

A NEW ÆSOP.

BY WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD.

Though Æsop, sage narrator, covered much,
Some points on this our life he failed to touch.

THE BEAR AND THE OWL.

A famished Bear, whose foot was clenched
Within a murderous engine, wrenched
And bounced about in fright and pain
Around the tree that held the chain,
Emitting many a hideous howl.
His state was noticed by an Owl,
Who, perched above him fat and free,
Philosophized from out the tree:
"Of what avail this fuss and noise?—
The thing you need, my Bear, is poise."

Moral.

Such counsels are most sage, we know—
But often how malapropos!

THE BALD MAN AND THE BEE.

A Bald Man fished upon a bank:
The air was hot; the ground was dank;
No fish would bite; and large supplies
Of woodticks, skeeters, fleas, and flies,
In yonder marsh and meadow bred,
Crawled unmolested o'er his head,
With many a tickle, sting and itch.
He wouldn't budge, he wouldn't twitch;
But, trusting in the universe,

He fished away from bad to worse.
 At length it chanced a vicious Bee
 From out the thicket in his rear
 Sped forth with much alacrity
 And pierced him with his little spear—
 Just where his cowlick used to be.
 The Bald Man slowly raised his hand:
 "Now that's enough, now that's enough—
 For *this*, I'd have you understand
 (He sweeps his pate), you'll *all* get off."

Moral.

Though one may be an optimist,
 A Stoic, Christian Scientist,
 And fish or fiddle with assurance,
 There is a limit to endurance.

THE LION, THE LIONESS, AND HER KINSFOLK

A Lion had a Lioness
 That got to ailing more or less.
 He walked with her in woodland air,
 He found a more salubrious lair,
 He foraged round for little lambs
 And cooked their juiciest, tenderest hams,
 He washed the plates and set on shelf,
 And put the cubs to bed himself.
 But just as she again was cheered,
 Her mother, sisters, aunts appeared—
 With twenty different bottles, pills,
 And powders, naming twenty ills,
 Until the creature, weak and wan,
 From out this foolish world was gone.

Moral.

O Busy-Bodies at the door,
 How much you have to answer for!

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE OWL.

A Nightingale, in song excelling all,
 And Owl, whose gifts were astronomical,

Sat on the self-same night on self-same wall,
 And watched the self-same moon, and in their throats
 Fashioned from self-same air their sundry notes,
 Yet swapped no courtesies nor anecdotes,
 Each wishing other ruined, ripped, and rent.

Moral.

Children, mens' hates are caused to large extent
 By such diversities of temperament.

THE CROWS AND THE EAR OF CORN.

Three Crows, whose nests were in a single tree,
 Long dwelt together in felicity,
 Exchanging visits, swapping odds and ends
 Of jest and fancy, as befitting friends:
 Till one fine eve a farmer passed beneath
 And dropped an ear of corn upon the heath
 From out his sack, which spied by all at once,
 All three together did upon it pounce:
 And not content with taking each a third,
 Each Crow most avariciously averred
 The whole was his, as seen by him the first.

Moral.

O cruel lust of worldly goods accurst,
 How many bonds of friendship hast thou burst!

THE MAN AND THE HEN AND THE OSTRICH EGG.

A Man with jerk and crawl and stoop
 Emerged from out a chicken coop,
 And as he rose, a child might see
 That a distracted man was he.
 It wasn't that his face was grimy,
 It wasn't that his knees were slimy,
 It wasn't even his ruffled hair
 That gave him this distracted air.
 It was the terror in his eyes,
 His forehead knit in wild surprise,
 It was the frenzy in his whoop
 When rising from the chicken coop.

He strode a rod and back again,
 He strode around from leg to leg—
 His left arm held a cackling Hen,
 His right a monstrous Ostrich Egg.
 The circumstance was rather strange—
 'Twould almost any man derange.
 But rallying his nerves a bit,
 He halted to consider it.
 With feet akimbo, shock abated,
 'Twas thus he ratiocinated:
 "I won't believe it after all;
 It surely isn't nat-ur-al."

Moral I.

Don't trust too much, dear child, to senses,
 However strong the evidences.

Moral II.

