Selected Aesop's Fables and Their Adaptations

Classical Sources

Aesop (c. 620–564 BC), the legendary storyteller of ancient Greece, was said to have been enslaved before gaining his freedom and becoming an advisor to kings. No written versions of his fables from his own time survive, so they are known only from later retellings.

Horace (65–8 BC) was a celebrated lyric poet writing during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus. His retelling of the fable of the city mouse and the country mouse is older than the versions in the surviving collections of Aesop's fables.

Phaedrus (early 1st century AD) was born in Greece, enslaved, and brought to Rome, where he served the emperor Augustus and gained his freedom. His poetic renderings in Latin comprise the oldest surviving collection of Aesop's fables.

Babrius (late 1st century AD) was probably from Italy but wrote in Greek for the son of a King Alexander in or near Syria. His poems comprise the oldest surviving collection of Aesop's fables in Greek.

Avianus (c. 400 AD) adapted Aesop's fables as Latin poems, drawing mostly on Babrius, but with a distinctive touch of his own. His versions of the fables went on to become popular school texts.

Anonymous Greek poets (4th – 6th century AD) retold prose versions of Aesop's fables in the form of Greek poems, but did not label the poems with their own names.

Adaptations

Romulus Anglicus ("the English Romulus") (manuscript c. 1450) refers to an anonymous medieval author of fables in the Romulus tradition, whose fables may have been known to the author Marie de France (fl. 1160–1215).

William Caxton (c. 1422 – c. 1491) introduced the printing press to England and published his translation of a French book of Aesop's fables in 1484.

Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), a celebrated French poet, published his classic fables 1668–1696.

John Newbery (1713–1767) is sometimes called the Father of Children's Literature because, as a publisher, he published books specifically for children and helped to make children's literature a distinct literary genre and market. He and Christopher Smart are probably the authors of a pseudonymous 1760 book of fables.

Christopher Smart (1722–1771) was a poet and the son-in-law and employee of John Newbery.

Richard Scrafton Sharpe (c. 1775–1852) was a grocer by trade, but wrote comic poetry for children (usually anonymously), including his 1820 fables in verse.

John Hookham Frere (c. 1769–1846) was a diplomat during the wars with Napoleon, a translator of Aristophanes, and a poet. In addition to his books for adults, he adapted Aesop for small children in an 1813 volume.

W.J. Linton (1812–1897) was an artist and poet. He adapted Aesop's fables as limericks for children, which were later illustrated by his apprentice Walter Crane for an 1887 edition.

Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) was an author and illustrator best known for *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, but her stories of anthropomorphic animals also include the Aesop-inspired *Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918).

Introduction to Aesop's Fables

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

At first, before our peoples' birth,
there was an age of gold,
when righteous people walked the earth,
the golden folk of old.

And all the other living things
knew words that people knew,
and in their forest gatherings
would talk the way we do.

The leaves that whispered on the bay
would talk, as did the pine.
The friendly fish would have his say
to sailors on the brine.

The sparrows made a clear reply
to farmers when they spoke.
The plants grew straight up toward the sky
and asked no work of folk.

And God and Man were friends, you know,
back in the age of gold.
And you may learn these things were so
in fables Aesop told.

I wove each fable as a poem
with flowers of memory,
and give you, sweet as honeycomb,
my gentle poetry.

A more literal translation in prose (AFM):
A race of righteous people that they call Golden was the first, Branchus, child, after which came another race, of Silver. And we are third from the same, the race made of Iron. But in the Golden time, the other living things also had an articulate speech, knew words just such as we speak in answer to each other, and there were assemblies of these creatures in the middle of the forests. And the pine talked, and the leaves of the bay laurel, and the swimming fish talked with the friendly sailor, and the sparrows conversed intelligibly in reply to the farmer. All things put forth shoots from the earth, asking nothing, and there was friendship of mortals and gods. You may learn and know these things were so from the wise old man Aesop, who to us told fables of the free Muse. Now, having adorned each of these with the flowers of my memory, I will give to you the honeycomb dripping honey, having softened the hard metrical units of the sharp iambic verses.

our peoples… golden folk / race… they call Golden… race of Silver… race made of Iron: For the worsening races of men named after different metals, compare Hesiod, *Works and Days*. Hesiod's golden age includes a fruitful earth and friendship with gods, but does not feature talking animals or trees as Babrius's does.

learn / learn and know: The word translated "know" (γνοίης) could mean "judge." Kristin Mann argues that "Babrius instructs his readers to actively consider whether Aesop's fables match the Golden Age picture that the prologue has painted" ("The Puzzle in Babrius's Prologue," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 58 (2018) 253–278, see page 267).

gentle poetry / having softened the hard metrical units of the sharp iambic verses: Iambic poetry (the meter of Babrius's fables) was traditionally associated with harshness.

The Ant and the Cicada

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

An ant who spent the summer heat
In heaping grain inside his den,
In winter dragged it out again
To air it in the wind and sleet.

A starved cicada made his plea,
"Could you give some food to me?
Is there something you could give?
Something, so that I will live?"

The ant said to the one outside,
"What did you do all summer long?"
"Not doing nothing!" he replied;
"I never ceased to sing my song."

The ant just laughed, shut up his wheat,
And said, "If you have played a song
All through the days of summer heat,
This winter, you can dance along."

