach you to chaff at a hill of my age.'
So he jump'd up to punish the impudent Fay,
Who wisely retorted by running away;
Until the old Mountain broke right down the middle,
When back he came nimbly and played on the fiddle.
My Advice to all Mountains that make such a stir, it's
'Don't get in a passion with pert little spirits.'

The Toad and the Fays

Dedicated to Philosophers

There sat a Toad upon a lawn
Lost in a dream of fancy;
His right foot in a Rose was set,
His left upon a Violet,
His paunch upon a Pansy.
Some merry Elfin passing by
At sight of him were sore affrighted,
And would have fled; until he said,
'My little dears, if you knew why
I look to heaven thus and sigh,
I think that you would be delighted.
The Stars rise up and fall, the Stars
Do shine in pools and stilly places,
The Lilies blink on sandy bars,
The Midges move in flickering mazes;
But I profoundly pore upon,
And reason, think, and cogitate,
And marvel, muse, and meditate,
Why had the ancient Mastodon
So few sad hairs upon his pate?'

The Parson and the Angel

Thus spake the Preacher. All aver'd
A saintlier man was never heard.
But no one knew that o'er his head
An Angel wrote the things he said,
And these not only, but as well
The things he thought but did not tell;
And thus the double discourse fell.
'Beloved Brethren, never do
What makes your (neighbour) censure you;
That is, conceive yourself as good
(And so impress the neighbourhood).
Make you yourself a law to self
And so you will (enjoy yourself).
For the best way to 'scape the devil
Is to (protest you are not evil).
For virtue lies in this, I take it,
To drink the physic (but not shake it);
To gulp it dutifully down
(But leave the bitter dregs alone).
Desire not aught of any man
(But take your due); so that you can
(Quite safely unto others do
As you wish they should unto you);
And thus'—so summed the portly Priest—
'Be chosen for the Wedding Feast
(As City Councillor at least).'

Puck and the Crocodile

Dedicated to the Godly

Puck, wandering on the banks of Nile,
Beheld one day a Crocodile,
That with heart-wringing sighs and sobs,
With groans and cries and throes and throbs,
Made moan, until his rushing tears
Ran down the wrinkles of the sand.
'What ails thee, Monster?' made demand
The Sprite, 'and why these million tears?'
'I weep, I shriek,' the other cries,
'To see the World's iniquities.'
'And I with you,' the Elf replies.
'The World,' resumed the Crocodile,
'Is full of Cruelty and Guile.'
'Except for you,' Puck said, 'it's vile.'
'Honour and Chivalry are dead;
The Soul of Pity vanished.'
'Save in yourself, Sir,' Robin said.
'How are the Righteous much abhor'd,
And silent still the Godly Word!'
'Not while you live,' the Sprite aver'd.
'My friend, I thank you,' said the Beast;
'I think you sympathise at least.
The world is evil—pray beware—
How fat you are, I do declare!
God grant us all some day remission—
I vow you're in a fine condition.
I think that all—I must say that
For a fairy you are very fat.
What unctuous food—excuse me, friend—
You fays must find in fairy land.
As I was saying, all is not—
Fie, what a toothache I have got!
See here, this molar. Pray look nearer,
And you shall see the bad place clearer.
Nay if you could but just creep in
And say which tooth the mischief's in—'
'No thank you, friend,' our Puck replied;
'I'll keep upon the outer side.
With many large soul'd folk I've met
I've found the stomach's larger yet;
And when the Righteous talk of Sin
Look to your pockets or your skin.'

The Virtuous Goat

Dedicated to Teachers

Upon a mountain lived of old
(So says the Saga that is wise)
An ancient Goat of portly size,
Well known for virtues manifold,
Who once to take the evening air
Reposed upon a meadow there,
With Wife and Children in a row;
And thus endeavour'd to bestow
On them (and all of us) advice
To make our conduct more precise
And lead at last to paradise.
'My dears be Good. All else forgot
Yours shall be still a happy lot.
Enough the Rule. Do not enquire
The How and Why of things—or higher.
Be Virtuous, and neglect the Schools;
For Wisdom was but made for fools.
Scorn still the shallow Mind that pries
In science, art, philosophies;
Essays the future to forecast,
Forsooth, by study of the past;
Maintains the laws should be (what treason!)
Compounded by the use of reason;
And will advise e'en men of note
To govern well by thinking o't;
Avers when honest people chatter
That he knows best who knows the matter;
And even go so far as state
Goats can by thinking mend their fate.
So hold this saw before your eyes,
Be Good and let who will be wise.'