A timely grasp on nature's laws
 May help us to discover flaws
 In many a theory, many a cause.

Moral III.

Undue excitement we may end
 By reason, man's supernal friend.

Moral II'.

When one's belief is premature,
 Reflection is the only cure.

THE TWO DOGS AND THE PEACEFUL MAN.

One day a bull-dog and his wife
 Fell to it in domestic strife
 And gave some lively exhibitions
 Of woeful marital conditions.
 It chanced the Peaceful Man did sally
 That moment down along the alley
 And in the interests of remating
 Began at once expostulating;

And getting each one by the scruff,
 The Peaceful Man was rather gruff.
 The Dogs, at this intrusion nettled,
 Forthwith their differences settled,
 A common purpose now controlling.
 The Peaceful Man went raving, rolling—
 With little heart to dilly-dally,
 And left two coat-tails in the alley.
 (And when one's robbed of raiment thusly
 He runneth rather ludi-crous-ly.)

Moral.

Avoid domestic interference,
 For it may ruin your appearance.

THE DOG AND THE KETTLE.

A Kettle, swinging on a crane,
 Sang a most contented strain,
 And puffed, as if with self-esteem,
 From out its nozzle jets of steam.
 A Dog, who dozed upon the settle,
 Was irritated by the Kettle;
 With thoughtless bounce he clasped its nose
 Between his teeth, as if to close
 At once its singing and existence.
 The Kettle offered no resistance.—
 Continuing unperturbed at ease
 The natural functions of its being:
 The Dog, however, turns and flees,
 As if all life's activities
 Concentrated in the act of fleeing;
 And out along the village ditches
 In agonies he rolls and pitches,
 Imbedding now and then his face
 In some soft cooling oózy place.

Moral.

Before expressing too directly
 Whate'er your hate of this or that is,
 Examine rather circumspectly
 The nature of the apparatus.

THE MAN AND THE SQUIRRELS.

A queer suburban Gentleman
 Was strolling with a palm-leaf fan,
 With philosophic step and slow,
 And pate a-nodding to and fro,
 Across the lawn that sloped you know
 Around his leafy bungalow.
 He marked the skipping Squirrels pause
 Upon their haunches with their paws
 Against their bosoms, each with head
 Atilt and bowed. And then he said,
 "I think I can explain the cause.
 All men perceive how great I am,
 And even the Squirrels here salam;
 And could they speak, they wouldn't fail
 To add, 'O gracious Master, hail.'" •
 Whereat he tossed unto the dumb
 A largesse of a nut and crumb.

Moral I.

O blest is he who can construe
 Whatever other people do,
 To suit his pride and point of view.

Moral II.

And blest is he whose self-conceit
 Yet gives the hungry things to eat.

THE TOAD.

One glittering morning after rain,
 From crevice in the wall, again
 Into the middle of the road
 There pops and hops a hungry Toad.
 He snappeth, gulpeth worm on worm,
 And feels them tickle as they squirm
 Within his pannch, until its size
 (The while he squats with blinking eyes)
 Bulges out his knees and thighs.
 An ass comes on with sturdy stride:

The Toad he thinks to move aside ;
 Yet each attempt at hop and spring
 But sets his frame aquivering—
 He cannot budge. . . . And with a thud
 The hoof imprints him on the mud.

Moral.

Whether your fare be worms or mutton,
 O Toad or Man, don't be a glutton.

THE PARROT.

A Parrot, shipped across the sea
 From Africa when young was he,
 Became a lonely widow's pet.
 The cage was by the window set ;
 And in the sun the passers-by
 Could see the opal-jeweled eye,
 The scarlet tail, the ebon beak
 Thick-set against a whitish cheek,
 And that magnificence of gray
 On wing and back and breast, and they
 Remarked, "It is a splendid dream,
 A most successful color scheme.
 O *Psittacus erithacus*,
 We're glad to have you here with us."
 The widow, both from sense of duty
 And natural pride, baptized him "Beauty."
 I will not dwell on Beauty's feats:
 The peanuts how he cracks and eats,
 A-perch and holding in his claw,
 Then gargling them into his maw
 With lifted head, beside the cup,
 The widow's always filling up—
 The way he waddles round the floor
 When mistress opes his cage's door—
 The words he speaks, so shrill and mystic,
 And preternatur'ly linguistic—
 I will not mention, for my aim
 Is to expound his fateful name.
 Ere many moons, there came o'er him
 An itching in his every limb—