The Ant and the Cicada

ROMULUS ANGLICUS (manuscript c. 1450)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A Cicada, in need in winter time, came to the house of an Ant, asking and begging that she do her some good, and telling her she had nothing at home to live on. The Ant said to her, "So what work did you do in summer and harvest time, when my family and I were hard at work, running and gathering into our storehouses something to live on in winter?"

The Cicada answered, "Back then I sang to those who were working, and I received no wages from them."

Then the Ant said, "It would be better to have worked in summer, looking ahead to the coming storm, than that the severity of winter now compel you to beg at our doors. If, then, I were now in need, what would you be able to offer me when I begged?"

Moral. In this example we are reminded to flee laziness and pursue work, so that we can help ourselves in our own need, because, if we have need of the goods of others, we may ask much, but get little.

A more literal translation of Babrius in prose (AFM):
In wintertime, an ant was dragging grain from his den, all he'd heaped up in the heat of the summer, to air it out. A starving cicada begged the ant to give him something from the food, so that he would live. "What were you doing this summer?" said the ant. The cicada said, "Not doing nothing; I continued singing all that time." But the ant laughed, shut in his wheat, and said, "If you played songs all through the heat of summer, then in winter, dance."

The Oak and the Reed

AVIANUS (c. 400 AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

Upon a hill, an oak tree grew.
The whirlwind raved, the wild wind blew,
Tore up its roots and shook its crown:
The wind had won; the oak fell down.

A rising river ran below
And rushed the oak off in its flow.
Bounced by the banks as it proceeds,
It comes to rest in fragile reeds.

The oak's amazed that reeds which grow
In little clumps withstand the flow.
The great oak's trunk cannot stand tall,
But this thin reed endures it all.

But soon the creaking reed replies
In soothing murmurs soft as sighs,
And shows the oak it makes good sense:
Its weakness is its best defense.

The reed says, "You hold them in scorn,
The rushing wind, the raging storm.
Despite the strength within your core,
You fall in ruin on the shore.

"But where I can, I will give way,
And bit by bit I slow and play
With rising winds before they rise.
To bow before the breeze is wise.

"The rushing rainstorm bursts to flood
And overcomes your sturdy wood.
My movement and my mocking sway
Deceive the wind, which dies away."

This shows the weak withstand the strong,
Whose wildest threat does not last long;
For those who bend do not succumb,
But bit by bit they overcome.

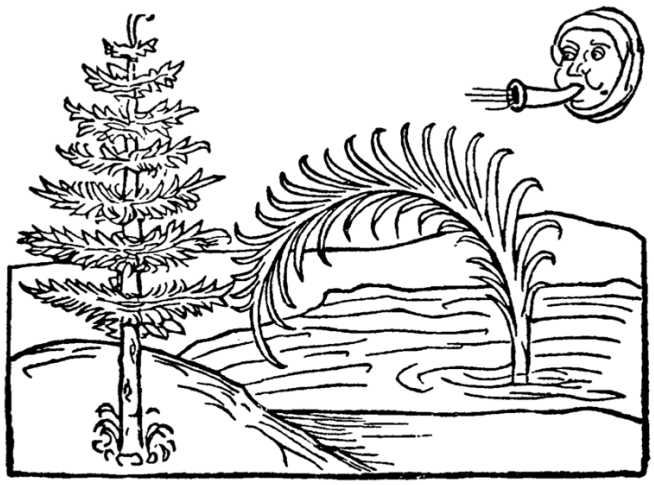
This shows / These words remind us: Babrius instead concludes (trans. Ben Edwin Perry): "Our myth reveals this truth, it is not wise to struggle with the mighty, but to yield." Cf. Aphthonius's (4th c. AD) moral (trans. Laura Gibbs): "Those who adapt to the times will emerge unscathed."

Of the tree and of the reed

WILLIAM CAXTON (1484)

None ought to be proud against his lord, but ought to humble himself toward him, as this fable rehearseth to us of a great tree which would never bow him for none wind, and a reed which was at his foot bowed himself as much as the wind would. And the tree said to him, Why dost thou not abide still as I do? And the reed answered, I have not the might which thou hast. And the tree said to the reed proudly, Then have I more strength than thou. And anon after came a great wind which threw down to the ground the said great tree, and the reed abode in his own being. For the proud shall be alway humbled, and the meek and humble shall be enhanced, for the root of all virtue is obedience and humility.

as the wind would: as the wind wished.
being: existence, manner of existence, essential nature, condition (*Middle English Dictionary*, University of Michigan Middle English Compendium).



Caxton text and illustration: Caxton's Aesop, edited by R. T. Lenaghan. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967. Spelling modernized by AFM.

A more literal translation of Avianus in prose (AFM):
An oak, dug out by the roots down from the highest mountains, fell down, conquered by the mad whirling of the south wind. A riverbed running below takes it with swelling billows, and with the rushing river carries it off. But when its tall length is knocked by the separated banks, its great bulk settles into frail reeds. Then it is amazed that the reed, joining its stalks in a little clump, can stand in the flowing stream. Even with such a vast trunk, the oak itself does not stand upright, but that reed with its thin sheath endures the threats. Soon the creaking reed replies with a soothing/soft murmuring, and shows it is more secured in weakness. The reed said, "You despise the winds that are tearing along, and the raging storms, and with all your strength you fall in ruin on the shore. But little by little I detain the rising south winds and, as much as possible, being prudent, yield to the light south winds. The hasty storm discharges itself against your hardwood trunk; the wind, deceived by my movement, is spent and passes away." These words remind us that the weak withstand the mighty, and little by little they overcome their wild threats.

