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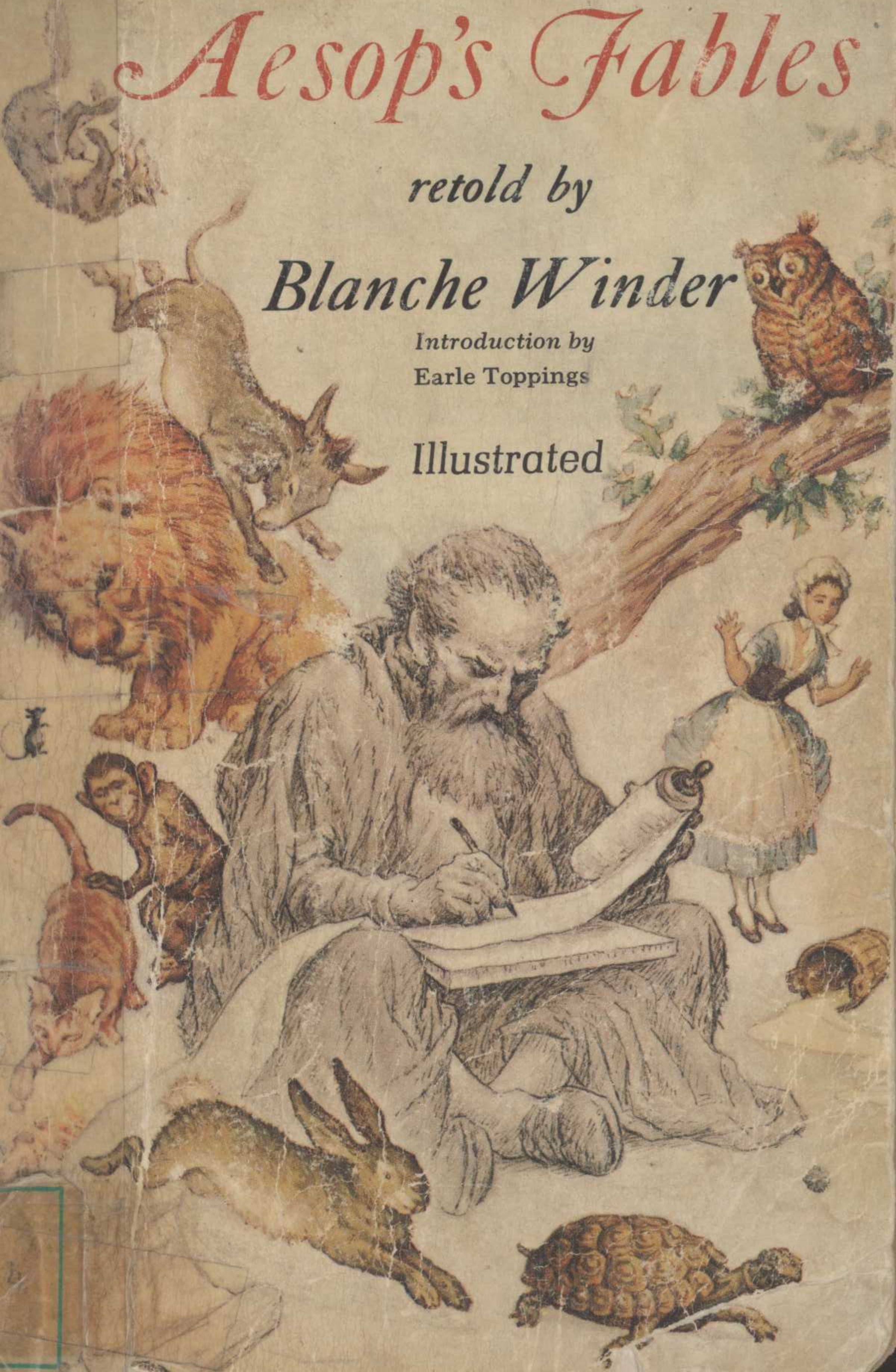
Aesop's Fables

retold by

Blanche Winder

Introduction by
Earle Toppings

Illustrated





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Æsop's Fables



INTRODUCTION

The available material on Æsop is scant, and hardly strict history, but runs something like this: He lived in Phrygia, Asia Minor, in the sixth century before Christ. He became a slave of Iadmon at Samos, was later granted his freedom but at one point got into a dispute and was hurled from a cliff to his death.

It is not likely that he left any written works but the telling of his fables were popular in Athens; in the fifth century he was the leading fabulist. His contemporaries were probably involved in the writing of these tales and changes were made by other writers and storytellers down the ages. Many fables written after his lifetime were attributed to Æsop, so dominant was his name in this field of literature. Later modifications included the interpolation of various morals, some from the Christian tradition.