Alas, with his own virtue blind,
He fail'd to mark the Wolf behind;
Who, as he seized and bore him off,
Distress'd him with this bitter scoff—
'With your high views I sympathise;
But better also to be Wise.'

The truth of Truth

Within a vast and gloomy Fane
There hung a Curtain to the floor,
Which fill'd with terror those who came
To wonder there or to adore;

For, as the Priest had often said,
Within the chamber dwelt in sooth
A breathing Horror, half divine,
Half demon, and whose name was Truth.

And none there were so doughty bold
As durst to lift the tapestry;
For it was death, he said, to peer
Upon the awful Mystery;

Until one day—oh dreadful hour—
Up jump'd a foolish hardy Youth,
Who cried, 'I care not if I die,
But I will have the truth of Truth.'

There came a Crowd to see the deed—
To hear him shriek within and fall;
But they were much astonish'd when
He found—why Nothing there at all;

Except indeed upon the floor
(Ill fortune take the prying sinner!)
A Pasty and a Pot of Beer
Which the poor Priest had got for dinner.

The Man, the Lion, and the Fly

Dedicated to Reformers

There was a Man to wisdom dead
Who took a mad thought in his head—
'A second Hercules I,' he said.
'Behold,' he cried, 'I will go forth
From east to west, from south to north,
And with this knotted bludgeon bash
The Things that Sting, and those that Gnash
Blood-dripping teeth, and Giants glum
So mighty that with finger and thumb
They pick and eat chance passengers.
And I will slay each thing that stirs
To grief of man and dole of beast,
Until the world from wrong released
Pronounce me Emperor at least.'

But as he spoke, upon the way
A casual Lion chanced to stray,
Just as on any other day;
And he, to measure of his thought
In ready deed inferior nought,
Sprang at him furious, and they fought.

Three hours they fought, until the sun
Ymounted in the vault begun
To make them wish that they had done.
'Friend,' quoth the Lion, 'or why foe
Upon my word I do not know—
If we fight more we melt, I trow.'
'A little grace,' the Man replied,
Wiping his brow, 'is not denied;
You'll have but little when you've died.'

So each beneath a tree disposed
Took ease. The languid Lion dozed.
The Man, who should have done likewise
(So says the Saga that is wise),
Was waked each time he sued repose
By a great Fly upon his nose.
First in the one ear then in t'other
The winged monster buzz'd with bother;
The twitching tender nostrils tried,
The corners of the lips beside;
From lip to eyelid leapt with fuss,
Like old dame in an omnibus;
Delighted vastly to have met
So great a store of unctuous sweat.
At last to desperation driven
The Man accursed the Fly to Heaven,
And with his bludgeon great assay'd
To stay the small annoying raid.

Orpheus and the Busy Ones

Dedicated to the Public

Orpheus, the Stygian current cross'd,
When Hell stood still to hear him sing,
Torn from Eurydice twice lost
(Almost by music saved e'er lost)
Over the world went wandering.
One day, sate on a mountain slope,
Weary and sick for want of hope,
(Or rather, shall we term it, dead,
Since life is gone when hope is sped),
He twang'd his lyre; till song sublime
Out of the ashes of his prime
And fire of grief like Phoenix sprang;
And all the startled hillside rang.
Aroused, the dew-engrossed Flowers
Turn'd to him all their maiden eyes;
And from the sweet forgotten bowers
Flew forth a thousand Butterflies.
The Trees forgot their roots. Beneath,
The noisy Crickets of the heath
Rub'd each his forehead with amaze
To hear one sing such heavenly lays.
Under her stone the lumpy Toad
Peer'd forth; even the solid sod
Grew peopled with emerging Worms—
Such power hath Music on all forms.
Above, the pinched Pard amort
(She had three cublings in a den)
Forgot her hunger, and in short
Reposed herself to listen then,
Upon her furry paws her chin;
And from her vantage watch'd the Poet,
Delighted, but enraged to know it,
While all her spotted sleek of skin
Heaved with the pleasure she took in.
Not only this, but shall I say 't,
The very Hills began debate
Whether, to hear the singing clearer,
They should not move a little nearer.