The Fox and the Stork

PHAEDRUS (early 1st century AD)
translated by CHRISTOPHER SMART

One should do injury to none;
But he that has th' assault begun,
Ought, says the fabulist, to find
The dread of being served in kind.
A Fox, to sup within his cave
The Stork an invitation gave,
Where, in a shallow dish, was pour'd
Some broth, which he himself devoured;
While the poor hungry Stork was fain
Inevitably to abstain.
The Stork, in turn, the Fox invites,
And brings her liver and her lights
In a tall flagon, finely minced,
And thrusting in her beak, convinced
The Fox that he in grief must fast,
While she enjoy'd the rich repast.
Then, as in vain he lick'd the neck,
The Stork was heard her guest to check,—
'That every one the fruits should bear
Of their example, is but fair.'

her liver and her lights… finely minced / crumbled food (intrito cibo): Where Phaedrus does not specify the food, Smart specifies livers and lights, which consists of an animal's internal organs ("lights" meaning lungs).

A more literal translation in prose (Laura Gibbs):
Do no harm—if someone does get hurt, then turn-about is fair play, as this fable cautions.
The fox is said to have started it by inviting the stork to dinner and serving a liquid broth on a marble slab which the hungry stork could not so much as taste. The stork, in turn, invited the fox to dinner and served a narrow-mouthed jug filled with crumbled food. The stork was able to thrust her beak inside and eat as much as she wanted, while her guest was tormented with hunger. As the fox was licking the neck of the jug in vain, the stork is supposed to have said, 'When others follow your example, you have to grin and bear it.'

Verse translation of Phaedrus: Christopher Smart. The Fables of Phaedrus Translated into English Verse. *London, 1913.* Aesopica. *Emendation by AFM: Changed comma to period after* kind.
Prose translation of Phaedrus: Laura Gibbs, trans. Aesop's Fables. *Oxford: Oxford University Press (World's Classics), 2002.* Aesopica.

Notes: AFM

The Fox and the Stork

JEAN DE LA FONTAINE (*Fables* 1668-1694)
translated from French by PAUL HOOKHAM

Once Goodman Fox with great benevolence
Asked Gossip Stork to dine at his expense.
The fare was poor; in quantity not vast;
Our gallant, for the whole repast,
Produced a slender soup which—sad to state—
Was served upon an ordinary plate.
The Stork's long beak could hardly get a taste.
To be revenged upon this sinner,
The Stork in time invited him to dinner.
On such occasions it was not his way
To deal in vain excuses or delay;
The hour appointed came;
He scampered to the lodging of the dame
Who greeted him benignly.
The meal was cooked divinely;
His appetite was all a Fox's should be
Or could be.
The meat, cut up capriciously,
In little morsels, smelt deliciously.
But now—what puzzled much his wits—
Behold these dainty bits
Served in a long-necked Jar with outlet narrow.
Judge how it must his feeling harrow
To see the Stork's beak dodging in and out—
A thing impossible to Vulpine snout!
His hungry, homeward way he steers,
With tail between his legs, and drooping ears,
Feeling as much a victim
As if some common barn-door Fowl had tricked him!

Goodman: a respectful title for those of modest rank, such as farmers
Gossip: a female friend (originally *god-sib*, godparent)

Translation of La Fontaine: Frederic Taber Cooper, editor. An Argosy of Fables. *Illustrated by Paul Bransom. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1921.* Wikisource. *Emendation by AFM: changed period to comma after* sinner.
Illustration: Jean de La Fontaine. Fables choisies, mises en vers. *Denys Thierry et Claude Barbin, 1678*. Wikisource.

The Dog and the Reflection

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

The meat a dog got from a cook
He carried by a running brook.
And where the flowing waters gleam,
He saw a shadow in the stream:
The mirror of the meat, but larger.
Lunging for it like a charger,
He allowed the meat to fall.
The shadow was not there at all,
Nor could he find the meat. So then
The hungry dog went back again.
A life of greed is spent in vain
On shaky, empty hopes of gain.

A more literal translation of Babrius in prose (AFM):
A dog carried off some meat from a cook shop, and now runs along the riverside, but seeing the shadow of the meat in the stream was larger, the dog let the meat fall, and rushed upon the shadow. But the dog found neither that shadow nor that meat which he let fall, but, being hungry, the dog went back again along the way. [The life of every greedy man is unsteady, wasted in empty hopes of advantage.]

The Dog and the Shadow

JOHN NEWBERY (?) *and* CHRISTOPHER SMART (?) (1760)

Tray with his prize crossing a brook,
Did on the glassy surface look,
There saw the shadow of his bone,
And dreamt not that it was his own;
So big it seem'd, so full, so fair,
He greedy (as his brethren are)
Snatch'd at the shade, the bone let go,
And lost his prize and dinner too.
He yelp'd, and cry'd, Ah well a-day!
No dinner now remains for Tray;
Fool that I was, he sighing said,
To loose the substance for the shade.