But whether caused by frequent bites
 Of horrid little parasites,
 Or by the harsh New England climate
 (That ruins many a lusty Primate,
 And hence might possibly nonplus
 A tender, an oviparous,
 A tropic bird), or by some particles
 In wretchedly digested articles,
 We have slight reason to suspect.
 At any rate, he clawed and pecked
 With all his passion, intellect,
 And sinews of his bill and foot,
 Upon his feathers to the root.
 Now Beauty's tail was but a stump
 That ill-concealed a tragic rump,
 Now Beauty's wing-bones both were bare,
 And ghastly purple was the skin
 That held his bulging gullet in,
 And in his eye a vacant stare;
 And, as his remnants there he sunned,
 Men saw that he was moribund.

Moral.

Don't call your bird or offspring by
 A name his future may belie.

THE CORPUSCLE AND THE PHAGOCYTE AND THE STREPTOCOCCUS.

A Corpuscle began to fight
 Absurdly with a Phagocyte:
 "Indeed," he said, "I'm round and red,
 And keep a man from falling dead.
 I give him brains and nerve and muscle,"
 Remarked the little red Corpuscle.
 The Phagocyte: "And I am white,
 And but for me you'd perish quite;
 I go afloat round the serum,
 And when I spy the bugs I qucer 'em;
 You owe your work, your freedom, joy
 To me, the Phagocyte, my boy."
 But then a stalwart Streptococcus—

Whose sterner functions needn't shock us—
 Seeing his foe was occupied
 With learned questions on the side,
 Swooped down and bit him till he died.
 And then the red Corpuscule cried:
 "Nature appoints, as well she should,
 To each his task—and each is good;
 Even though the Streptococcus be
 At last the best of all the three."

Moral.

The wretched Corpuscule has stated
 The moral—which, if syndicated
 And widely pondered, might prevent
 Our present social discontent.

THE GEESE OF ATHABASCA.

Candidus anser.—Lucretius, IV, 681.

Somewhat southward from Alaska,
 Lie the moors of Athabasca;
 And in these bleak uncouth dominions—
 So far detached from our opinions
 That none can ever misconstrue
 The tale I want to tell to you—
 There gathered at the equinox
 Some eager migratory flocks
 Of ganders, geese, and goslings—and
 The *ganders* had the upper hand,
 Debating with a gaping mouth
 On whom to choose to lead them south.
 In spite of casual disgressing
 They thought the matter was progressing,
 When all the *geese* began to flap
 With wings, and cackle too, and rap
 With bills on sundry sticks and stocks
 And crane their necks around the flocks.
 Their actions, though surprising, new,
 (Bizarre at times it may be, too),
 Betrayed such aim and fervor, surely
 One shouldn't chide them prematurely,
 And, fiery hot as salamanders,

They much impressed the puzzled ganders,
 Who paused and pondered in their pates.
 What their vociferating mates
 Intended by these frantic states.
 "Give *us*," they cry, "a chance to say
 Who 'tis shall guide us on our way:
 Give *us*," they cry, "a voice, a voice—
 Who shares the *risk*, should share the *choice*."
 And now and then from some old goose
 More deft, it seems, in logic's use,
 The ganders heard reflections meant
 To ridicule their government,
 As antiquated precedent,
 And divers observations tending
 To show how much it needed mending—
 The *more*, since geese *were* different.
 One says: "Our judgment lacks in poise,
 And all we do is make a noise?—
 But can't we tell as well as you
 Where trees are green and skies are blue?"
 Another: "You, sirs, should elect,
 Since 'tis your business to protect?—
 Define protection, . . . more than skill
 In thrusting out an angry bill
 With anserine intent to kill.
 Our *wings* are weapons, sirs, as good—
 When clasped around the little brood."
 Another: "Yes, the goslings, goslings!—
 Now that's a point that's full of puzzlings
 For these our ganders—Hear my queries!—
 Have we no business with the dearies?—
 Have *we* no right at all to say
 Who's fit to lead *them* on the way?"
 And then a younger goose, an active
 And in her person most attractive,
 Remarked with widely parted lips
 That put her eyeballs in eclipse:
 "We wouldn't be so charming,—pooh!—
 If we should choose along with you?
 You wouldn't like to see us snuffle,
 And wrangle round—O piffle, piffle:
 The fact is, nature made us so