Only, the Bard, to these strange ways
Accustom'd, noted with amaze
A herd of Hogs that near him fed,
Which might for all he sang be dead.
He ceased his song and tried the scale
To find out where his voice might fail;
His lyre divine descanted soon
To see the strings were all in tune;
Till satisfied that these were right,
And at those Hogs astonish'd quite
That they not to his conquering lyre,

Which all things else did so admire,
Gave heed, but routed in the rye
As tho' he had not been close by,
He ask'd of them the reason why.
'Good friend,' a Bacon old replied,
'We have too much to do beside;
The roots are many, the field is wide.
Should we neglect this plenteousness
We should be wrong, you must confess—
The gods some day might give us less.
Our girth is great; the fodder free;
This field of food must finished be.
That time is short you'll not deny.
We eat but little ere we die.'

The Poet and the Penman

All night had browsed the Pinion'd Steed
Upon that lush and level mead
That swathes Parnassos' feet;
Till, when the pranksome Morning Star
To van of Day's slow-driven car
Came piping past the eastern bar,
A Poet him did greet.

'Your back, my Pegasos,' he cried,
'Shall win me to the tiers espied
Of yonder shelfed hill,
Where all the Great are, I opine,
And on the last proud peak divine
Apollo and the Earnest Nine
At songs symphonic still.'

Tomes had the Poet, rolls and wraps,
Pens at his ears, and scribbled scraps,
And so essay'd the mounting—
'Stand still, O Steed, and I will climb,
Tho' weighted here with pounds of rhyme,
If you will only give me time,
Who'd been on stirrups counting.'

The Steed stood still; the thing was done;
He slid, slip'd and shuffled on,
And stay'd to pen his deeds:
When now the Monster's patience wears;
He lowers his head, his haunches rears;
And flying past the Stallion's ears
The Poet measures weeds.

Three times attempting, three times foil'd,
The Bard beheld his breeches soil'd;
And on his knees the mashed green
Gave an arch proof of what had been;
And winds like gamboling babes unseen
Made all his errant sheets revolve.
For now the Morning 'gan to solve
The long-strewn sands of heav'nly cloud;
And that fair Mountain noble brow'd,
In snowy silv'ry laces dight
Shone like a bride, against the night
Unveil'd, with many-pointed light.
And lo half seen thro' level mist
A Critic rode with saucy wrist,
Plump, smug and smooth and portly, dress'd
In corduroys and velvet vest;
Who clip'd at ease an ambling cob
With dappled nose and ears alob;
While all around a barking brood
Of puppies nuzzled in the rood.

'He who to climb has climbing blood
Must fear no fall in marish mud;
And he who phantoms fain would ride
May sometimes sit the ground,' he cried.

At this his thighs the Poet slam'd
And papers in his pocket ram'd;
'Be off,' he said, 'or else be damn'd.'
'You lose your time,' resumed the Man,
Whose oozing eyes with mirth o'erran;
'You waste your time about that Brute
Whom, if 'twere mine, egad I'd shoot,
So gaunt and gall'd a hack is he.
But take example now from me,
Who riding in this airy plight
For breakfast get an appetite;
And sitting here (I am so sly)
With this my pocket-sextant I
Take altitude of those on high.'
'Pedant avaunt!' the Poet cries,
And mounting shoots towards the skies
An angry palm—'Come not anear!
I, as toward the marineer
The welcome star from beacon'd brows
Of headland, when the Northern blows
His scurrilous spitting spray in air
And lobbing billows blotch the Bear,
Appears, so shall appear and shine
Thro' streaming rain and hissing brine
To cheer the coming better blood;
And shall be fire when thou art mud!'