MORAL.
Poor Tray, you see, has lost his prize,
By only trusting to his eyes.
In such a world—to your defence,
Call in the aid of ev'ry sense,
That none may laugh at your expence.

John Newbery (?) and Christopher Smart (?): The book was published under the pseudonyms of Abraham Aesop and Woglog the Giant. For the attribution to Newbery and Smart, see the *Oxford Book of Children's Verse*, edited by Iona and Peter Opie (1973), page 389.
well a-day: an expression of dismay

Newbery text and illustration: Fables in Verse For the Improvement of the Young and the Old. 3rd edition. 1760.

The Fox and the Grapes

PHAEDRUS **(early 1st century AD)**
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A hunger drives the fox. She leaps
And snaps at grapes with all her might.
But the grapes are at a height
She cannot reach. So off she creeps.

She says, "The grapes are not ripe yet.
I do not want to eat them sour."
Learn something from this tale of ours
If you insult what you can't get.

A more literal translation of Phaedrus in prose (AFM):
A fox, driven by hunger, was reaching for a grape on high vines, leaping with her utmost strength. And when she was not able to touch it, departing, she said, "It is not yet ripe; I do not want to eat a sour grape." Those who disparage with words what they are not able to attain, they ought to apply this example to themselves.

The Fox and Grapes

JOHN NEWBERY (?) *and* CHRISTOPHER SMART (?) **(1760)**

Renard by fraud and rapine fed,
The hen-roosts and the lambkins dread;
Sated with slaughter, now grown nice,
A vine with clusters laden spies;
The fruit to warmest beams display'd,
ln horizontal lines were laid.
Beauty has charms. But ah! in vain
We sigh for what we can't obtain.
Six feet above the ground and more,
The wall supports the purple store.
Beyond thy reach, ambitious creature,
Whose cunning far exceeds thy stature.
He longs, and thrice with utmost strain
Leaps at the Grapes, but leaps in vain.
Now tired; the disappointed thief,
Tho' sorely vex'd, thus hides his grief.
'A plague, says he, d'ye call these ripe,
'They'd kill one with the colic;
'I wou'dn't have 'em, if I might,
'I jump'd but for a frolic.'

MORAL.
Who have, by fortune's malice crost,
Preferment, or a mistress lost;
Wisely dissemble the miscarriage,
And what they cannot reach, disparage.

Renard: In English, Renard is a conventional name for a fox, because of a medieval cycle of stories about Reynard the Fox.
nice: choosy
colic: abdominal pain
preferment: advancement (in one's career)

Newbery text and illustration: Fables in Verse For the Improvement of the Young and the Old. 3rd edition. 1760.

The Lion and the Mouse

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A lion caught a mouse, and was
about to make a meal.
Near death, the mouse spoke up because
his bravery was real.

He begs for life with words like these:
"To fill your belly full
someone like you eats all you please
by hunting deer and bull.

"A mouse would make no meal at all,
And leave no taste to savor.
Please spare me! Though I may be small,
I will repay the favor."

The lion laughed and set him free.
But then one day he met
young men upon a hunting spree,
who caught him in a net.

The lion, overthrown and bound,
Looked up and saw the mouse
Who sneaked and crept out of the ground,
The hole that was his house.

He bit the knot in two, and set
The captured lion free,
and so he paid in full his debt
of life and liberty.

To thoughtful folk, this metaphor
can teach, if you will learn:
Remember to protect the poor;
they might help in return.

A more literal translation of Babrius in prose (AFM):
A lion caught a mouse and was about to make a meal of him. But the lowly domestic thief, close to death, was stout-hearted; with words like these he beseeched him, babbling: "It is fitting for you, hunting deer and horned bulls, to fatten your belly with this flesh. But a meal of a mouse is in no way enough to lightly touch the edges of your lips. But I beg you, spare me. Being small, I will repay this favor to you equally." And the beast laughed and let the suppliant live. The lion encountered young men, who also loved to hunt, and was caught in a net, overthrown, and bound. But the mouse sprang sneakily from his hole, and sheared the solid knot with his short teeth, setting the lion loose, giving a recompense worthy of seeing the light, saving him alive in turn. [The fable is clear to people thinking well, to protect the poor, and not to despair of them, if even a mouse saved a lion who was caught.]

words like these: The word translated "words" (μύθοις) can also mean stories, myths, or fables.
protect: or "remember," or "save"
they might help in return / not to despair of them: Ben Edwin Perry (the translator of the Loeb edition of *Babrius and Phaedrus*) gives the translation "don't hesitate to rely on them."

The Lion and the Mouse

RICHARD SCRAFTON SHARPE (1820)

Within a thicket's calm retreat
A fine majestic Lion lay;
Glad to forget, in slumber sweet,
The toils of the foregoing day.

A Mouse too near him chanc'd to creep,
It knew no fear, nor danger saw;
The Lion, starting from his sleep,
On the intruder laid his paw.

Imprison'd, and detain'd so tight,
And so uncomfortably press'd;
The Mouse was in a dreadful fright,
And thus the royal brute address'd:

"Ah! let me not, Sir, plead in vain,
Hear me, dread monarch of the wood!
And gen'rously forbear to stain
Thy paws with such ignoble blood."

The Lion saw its humble size;
And melted by the strain of woe,
In pity to its plaintive cries,
He let the little trembler go.