That nothing we might undergo
 Could take that *something* from us which
 Oft gives your heartstrings such a twitch.
 And furthermore, you'd better drop
 The sugar-plum and lollypop—
 That sort of argument won't please
 The intellectual type of geese."
 "The intellect, the intellect,"
 Another cries, "they don't suspect—
 And think the issue to confuse
 By queer domestic interviews
 About our *functions* and the aim—
 As if the privilege we claim
 Might shrink the size and number of
 The eggs we lay, the chicks we love."
 I do not note for special causes
 The interjections and applauses.
 "Give us," they cry again, "a voice,
 Who share the *risk* should share the *choicc*."
 And though some points might need apology,
 As shaky in their sociology,
That cry appealed to instincts, reason—
 So ganders yielded for the season.
 But whether it became a practice
 In future times, and what the fact is
 About the *scr* of guide and leader
 The muse conceals from bard and reader,
 Assuring only that they ne'er
 Had made a trip more safe and fair
 Down the continental air,
 From the moors of Athabasca,
 Somewhat southward of Alaska,
 From those bleak, uncouth dominions,
 So far detached from our opinions
 That none can *ever* misconstrue
 The tale I here have told to you.

THE DUCK AND THE NIGHTINGALE.

An ancient Duck, complacent, fat,
 Whose miserable habitat
 Had been the stagnant pool behind

The barnyard of Boeotian hind,—
 Save when she waddled by the fence
 Among the roosters and the hens,
 To snap with bony bill at corn
 Her owner scattered every morn,
 Or when within the crib she sate
 To hatch her eggs and meditate,—
 Began to make some slight pretense
 To wisdom and experience.
 She heard at dark a Nightingale
 At no great distance down the dale—
 The wingèd Nightingale who'd flown
 In every sky, in every zone,
 And sung while moon or morning star
 Descended over hills afar—
 And thus the Dame began to quack :
 "O Nightingale, you'll surely crack
 That voice of yours, unless your soul
 Can learn a little self-control ;
 Try settling down and doing good,
 And earn a sober livelihood."

Moral.

Conceited ignorance with ease
 Pronounces its banalities.

THE POODLE AND THE PENDULUM.

A Poodle, wistful-eyed and glum,
 Sate looking at a Pendulum,
 That with a steady tick and tock,
 Before the wall, beneath the clock,
 Swang back and forth its brazen disk.
 The Poodle gave his tail a whisk.
 A sudden thought had crossed his brain—
 "What once it did, it does again,
 Again, again, again, again."
 For you could scarce expect a Poodle
 And his fuzzy-wuzzy noodle
 Forsooth at once to comprehend
 The mechanism and the end.
 The Poodle's head, with both his eyes

And both his ears of goodly size,
 Began to nod from right to left,
 As if of every sense bereft,
 With a rhythmic motion mocking
 Both the ticking and the tocking.
 The Pendulum had first surprised him—
 But now 't had surely hypnotized him.
 With every tick and every nod
 (So odd, so odd, so odd, so odd)
 He gave a sudden little yelp;
 But no one came to hold or help—
 Or whistle, or provide a bone,
 Or snap a finger, throw a stone,
 Or do a thing upon the lists
 Prescribed by psycho-therapists,
 When Poodles or when Men get notions
 From neurasthenical emotions.
 And, since no Poodle can sustain
 Existence on this mortal plain
 Long by only yelps and nods,
 He passed unto the Poodle-gods.
 The Pendulum observed his jerk,
 But kept unflustered at its work.

Moral.

Don't get to looking at devices
 That tend to cause a mental crisis.

THE BUG AND THE LION.