'Blind is the goose that play'd the geier
And tried to see the white sun nigher!—
He flapping lies; so shall you lie
And grovel as you think to fly!'
The other cries; whose Nag amazed,
Viewing the winged Stallion, gazed,
Shook out her tail and with a snort,
Approaching in plebeian sort,
Paw'd archly at him. He with scorn
And having too long mildly borne,
Rear'd, spread his wings, and buck'd and neigh'd.
She with the monstrous tone affray'd
Shot forth her rider like a ball;
Who in the mid-air, ere his fall,
The like-projected Poet met.

As when two Suns in furious set
Together dash with whirl and wind,
Their shrieking planets drawn behind;
Or two great Blacks with blinding rage,
Each dragging his black wife, engage,
And clash their pates upon the green

(The fleas being heard to crack between),
The Critic so and Bard pell mell
Fighting concuss'd and fighting fell;
And puppies tug'd their tatters.
Bruises for breakfast got the one;
Black eyes the other, and of Fame none.
They fought it out, and when they'd done
Went home as rough as ratters.

The Piteous Ewe

Dedicated to Kings

King Lion yawning at his gates
On deep-empiled mosses, when
The sunset gilt the underwood,
Awaking claw'd in idle mood
The frighten'd dead leaves of his den,
Content; when lo (the Rune relates)
A tiny piercing note was heard.
It was the Mouse (the Rune aver'd)
Who saved the Sov'reign's honour when
The hunters mesh'd him in the glen.
For that admitted now to cheep
Before the Audience half asleep,
She introduced a weeping Sheep.

'Sire,' said the Mouse, 'with much ado
Thro' wicked guards I bring to you
This much wrong'd creature to implore
Justice against the evil doer.'
At this, no rhetorician,
The shiv'ring Mutton then began
Of how three lovely Lambkins lost
The Wolf had taken to his den,
Deep-delved in a dreadful glen—
And ah! to her the bitter cost!
One from her side when day was dead
The monster stole. Another took
At gambol in the glassing brook.
The third, the Mother's last delight,
When now the many-lamped Night
No more, with mystic moon aloft,
Gave shudd'ring shadows to the flowers
And stars of wan irradiance soft
To every dewdrop; but the hours
Of Dawn and Daybreak, Sister Hours,
Twin Lovelinesses, lit the world,
And the confident buds unfurl'd,
He seized with mangling tushes, till
The innocent flower-eyes of the wood,
That wont with early dew to fill,
Grew piteous-wet with tears of blood;
The mother helpless. So he rush'd
With shaggy flanks, and snarling gnash'd
The gripping teeth that gleam'd between
His cruel red lips scarcely seen,
While springing branches clash'd behind,
And left her weeping to the wind.

'Ho!' roar'd the Monarch, 'call the Court!
With this black ruffian I'll be short.
How often have I giv'n command

The young shall not be taken'—and
His thunder rang across the land,
Until the forest flowers for fear
Shut up their petals not to hear.

Then his gay Herald, the Macaw,
Screams out the hest from hill to haugh,
And from a thousand delled dens
Run forth his frighten'd denizens,
To share the Council, or to know
What makes the Monarch bellow so.
And, as they gather, to and fro
He paces, and his red eyes flash
Enough to turn them all to ash.
Arranged before him in a row
They take their places, high and low.
The Wicked Wolf between his guards,
Two grave and stalwart Leopards,
Stands tip-toe, snarling, and repeating
It was not he who did the eating;
And, with his tail between his legs,
For justice, justice only, begs.
'You or another,' roar'd the King,
'I'll find the one who did the thing—
But first, Sir Premier, please reply
(A Constitutional Monarch I)
Why do you let my people die?'
At this, with deference, said the Bear,
'Twas not his fault—he was not there.
Still lab'ring in affairs of state
To make the kingdom good and great
(Altho' the wicked Opposition
Did ever thwart him in his mission),
A sleepless eye he always cast
Upon the future and the past
To frustrate—hard for anyone—
What the Last Government had done.
At present he'd in contemplation
Some mighty measures for the nation—
To bring the Butterflies to terms
By giving franchise to the Worms;
To teach the Gnats to carry logs;
To give self-government to Hogs
Because they had resolved to shirk,
With noble Scorn, ignoble Work;
To succour Wildcats, and to keep
The Wolves secure against the Sheep.
And here he thought he smelt a plot:
This trivial matter, was it not
A little juggle to discredit
This last great measure?—There, he'd said it.
But still his heart bled at the woe
Occasion'd by his Party's foe.