It chanc'd upon a sultry day,
When scarce a timid beast was met,
The Lion, roaming for his prey,
Was taken in the hunter's net.

He foam'd, he roar'd, he lash'd his tail,
His thund'ring groans the forest fill;
But, ah! his efforts nought avail,
The Lion is a pris'ner still.

The grateful Mouse, surpris'd to hear
The noble creature in distress,
Now proves its gratitude sincere,
By hasting to afford redress.

"Be patient, Sir," she cried, "fear not,
While I my humble means will try
To show you I have not forgot
The day you gave me liberty."

The Mouse began to work at nine,
And ere the morning clock struck three,
Completely gnaw'd the woven twine,
And set the royal captive free.

The Lion long in vain had storm'd,
The Mouse with patience had begun;
And perseverance soon perform'd
A work rash haste could ne'er have done.

Two lessons we from hence may learn,
"The humblest not to disregard;"
And that "a kind and friendly turn
Will almost always meet reward."

Sharpe's text: Old friends in a new dress; or, Familiar fables in verse. London, 1820.

Illustrations: Old friends in a new dress; or, Familiar fables in verse. London, 1820.

The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs

AVIANUS (c. 400 AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A man once had a goose, I'm told,
With offspring of a precious kind:
She gave him eggs of purest gold—
The splendid bird was so designed.

She'd not lay two gifts in one day.
Her greedy master, filled with fear
His wish-come-true would disappear,
Would not wait as his gains delay.

He thought he'd find a prize inside
When the abundant mother died,
Whose constant gift was rich and rare.
He killed the goose and plucked it bare.

He carved it with a hostile blade.
Her precious offspring were not there
And she was empty. Thus dismayed,
He cried in anguish and despair.

Deceived, deluded, greedy-eyed,
He earned comeuppance for his crime.
The wish should likewise be denied
To have it all, all at one time.

goose: In Babrius's earlier version, the bird laying golden eggs is a hen.

offspring: Both *germine* and *fetibus* can refer to offspring, and I have taken both to refer to the golden eggs. Edna Elizabeth O'Hair takes the precious *germine* to be "some gold producing germ" (University of Illinois bachelor's thesis, 1901).

wish-come-true/answered-prayer … wish/prayers … ask the gods: Originally referring to a vow to a deity or to the thing promised, *votum* came to also mean a wish or prayer. When the word first appears, it could mean "promise of wealth" (hence O'Hair, "source of wealth"), but at the end of the poem it refers to wishes or prayers. Notably, *deos* (gods) is plural; Avianus is apparently a polytheist despite his late date.

A more literal translation of Avianus in prose (AFM):
There was, belonging to a certain man, a goose pregnant with offspring of great value, and which often laid an egg of gold in her nest. Nature had established a rule for this distinguished bird that it not be permitted to lay two such gifts together. But the greedy master, fearing that his wish-come-true/answered-prayer will disappear did not tolerate hateful delays to his profits, thinking to receive a great price from the death of the bird, the bird which was so rich with her continuous gift. After he drove the menacing blade into her plucked flesh, and he sees her to be empty of her usual offspring, deceived by the offense of so great a delusion, he cried with anguish. For he received the punishment deserved from his own deeds. So likewise it is just they refuse the daily wishes/prayers to those who wrongly ask the gods for all things at one time.

The Farmer's Boy and the Goose with Golden Eggs

RICHARD SCRAFTON SHARPE (1820)

Though rich was Tom, the farmer's boy,
While many neighbours round were poor;
Yet Tom no riches could enjoy,
For envy that he had not more.

A Goose enrich'd him day by day,
Young readers, do not laugh, I beg;
You'll think it likely, when I say,
She daily laid a Golden Egg.

The Egg might sell for near a pound,
But silly Tom, the farmer's son,
As often as the Egg he found,
Lamented that there was but one.

Unthinking boy! a friend so good
Sure well deserv'd thy grateful care;
The sweetest grain, the softest food,
Ought daily to have been her fare.

But, ah! the cruel farmer's boy,
Enrag'd his riches came so slow,
Declared the Goose he would destroy,
To find from whence the treasures flow.

"And then," the cruel lad would say,
(This foolish boy, this thoughtless dunce,)
"Instead of one poor Egg a-day,
I shall enjoy them all at once."

He then, with murderous intent,
Relentless seiz'd the fatal knife;
And to the neighb'ring stable went,
Where the poor Goose resign'd her life.

But not one Egg within was stor'd:
Rash boy! thus all thy hopes to sever!
Thy av'rice meets its just reward,
Adieu to Golden Eggs for ever!

Let us from hence, young friends, take heed,
Nor hope in indolence for wealth;
Labour will make us rich indeed,
For labour brings content and health.

near a pound: Nearly a pound for a *daily* egg is more than Bob Cratchit makes in a *week* as an underpaid adult office worker in Dickens's *Christmas Carol* (1843). Realistically, however, an entire egg made of gold would surely sell for much more than a pound.

Sharpe's text: Old friends in a new dress; or, Familiar fables in verse. London, 1820. *Emendation by AFM:* rom *to* from.