These reminders tagged on the stories were not forced upon the people, however, who seemed to

expect the terse advice. Such counsel was not necessarily moral in the modern sense in that it might tell one how to get the better of a friend, not to mention an enemy, and in general to come out on top for number one.

The fable was a popular genre but not a folk product. It was usually composed by men of some learning, was didactic and had double meanings. In the tyrannical period in Greece, for instance, fables were used as veiled political comment. They required writers and maxim-makers but also an audience, and this comprised the common man. Qualities he wished to instill in his children, such as gratitude and industry, could be conveyed in these tales that taught lessons and entertained at the same time.

The fables might be called Sadder-but-Wiser Stories: the stupid, the innocent, and the credulous are devoured first, and "even the kindest treatment cannot tame a savage nature." Crèpe-hangers and cliff-hangers would understand this. Yet just when one feels at the mercy of dark forces, inconsistency comes to the rescue and the reader is assured that nothing escapes the eye of divine Justice: "it weighs crimes in the balance and allots the appropriate punishment."

Most of the fables we have are about animals—at least the characters are animals. Using beasts rather than people made it easier to insert bits of social and political criticism, but also more pleasant to instruct the young. Many tales have men and gods, though it is such creatures as the fox who said, "Who cares for sour grapes?" that we remember in Æsop's stories. His cast included wolves, foxes, frogs, snakes, lions, and donkeys. With today's emphasis upon "making

it" in the urban jungle, the animals and their survival tactics are indeed apposite.

The animals play the roles expected of them: it is not hard to guess what foxes or wolves will be up to, and one gets a bit much of lions. If the rabbit makes a speech, the lion says, "Not bad, but no claws." Surely it is bad form to throw one's weight around, even though a lion. One of the writers could have worked for a modern advertising agency: A group of animals showing off their many offspring before King Jupiter, his story relates, sneered at a lioness because she had only one kitten.

But the lioness bore away the prize, because her one little lion was a *lion*, "the King of all the beasts."

The reader feels sorry for frogs. Was Æsop anti-frog the way contemporary film cartoonists are anti-cat?

Numerous fables are all about being wise as serpents; for example, there was the rook who was told by a fox that he was sure the rook could sing even more sweetly than the nightingale. The rook opened his beak to try and lost his piece of meat. Now, was the writer on the side of the vain, vulnerable rook, seeking to encourage his maturation, or was he showing how foxes get ahead in the world? The tale seems to be about living by one's wits.

The fables' greatest value is that they make man contemplate the life of those around him, and his own.

EARLE TOPPINGS, *Trade Editor*
The Ryerson Press

ÆSOP'S FABLES

The Donkey and His Shadow

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One fine morning, in a sunny Eastern country, an Arab stood with his donkey at the door of an inn. The donkey was for hire; and the Arab knew there were travellers sleeping at the inn who would be glad to engage such a fine animal to carry them across the desert. Sure enough, as the Arab waited, one of the travellers came out. Seeing the donkey, he asked if he could hire it. The Arab said "Yes," and the two agreed upon the sum that the traveller should pay for the donkey to carry him over the hot sands to the city.

They set off at once, the traveller and all his baggage on the donkey, the Arab walking behind. The Arab was used to the desert, and did not much mind the long tramp. He munched a green lettuce nearly as big as his head, and thought cheerfully of the money the traveller was to pay him at the end of the journey.

They moved on steadily for a time, the three of them—traveller, donkey and Arab. But, as the day wore on, the sun grew very hot, and they all got very

tired. The traveller decided that he would like to rest for an hour or two, so he pulled up the donkey, got off its back, and, seeing that it threw a nice, big, cool shadow on the sand, sat down to rest in this shade.

There was no room for the Arab in the donkey's shadow, so he had to sit in the hot sunshine outside. For a little time he stared gloomily and resentfully at the traveller, while the perspiration trickled from his forehead. Suddenly an idea struck him. Springing to his feet, he caught the donkey by the bridle, led him a few steps forward, and, when a nice new shadow fell on to the sand, plumped himself down in the middle of it.

The traveller had been asleep, but he awoke with a start of rage. Up he jumped, and strode off after the donkey and the shadow. But when he tried to sit down, the Arab drove him off.

"No! No!" said he. "The donkey is mine! Therefore the shadow is mine! Go away!"

"The shadow yours, indeed!" replied the traveller furiously. "I hired the donkey! Therefore I hired the shadow as well!"

"That is not so!" insisted the Arab. "If you wanted to hire the shadow, you should have said so at the beginning. I should then have charged you more for it!"