The plaintiff can no witness call,
And hers the only evidence,
Which, rightly sifted, has no sense.
For in the night she says he took
Her first, her second in the brook.
How could she see him in the dark?
And for the second, pray you mark,
Perhaps it was more likely drown'd.
As for the third, when she look'd round,
He'd gone: how did she know him then?
This is of fancy, not of ken.
Moreover, in th' alternative,
Sir Wolf can plead he could not live
Because the din the lambkins made
About him slumb'ring in the shade.
As for the much-bereaved Dame,
With whom I deeply sympathise—
Such sorrow wets my foolish eyes—
I fear she may be thought to blame
Because she troubled Majesty
Before she had instructed me
(Of course I ridicule the fee);
And I should be prepared, in short,
To hear it argued in the Court
Whether she did not bring the charge
In order merely to discharge
An ancient grudge against her foe—'
'Enough! and let the prisoner go!'
The Sov'reign said. 'And as for you,
Dishonest and malignant Ewe,
We do not order you to death
(Whate'er your conduct meriteth)
Only because it pleaseth us
To show we are magnanimous.'
(He was indeed much praised for that,
And more because the Sheep was fat).
'Break up the Court. Enough of worry,
It's time to dine, so let's be merry.'

With that they shifted in a hurry;
But in the scramble no one knew
(So says the Saga that is true)
What happen'd to the Piteous Ewe.

The Contest of Birds

Dedicated to all the Excellent

The Eagle which at Jove's right hand
Was wont to take imperial stand,
Proud of his perch, and with fond beak
The Thund'rer's fondling finger tweak,
Or blinking in sage thought t' assume
Half sov'reignty and weigh the doom,
Was sick; for the World he sigh'd,
His Mountains and his Forests wide;
So true it is, not Jove's right hand
Is worth to us our Native Land,
And that the Little we have not
Can make the Much we have forgot.

Therefore to earth with arching vans,
Released a while, the sky he spans
In flight; sinks thro' the tempest; takes
The feather-fretting aid of wind;
And now, new born with pleasure, breaks
Upon a beauteous Vale confined.

Now it is said that on that day
All Birds that are had ceased their play,
And question'd, each with heat and brawl,
Which was the noblest of them all:
Who when they saw the Eagle stand
Amidst them (now unused to stand
Upon the dull, flat, level earth)
Burst into loud contemptuous mirth.
'It seems,' exclaimed a civil Crow,
'You come here, friend, quite apropos.
For we discuss'd the noblest here,
And you are truly the most queer.
Your wings and tail, excuse me friend,
Seem too long for your other end.
Pray change your—if I may suggest—
Your tailor and be better dress'd.
Look at myself how neat I go,
And in the latest fashion too.'
'Or were your plumes, my friend, more bright
We could excuse your homely plight,'
The Peacock said: 'pray just admire
My plumes of azure, gold and fire.
My dames about me ever move
In wonder, and confess their love.
Whene'er I show myself,' said he,
'The Gods look down from Heaven to see.'
'Base virtues of the body!' cried
The Parrot. 'Is the soul denied?
Know friend that beauteous words are worth
More than these qualities of earth.