The Boy Who Cried Wolf

ANONYMOUS (4th – 6th century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

A little boy once kept the sheep
Up on a hill both high and steep.
"Come help! A wolf! A wolf!" he cried,
But there was no wolf—he lied.
The country folk came running, too,
And found he said what was not true.
Though many times he called the men;
Each time they found he'd lied again.
But then one day, a wolf attacked.
The boy shouts, "Help! It's time to act!
A wolf! A wolf!" But no one planned
To come and lend a helping hand.
What should they leave their own work for?
They did not trust him anymore.
So there was no one there to keep
The wolf from killing all the sheep.
Don't lie, for those who learn you do
Won't trust you when you say what's true.

A more literal translation in prose (AFM):
A little boy pasturing flocks on a hill cried, "A wolf! Come help me!" But the men of the countryside, running to the flock, found this boy was not speaking completely truthfully. The boy having done this many times, they found him to be lying again. But after that, a wolf did come. With the young boy shouting, "Come help! Wolf!" no one trusted the young boy any more, not enough to leave their work and come to that place and lend a helping hand. At once the wolf, who had gained total license, easily utterly destroyed the whole flock. The story shows that if a person is a liar many times, he is not trusted even if he tells the truth.

Translated from the Greek text: Emile Chambry, *Aesopi fabulae*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1925-1926, 2 vol. This is fable variant 319.3 (Chambry's 1925-1926 edition), a variant of fable 318 (in Chambry's renumbered 1927 edition).

Of the Boy and the Wolf

JOHN HOOKHAM FRERE (1830)

A little boy was set to keep
A little flock of goats or sheep.
He thought the task too solitary,
And took a strange perverse vagary,
To call the people out of fun,
To see them leave their work and run,
He cried and scream'd with all his might,—
"Wolf! wolf!" in a pretended fright.
Some people, working at a distance,
Came running in to his assistance.
They search'd the fields and bushes round,
The Wolf was no where to be found.
The Boy delighted with his game,
A few days after did the same,
And once again the People came.
The trick was many times repeated,
At last they found that they were cheated.
One day the wolf appeared in sight,
The Boy was in a real fright,
He cried, "Wolf! wolf!"—The Neighbours heard,
But not a single creature stirr'd.
"We need not go from our employ,—
"'Tis nothing but that idle boy."
The little boy cried out again,
"Help, help! the Wolf!"—he cried in vain.
At last his master went to beat him.
He came too late, the wolf had eat him.
—
This shews the bad effects of lying,
And likewise of continual crying;
If I had heard you scream and roar
For nothing, twenty times before,
Although you might have broke your arm,
Or met with any serious harm,
Your cries could give me no alarm,
They would not make me move the faster,
Nor apprehend the least disaster;
I should be sorry when I came,
But you yourself would be to blame.

Text of Frere: Fables for Five Years Old. Malta: Government Press, 1830.

The Sun and the North Wind

BABRIUS (late 1st century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

Between the North Wind and the Sun
This rivalry took place, they say:
Out of the two of them, which one
Would strip a farmer's cloak away.

The North Wind blew both hard and cold,
And thought to rob the man by might.
The man, though, did not loose his hold
But pulled his cloak's edge round him tight;
He shivered in the blasting shock
And leaned his back against a rock.

The Sun peeped out, and he began
From cold and wind to free the man,
And then he introduced more heat,
Which held the farmer in its grip.
He threw his cloak down at his feet:
The man himself was moved to strip.

And so the North Wind lost the fight.
The tale says, "Strive for gentleness,
My child; you will win more success
Persuading than by using might."

blew both hard and cold / began to blow in such wise as when he blows from Thrace: Boreas, the North Wind, was imagined as living in the "wintry borderland of Thrace," north of Greece (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.212ff, trans. Rieu), and blowing his freezing blasts from there (Homer, *Iliad* 9.4ff; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 594ff).

A more literal translation in prose (Ben Edwin Perry):
Between the North Wind and the Sun, they say, a contest of this sort arose, to wit, which of the two would strip the goatskin from a rustic plodding on his way. The North Wind first began to blow in such wise as when he blows from Thrace, thinking by sheer force to rob the wearer of his cloak. And yet no more on that account did he, the man, relax his hold; instead he shivered, drew the borders of his garment tight about him every way, and rested with his back against a spur of rock. Then the Sun peeped forth, welcome at first, bringing the man relief from the cold, raw wind. Next, changing, he turned the heat on more, and suddenly the rustic felt too hot and of his own accord threw off the cloak, and so was stripped. Thus was the North Wind beaten in the contest. And the fable says, "Cultivate gentleness, my son; you will get results oftener by persuasion than by the use of force."

Prose translation of Babrius: Babrius, Phaedrus. Fables. *Edited by Ben Edwin Perry. Loeb Classical Library 436. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.*
Note: AFM

The Wind and the Sun

W.J. LINTON (1887)

The Wind and the Sun had a bet,
The wayfarers' cloak which should get:
Blew the Wind, the cloak clung:
Shone the Sun, the cloak flung
Showed the Sun had the best of it yet.

TRUE STRENGTH IS NOT BLUSTER

Text of Linton and illustration: The Baby's Own Aesop. Illustrations by Walter Crane. 1887. *Aesopica.*

The Tortoise and the Hare

ANONYMOUS (4th – 6th century AD)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

The hare had called the tortoise slow
And laughed, but she laughed back.
She said, "Despite how fast you go,
I'll win on the race track."