The traveller, instead of answering, seized the donkey by the bridle and walked a few paces with it, shadow and all. Then down he sat, once more in the donkey's shade. But the Arab, springing after him, did not argue the matter this time. Instead, he lost his temper entirely, and gave the traveller a cuff on the head.

The traveller replied with another cuff, and, in a few seconds, the two were engaged in a furious bat-

tle! They made such a noise with their shouts and blows that the donkey took fright. Giving a loud bray of dismay, he flung up his heels, stuck down his head, bucked off the traveller's bundles, and galloped away.

So there they were left, the silly traveller and the still sillier Arab, not only without the shadow, but without the donkey. There was nothing for them to do but to pick up the bundles, take their staffs in their hands, and follow the donkey, a lesson to everybody that folk may easily lose the substance if they spend their time in fighting over the shadow.



方程
物理

Crying "Wolf"

Once upon a time the hills and woods were as full of wolves as now they are full of foxes; and in some places, a good deal fuller. In the summer-time the wolves stayed among the trees and caves and brought up their families. But in the winter, when the snow was on the ground, the wolves used to get very hungry—so hungry that they took to stealing from the hill sheep-folds.

The great beasts did not go thieving singly, but banded themselves in packs.

So all the shepherds in the district agreed to help each other. If anyone among them saw a wolf, he was immediately to jump on to a rock or a high mound, and shout "Wolf! Wolf!" with all his might. Then his friends and neighbours would instantly seize their sticks and clubs, and, rushing to the spot, help to drive away the thief and his companions.

Well, this plan answered extremely well, and now the shepherds hardly ever lost any of their sheep. They had only to shout "Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!" at any hour of the night, and all the other shepherds came

running one after another along the mountain paths and through the deep gullies of rock and furze bushes. As fast as the shepherds ran into the sheepfold the wolves ran out! They were frightened of such a lot of strong men with even stronger sticks.

Then, one day, one of the older shepherds had to go to the town for a few days, and leave his son in charge of the sheep. He was a dreadful coward, and horribly frightened at the thought of the wolves that came into the folds after the sheep.

The sun set, and the moon rose, and the unhappy shepherd-boy sat nervously clutching his club. All at once he was quite sure he heard a growl, and saw a long lean shape slip out from among the pines. He sprang to his feet in great excitement.

"Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!" he shrieked at the top of his voice, brandishing his club wildly. And over the hill-top, and up through the gullies, ran the shepherds, quite ready for the fight.

They found the silly youth racing up and down among the sheep, which were frightened to death. But it was their own shepherd who was scaring them, for there was not a wolf within miles.

Warning the foolish boy not to call them from their warm beds for nothing, the shepherds returned home. But they had no sooner settled down in their own huts again than a still more frenzied call of "Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!" brought them all out a second time. And, a second time, they discovered that there was no wolf at all—nothing but a frightened lad clubbing shadows thrown by the moon.

They scolded him severely, and told him that, if he wanted to club shadows, he could club them by himself; and that, if he really saw a wolf, he would know

very well what it was like. Then they walked off by twos and threes, extremely cold and sleepy and cross.

This time they had not even reached their homes before "Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!" sounded after them, in a perfect shriek of terror. But the shepherds shook their wise grey heads and grunted into their wise grey beards.

"Not so!" said they to each other. "We know better by this time. It's just moon-shadows again!" And they all went home to bed.

But it really *had* been a wolf at last! And, following the wolf, came all the pack, running and leaping and jostling among the sheep. They ate up as many as they wanted, and, last of all, they ate the foolish shepherd-boy himself. So his father, when he came home, put up a little tombstone to his memory among the hills, and there, to the best of my belief, it stands to this day.

What do you think is written on it?

Well, it does not take much guessing. I am quite sure all of you have often heard the silly shepherd's epitaph.

"If folks cry 'Wolf' for shadows, nobody will hurry to their rescue when a real wolf comes along with teeth and claws."

The Story of the Bat

One fine morning the sun, as it climbed over the eastern shoulder of the hill, looked down upon a strange sight. In the middle of the plain below were drawn up two armies. One army was a mass of big horned heads, and little woolly heads, and long tails, and short tails, and bodies either rough and furry or hairy and smooth. These were the regiments of the beasts, and they were quite ready for battle.

Opposite them stood the enemy army. Here you might see what looked like an ocean of colour, trembling with a thousand wings. All about these lovely wings the sunbeams flashed as they might flash about a lot of jewels. It was the army of the birds, and they were as pretty a sight as a field of flowers in May.

Their commander, who must certainly have been an eagle, stood waiting for the beasts to charge; and we can hardly doubt that the beasts were led by their King, the lion himself. But the beasts paused for a moment. Their chiefs had gathered about a curious, small, winged creature, just arrived in their midst.