How wise I am admire, and know
It is by study I am so.
Still lost in contemplation I
Quite understand the earth and sky;
Can talk of wonders without end,
More e'en than I can comprehend;
Or say the wisest words, I ween,
Although I don't know what they mean.'
'Pshaw!' said the Vulture, 'fair or wise,
You shall some day become my prize.
Your merits shall be mine, 'od shake 'em,
Whenever I may choose to take 'em;
And when I have digested you
Your virtues shall become mine too.
As for our friend the new arrival,
If he contend to be my rival,
Let's fight it out in heaven's name!
'What base arbitrement! for shame!'
Exclaimed the mincing Nightingale.
'If he aspire let him prevail
Against me in the test of song
Where he who triumphs is most strong.'
'Beware of pride,' the Dodo said;
'I see that all of you are led
Astray by arrogance. For me,
I glory in humility.
I am so humble I confess
My utter wicked worthlessness.
I say with tears'—and here he blows
The part that should have been his nose—
'I say with tears I dote upon
Being beaten, bruised and trampled on.
I love to be reminded still
Of all my faults and treated ill.
So 'tis, I think, confess'd by all
My virtue's not equivocal.'
'To me,' the lofty Stork aver'd,
'This seems a most plebeian bird.
With nails so long and legs so short,
He cannot be of noble sort;
Tho' in his nose, I must confess,
I see some sign of gentleness.
I cannot really stoop so far
(Whom all the Frogs and Mice in war
Already have confess'd their king)
As rival this uncrowned thing.
My subjects would at once repine
Nor let me eat 'em, I opine,
As all contented subjects should,
Did I disgrace my royal blood.'

Which heard, the fiery Eagle's eyes
With noble anger and surprise
Flash'd out. 'Still dear what is most cheap

Ye little woodland creatures keep,
He cried; and flung aloft his head,
Gazed up to heaven, his pinions spread
(The wind of which made timorous stir
Among the things that round him were)
And leaping on the air begun
Ascent, and vanish'd in the sun.

Alastor

'Tis said that a noble Youth of old
Was to his native village lost
And to his home and aged sire;
For he had wander'd (it is told)
Where, pinnacled in eternal Frost,
Apollo leads his awful Choir.

Awful, for nought of human warms
The agony of Their Song sublime,
Which like the breath of Ice is given,
Ascending in vapour from all forms,
Where Gods in clear alternate chime
Reveal Their mystery-thoughts to Heaven.

Nor in those regions of windless Cold
Is fiery the Sun tho' fierce in light;
But frozen-pale the numbed Moon
Wanders along the ridges that fold
Enormous Peaks, what time the Night
Rivals with all her stars the Noon.

For there, not dimly as here, the Stars,
But globed and azure and crimson tinct,
Climb up the windless wastes of Snow,
Gold-footed, or thro' the long-drawn bars
Of mountain Mist with eyes unblink'd
And scorn, gaze down on the world below;

Or high on the topmost Peak and end
Of ranges stand with sudden blaze,
Like Angels born in spontaneous birth;
Or wrap themselves in flame and descend
Between black foreheads of Rock in haze,
Slowly like grieved gods to earth.

And there for ever the patient Wind
Rakes up the crystals of dry Snow,
And mourns for ever her work undone;
And there for ever, like Titans blind
Their countenance lifting to Heaven's glow,
The sightless Mountains yearn for the Sun.

There nightly the numbed Eagle quells
(Full-feathered to his feet of horn)
His swooning eye, his eyrie won,
And slumbers, frozen by frosty spells
Fast to the pinnacle; but at Morn
Unfettered, leaps toward the Sun.

He heard, he saw. Not to the air

Dared breathe a breath; but with his sight
Wreak'd on Immortals mortal wrong,
And dared to see them as they were—
The black Peaks blacken'd in Their light,
The white Stars flashing with Their song.

So fled. But when revealing Morn
Show'd him descended, Giant grown,
Men ant-like, petty, mean and weak,
He rush'd returning. Then in scorn
Th' Immortals smote him to a Stone
That aches for ever on the Peak.

Ocean and the Rock

The Rock. Cease, O rude and raging Sea,
Thus to waste thy war on me.
Hast thou not enough assail'd
All these ages, Fool, and fail'd?