A Bug—I will not state the kind,
 But one for horrid things designed—
 With yellow stripes across the coat,
 And spots of red around his throat,
 And beady eyes and two antennæ,
 And jointed legs, O many, many,
 And little suckers on each foot
 To help himself in staying put,
 And irritating little buzz—
 A certain Bug, I say, there was.
 And though an entomologist
 Might very angrily insist

That such a Bug could not exist,
 There's no occasion here to doubt it,
 If you don't stop to talk about it.
 This certain Bug, whose weight indeed
 Was equal to an apple-seed,
 Procured a while as dupe and slave
 A tawny Lion, large and brave.
 And though some foolish naturalist
 Declare such things could not exist,
 This only shows what slight reliance
 Can now be had in men of science,
 The specialists who squint and grope
 With tweezers and with microscope.
 The Bug demanded on a day
 The Lion help him take away
 A withered yellow blade of grass
 That scratched his side as he did pass
 From out his cell when rose the sun.
 The Lion put his paw upon
 The blade, and though he did as well
 As any Lion in his place,
 He crushed the wretched sun-baked cell,
 And all the store of food and eggs.
 He makes a frightened rueful face
 And begs and begs and begs and begs.
 The Bug remorseless—for in spite
 That Bug was not a neophyte—
 Remarks: "I know you have some brains,
 Some speed in scouring woods and plains,
 Some resonance of voice, some force
 In jaws and back and limb of course,
 And that the King of Beasts you be—
 But what are all these things to Me!

Moral.

Work, if you must, for Thieves and Thugs;
 But, children, never work for Bugs.

THE EPHEMERIS.

Some people love their souls to ease
 By thinking of the chimpanzees,

Of boa-constrictors and such cusses,
 Or oblong hippopotamuses,
 Of whales or crocodiles or gnus,
 Giraffes and cows and caribous,
 Or (if they have a turn for fun)
 Of dinosaur or mastodon
 And pterodactyl and those classic
 Monsters of the old Jurassic.
 'Twas Asshur-bani-pal who said,
 "Men's tastes will differ till they're dead."
 You all recall how Aristotle
 Preferred the fish that's known as cuttle,
 While the great sculptor Scopas says,
 "My choice shall be octopuses."
 And Poggio Bracciolini flew
 Into a passion when they slew
 The egg his favorite emu
 Had laid with cackle of alarum
 Behind Liber Facietiarum.
 Some people love such beasts as these;
 But I—without apologies—
 I love the Ephemerides.
 And having now admitted this,
 I'll mention an Ephemeris
 That one bright summer morn I spied
 When sitting by the river side.
 A half-transparent drop of jelly,
 With filaments upon its belly,
 It skimmed along the surface lightly,
 Nor plunged beneath it reconditely,
 Like some more bold investigator—
 For instance, loon or alligator—
 And then 'twould spread its wings and fare—
 A-going up, child, in the air,
 It knew not how, it cared not where,
 Till it collapsed, a bug, a bubble—
 Not having caused me any trouble,
 And certainly not having done
 The slightest good beneath the sun.
 Why do I love such bugs as these
 Sportive Ephemerides?—

Because I like to see them frolic?—
O no; because:

Moral.

They're so symbolic!

THE ASS AND THE SICK LION.

An Ass mistook the echo of his bray
For a celestial call to preach and pray;
And his own shadow, big upon a wall,
He deemed the everlasting Lord of All.
Besides he had some notions how to treat
Sinners and fetch them to the mercy seat.
So in a broad-cloth tailored coat, combined
With a white collar buttoned up behind,
He got himself a parish. In his flock
Was a sick Lion, panting on a rock.
(It was an arrow from a huntsman's bow
That laid this miserable Lion low.)
Him on his pastoral rounds the Reverend Ears
One morning thus addressed: "These groans and tears,
How base and craven in the King of Beasts!
You need a moral tonic! Godless feasts
And midnight games and evil Lionesses
Have brought you, brother, to these sad distresses;
Think not that I will comfort or condole—
My cure is drastic, but 'twill save your soul."
Whereat he turned and in the Lion's face
Planted his hoofs with more of speed than grace,
Knocked out the teeth, and blinded both the eyes,
And left him, dying, to the sun and flies.

Moral.

This little fable, children, is a proof
That no profession, purpose, or disguise
Can change the action of an Ass's hoof.