



# **Fables and Fabulists: Ancient and Modern by Thomas Newbigging**

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FABLES AND FABULISTS: ANCIENT AND MODERN. BY THOMAS NEWBIGGING,

Author of 'The History of the Forest of Rossendale,' 'Old Gamul,' etc.

'I shall tell you

A pretty tale: it may be you have heard it;

But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture

To stale't a little more.'

Shakespeare: Coriolanus.

'He sat among the woods; he heard

The sylvan merriment; he saw

The pranks of butterfly and bird,

The humours of the ape, the daw.

'And in the lion or the frog—

In all the life of moor and fen,

In ass and peacock, stork and log,

He read similitudes of men.'

Andrew Lang.

'The fables which appeal to our higher moral sympathies may sometimes do as much for us as the truths of science.'

Mrs. Jameson.

'The years of infancy constitute, in the memory of each of us, the fabulous season of existence; just as in the memory of nations, the fabulous period was the period of their infancy.'

—Giacomo Leopardi.

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## FABLES AND FABULISTS

### CHAPTER I. DEFINITION OF FABLE.

'Read my little fable,  
He that runs may read.'

Tennyson: The Flower.

'As clear as a whistle.'

Byron: The Astrologer.

The term 'fable' is used in two senses, with two distinctive meanings.

First, as *fabulæ*, it is employed to denote the myths or fictions which, by the aid of imagination and superstition, have clouded, or have become blended with, the history of the remote past. Such are the stories related of Scandinavian and Grecian heroes and gods; beings, some of whom doubtless had an actual human existence, and were wise and valiant and powerful, or the reverse, in their day, but around whose names and persons have clustered all the marvellous legends that are to be found in mythological lore. The better name for these is 'romance.'

Secondly, as *fabellæ*, it is used to signify a special branch of literature, in which the imagination has full play, altogether unassisted by superstition in any shape or form. The fabulist confers the powers or gifts of reason and speech on the humbler subjects over whom he exercises sway, and so has ample scope for his imaginative faculty; but there is no attempt on his part at any serious make-believe in his inventions. On the contrary, there is a tacit understanding between him and his hearers and readers, that what he narrates is only true in the sense of its application to corresponding circumstances in human life and conduct.

It is with fable as understood in this latter sense that we propose to deal.

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