The Ocean. Gaunt and ghastly Skeleton,
Remnant of a time that's gone,
Tott'ring in thy last decay
Durst thou still to darken day?

The Rock. Empty Brawler brawl no more;
Cease to waste thy watery war
On my bastion'd Bases broad,
Sanctified by Time and God.

The Ocean. Thou that beëst but to be,
Scornest thou my Energy?
Not much longer lasts the strife.
I am Labour, I am Life.

The Rock. Roar then, roar, and vent thy Surge;
Thou not now shalt drone my dirge.
Dost imagine to dismay
This my iron breast with Spray?

The Ocean. Relic of primaeval slime,
I shall whelm thee in my time.
Changeless thou dost ever die;
Changing but immortal, I.

Death and Love

Death, pacing between a ghastly Moon
Dying low down on the western Hills
And the Star, bright usher of the Morn,
The clear Dawn cryophor,

Trod frosty footprints in the dew
Upon a ridge; and beholding there
A lovely Lady lain below
His tingling Arrow sped—

A Barb with a burning icicle tip'd,
Torn from the frore beard of the Northern Star
That stares on the shuddering pyramids
Of crumbling Arctic ice.

With his Arrow he smote her and cried,
 'Come not here!
Not here will I bear thee. This is My world—
The world of Death where Beauty dies,
And I, I Death am god.'

She sobbing arose, and sobbing sank;
And would have perish'd, but Love that way
Fell like a flame, and supported her
And warm'd her dying hands;

And said to him, 'Fool, the touch of thy barb
Is poison that I can poison with Love;
For as thou art Death unto all the world,
Even so am I Death to thee.'

Calypso to Ulysses

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Go, go from me sorrowful Wanderer—
Go, go from me, tho' no Man dearer
Than thou art. The Stars will revisit me,
And Thou not forget me O Ocean.

Alone here, alone in my Solitude
I'll sit by the Ocean for ever,
And mourn for the Hero so lost to me—
So loved by me, Lost, and no omen.

Monotonous Waters shall sing to me;
Shall sigh to me, sing of my Hero.
Immortal like me is my Misery,
And when will my Sorrow grow older.

Immortal like me is my Love for thee;
But mortal like thee, alas, thine is.
I have no enchantment to quicken thee,
Nor thou to console me with Death.

The Star and the Sun

In Darkness and pacing the thunder-beat Shore
By many Waves,
No sound being near to me there but the hoarse
Cicala's cry,
While that unseen Sword, the Zodiacal Light,
Falchion of Dawn,
Made clear all the Orient and wanner the Silvery Stars,

I heard the fine flute of the Fast Fading Fire,
The Morning Star,
Pipe thus to the Glimmering Glories of Night,
And sing, 'O World,
If I even leave thee then Who can remain?'
But from the Deep
The Thundering Sun upsprang, and replied, 'Even I.'

The Poet's Retirement

Down from that blithe Idalian Hill
Where Violets drink of dew their fill,
And wading thro' wet eastern Flowers
With wash'd feet Eos and the Hours
Come laughing down, I laughing came.

The Morn had now her threads of flame
Inlaid to Earth's green tapestries,
Gold-inwoven; and to their knees
In chilly baths of thridding rills
At tremble stood luce Daffodils;
When lo I mark'd toward me move
Those Maidens Three whom poets love.
'O whither away, rash Youth,' they cried,
'Singing thro' daffodils dost thou stride?'
'Ladies, I wander for a while'—
And here I duck'd and doff'd in style—
'I wander by Bourn, I wander by Byre,
By Cape and Cote and Castle Spire,
And sometime stick in puddled Mire;
Or where the shrieking moon-drawn Tides
Drench dripping jags on Mountain sides;
Or twanging strings sound gay reprieve
To smoky Villages at eve,
The while toward their wattled home
The baaing Sheep do go, I roam,
And when the paddock'd Ass careers
Mirthful, with high prick'd tail and ears.
And I have left behind me there
My Hippocrate teaching the air;
And Learning prim; and Venus too
Now whipping Cupid with her shoe.'
Then, of those slipper'd Maidens, She
Robed in flush rose red answer'd me,
Who brightly gazing with mild look
Held still a finger-parted book.
'Come then,' she cried, 'with me and dwell
In my Valley of Asphodel,
Which is a land of laughing rills
And hung about with dazzling hills,
Where oft the Swain with garter'd legs
Piping for love in music begs
Nor Thisbe turns her petulant ear.
There large-eyed Plato thou may'st here
Persuade, or, if not idly awed,
Masters a Master's theme applaud.
Or if the Thunder more invite
Than silver-threaded rain's delight
And sloping seats of knolled moss,
Come where some thwarted Torrent toss
Thro' his black gorges, mad to break
The shining levels of the Lake.