The hare declared, "That won't come true,
You'll see when we are done!
But who says where we're racing to,
And who will say who's won?"

The fox, who was their wisest friend,
Arranged for them a place,
Set the beginning and the end,
And showed them where to race.

The tortoise did not hesitate;
Of that she showed no sign.
The tortoise kept on going straight
On to the finish line.

The hare, who trusts his speedy pace,
Goes off to sleep at first.
And waking late, he sprints the race
All in a top-speed burst.

But at the finish line he found
What made his eyes go wide:
There was the tortoise sleeping sound,
First on the winning side.

Delayed too long, a useful skill
That could succeed will fail.
But patient effort often will
Continue and prevail.

their wisest friend / the most sensible of the animals: This is based on reading ζῴων (of the animals) instead of ζωνῷ (of the boundaries?).

The Hare and The Tortoise

W.J. LINTON (1887)

'Twas a race between Tortoise and Hare,
Puss was sure she's so much time to spare,
That she lay down to sleep,
And let old Thick-shell creep
To the winning post first! You may stare.

PERSISTENCE BEATS IMPULSE

Puss: hare

Text of Linton and illustration: The Baby's Own Aesop. Illustrations by Walter Crane. 1887. *Aesopica.*

A more literal translation of the Greek in prose (AFM):
The hare laughed at the tortoise's feet, but she, laughing in return, said this against him, "I will win against you, though you run fast!" But the hare said, "This will not come true. But compete with my feet and you will see. But who will fix the finish line, and who will give us the declaration of the victory?" And the most sensible of the animals, the fox, put in order the beginning and the end, showing them at the same time the race-course and their starting position. Then the tortoise, not holding back at all, going straight on, went up to the finish line. But the hare, having confidence in his feet, slept meanwhile; and after these things, rising from his bed, and running at full speed, hastened to the location of the finish line, and that hare found the tortoise asleep. The story shows that many people's natural abilities are well-suited to a task, but out of laziness and hesitation the abilities are ruined; but by effort and patience many overcome natural abilities.

Translated from this Greek text: Emile Chambry, *Aesopi fabulae*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1925-1926, 2 vol.
This is fable variant 353.2 (Chambry's 1925-1926 edition), a variant of fable 352 (in Chambry's renumbered 1927 edition). Chambry suggests the 6th century for the verse recension containing this fable variant (Emile Chambry, *Ésope: Fables*, Paris, 1927, lii), whereas Perry suggests the 4th-5th century (Ben Edwin Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, Harvard UP, 1965, xvii, note 2).

The City Mouse and the Country Mouse

Satires 2.6.79-117

HORACE (65 BC–8 BC)

translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

Once upon a time, they say,
There was a country mouse,
Who had a city mouse to stay
In his small burrow-house.

The host, with all he'd set apart,
Lived in no luxury
So he could open up his heart
In hospitality.

The saved-up chickpeas and the grains,
He did not hold them back.
He brought him raisins, all his gains,
And bacon as a snack.

He knew his choosy city friend
And hoped a varied plate
Would win him over. — In the end,
The town mouse hardly ate.

The host, stretched in the straw to rest,
Ate farro and some rye,
Left what was best out for his guest.
His guest made this reply.

He said, "This wild and rugged wood—
Now, wouldn't you prefer
The city's people? For what good
Is it to just endure?

"Live with the blessings that life brings!
You can't outrun the end,
So journey to more pleasant things—
And take the road, my friend!"

The country mouse bounds from his house,
So stirred, he heard the call.
He creeps in with the city mouse
Beneath the city wall.

Night fills the sky; they step inside
A house of luxury
Where tapestries lie crimson-dyed
On seats of ivory.

And many dishes still remain
On one side, cleared away
In heaps the baskets can't contain,
From feasting yesterday.

The country mouse receives a seat
On rose-red tapestry;
The city mouse stays on his feet,
And serves with courtesy.

The ready host runs to and fro
To serve course after course,
And tastes each one so as to know
The savor from the source.

Rejoicing at his change of fate,
Reclining at his rest,
The country mouse enjoys the state
Of the delighted guest.

Then suddenly an awful bang
Came from the folding door
And drove them from their seats; they sprang
To flee across the floor.

Gone mad with fear, they hear the house
Resound with barking sounds
That terrify each shaking mouse—
Those are Molossian hounds!

"I do not need this life—goodbye!"
Declares the country mouse.
"I'll take my common grain in my
Secure old burrow-house."

chickpeas / vetches: The translation depends on whether *ciceris* is plural dative of *cicera* (a vetch, or wild pea, similar to the chickpea), or singular genitive of *cicer* (chickpea), here freely translated with a plural. Though *invidit* (envied or grudged) can take the dative, Lewis and Short cite this line as an example of *invidit* taking the genitive in poetry (s.v. *invideo*). (*Avenae*, oat, also not grudged by the country mouse, could be either dative or genitive.)

grains / long oats: The prose translation "long oats" is more literal.

raisins / a dry plum: Aridum… acinum could be a dry berry or dry grape.

bacon: lardi, bacon or lard.

farro / spelt: Lewis and Short translate *ador* as "spelt." The English word "farro" is sometimes used to include a range of similar grains including spelt.

rye / darnel: Darnel (*lolium*) resembles wheat but is not safe for human consumption. It is a kind of ryegrass, but it is not the same as the rye that is grown as a crop.