Or, if engross'd with human Fate,
On ranged boards mark Love and Hate
Egg on to midnight-living crime,
And glaring Horrors of dead time
Creep in behind. Or, restive still,
Unlock'd from Hell soar Heaven's hill
Thro' sun-outstaring Cherubim.'

'Not so,' cried one, a Virgin slim,
Plumed, wrap'd and robed in such gold-green
As thro' woods sunset-dazed is seen,
Who half upon her dinted breast
Apollo sculpt in little press'd.
'Come to my House of all delights,
Whose marble Stairs with merged flights
Are shallow'd in the viewless Lake;
Whose overpeering Turrets take
The peep of Dawn, or flashing turn
To Eve departing golden scorn.
There fairy-fluted pillars soar
To cloudy Roofs of limned lore,
And Walls are window'd with rare scapes
And rich designs: of blazon'd Capes
Pawing the sunset-burnish'd flood;
Of rib-railed reaches of Solitude;
Of rounded World and globed Skies,
And Stars between, and faint Moonrise;
Of black Tarns set mid mountain peaks
And spouting silver-foamed leaks;
Of Gods reclined, and Maids who move,
Unlidding lustrous eyes of love;
Of War; of Wisdom with a skull.
And in the high aisles Fountains full
Disperse a stream of coolness there
For frosted fern and maidenhair,
And sculptured beauty hold the way.
So thither go with me to-day.'

Then She who all in purple dight,
Brow-starr'd with orb'd ruby light,
Lifted from under rich deep locks
Looks wrapt on Heaven, to earthly shocks
Descending, thus replied: 'Not these
Flat hapless lands of Towers and Trees
May past the morn your spirit please.
But to some cold Crag, doffing drifts,
His cleared brow that Heavenward lifts,
And turns beneath the mistless Stars,
Come. There no dew distilled mars
The many hued Sidereal blaze,
And mooned Venus in white rage
Stares down the Dawn. Come; for that Glow
There solves to unpolluted flow
The crumbling crystals of the Snow;

And windworn Cataracts wavering plunge
To lightless pine-valleys. Come, O come!
Lest those faint Harmonies be unheard
Which, as from silver and gold strings stir'd
By the light fingers of the Wind,
Run from the poised orbs swiftly spin'd.'
She ceased, and with her finger tip
Made sound the lyre upon her hip,
And would have sung; but I replied,
'To be unchosen is descried;
And we shall be made mad in Heaven
By need of choice of good things given.
I love all Three so passing well
Which I love best I cannot tell.
Alas!'—I cried, but checked the word,
For close behind a footstep heard
Compel'd me turn; when lo that Maid,
Dress'd in black velvet, who bewray'd
Plump Popes and Pastors once to fear,
Came up and took me by the ear.
'Is this the way,' she cried, 'you waste
Time should be spent in huddling haste
To harry Ignorance to her den,
Or pink fat Folly with the pen?
Small unobserved things to use,
Each with its little mite of news,
To build that sheer hypothesis
Whose base on righteous Reason is,
Whose point among the Stars. For shame!
Enough the seeming-serious game.
But search the Depths; and for thy meed,
A place among the men indeed.'

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[The end of *Fables* by Ronald Ross]