Molossian hounds / mastiff dogs: Molossian hounds, now extinct, were an ancient Greek dog breed valued for being large and fierce. Some have claimed that mastiffs are descended from them.

common grain / homely tares: Bitter vetch (*ervo*) is a legume whose grains are so bitter that humans boil them with multiple changes of water to remove the bitterness.

Notes: AFM

A more literal translation in prose (C. Smart):
On a time a country-mouse is reported to have received a city-mouse into his poor cave, an old host, his old acquaintance; a blunt fellow and attentive to his acquisitions, yet so as he could [on occasion] enlarge his narrow soul in acts of hospitality. What need of many words? He neither grudged him the hoarded vetches, nor the long oats; and bringing in his mouth a dry plum, and nibbled scraps of bacon, presented them to him, being desirous by the variety of the supper to get the better of the daintiness of his guest, who hardly touched with his delicate tooth the several things: while the father of the family himself, extended on fresh straw, ate a spelt and darnel, leaving that which was better [for his guest]. At length the citizen addressing him, 'Friend,' says he, 'what delight have you to live laboriously on the ridge of a rugged thicket? Will you not prefer men and the city to the savage woods? Take my advice, and go along with me: since mortal lives are allotted to all terrestrial animals, nor is there any escape from death, either for the great or the small. Wherefore, my good friend, while it is in your power, live happy in joyous circumstances: live mindful of how brief an existence you are.' Soon as these speeches had wrought upon the peasant, he leaps nimbly from his cave: thence they both pursue their intended journey, being desirous to steal under the city walls by night. And now the night possessed the middle region of the heavens, when each of them set foot in a gorgeous palace, where carpets dyed with crimson grain glittered upon ivory couches, and many baskets of a magnificent entertainment remained, which had yesterday been set by in baskets piled upon one another. After he had placed the peasant then, stretched at ease, upon a splendid carpet; he bustles about like an adroit host, and keeps bringing up one dish close upon another, and with an affected civility performs all the ceremonies, first tasting of every thing he serves up. He, reclined, rejoices in the change of his situation, and acts the part of a boon companion in the good cheer: when on a sudden a prodigious rattling of the folding doors shook them both from their couches. Terrified they began to scamper all about the room, and more and more heartless to be in confusion, while the lofty house resounded with [the barking of] mastiff dogs; upon which, says the country-mouse, 'I have no desire for a life like this; and so farewell: my wood and cave, secure from surprises, shall with homely tares comfort me.'

Prose translation of Horace: The Works of Horace. *Edited by C. Smart. Philadelphia. Joseph Whetham. 1836. Perseus Digital Library. (Emendation: a hyphen has been added to "countrymouse.")*

Potter text and illustrations: Beatrix Potter. The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse. *New York. Frederick Warne & Co. 1918.* Wikisource.

The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse

BEATRIX POTTER (1918)

To Aesop in the Shadows

Johnny Town-Mouse was born in a cupboard. Timmy Willie was born in a garden. Timmy Willie was a little country mouse who went to town by mistake in a hamper. The gardener sent vegetables to town once a week by carrier; he packed them in a big hamper.

The gardener left the hamper by the garden gate, so that the carrier could pick it up when he passed. Timmy Willie crept in through a hole in the wickerwork, and after eating some peas—Timmy Willie fell fast asleep.

He awoke in a fright, while the hamper was being lifted into the carrier's cart. Then there was a jolting, and a clattering of horse's feet; other packages were thrown in; for miles and miles—jolt—jolt—jolt! and Timmy Willie trembled amongst the jumbled up vegetables.

At last the cart stopped at a house, where the hamper was taken out, carried in, and set down. The cook gave the carrier sixpence; the back door banged, and the cart rambled away. But there was no quiet; there seemed to be hundreds of carts passing. Dogs barked; boys whistled in the street; the cook laughed, the parlour maid ran up and down-stairs; and a canary sang like a steam engine.

Timmy Willie, who had lived all his life in a garden, was almost frightened to death. Presently the cook opened the hamper and began to unpack the vegetables. Out sprang the terrified Timmy Willie.

Up jumped the cook on a chair, exclaiming "A mouse! a mouse! Call the cat! Fetch me the poker, Sarah!" Timmy Willie did not wait for Sarah with the poker; he rushed along the skirting board till he came to a little hole, and in he popped.

He dropped half a foot, and crashed into the middle of a mouse dinner party, breaking three glasses.—"Who in the world is this?" inquired Johnny Town-mouse. But after the first exclamation of surprise he instantly recovered his manners.

With the utmost politeness he introduced Timmy Willie to nine other mice, all with long tails and white neckties. Timmy Willie's own tail was insignificant. Johnny Town-mouse and his friends noticed it; but they were too well bred to make personal remarks; only one of them asked Timmy Willie if he had ever been in a trap?

The dinner was of eight courses; not much of anything, but truly elegant. All the dishes were unknown to Timmy Willie, who would have been a little afraid of tasting them; only he was very hungry, and very anxious to behave with company manners. The continual noise upstairs made him so nervous, that he dropped a plate. "Never mind, they don't belong to us," said Johnny.

"Why don't those youngsters come back with the dessert?" It should be explained that two young mice, who were waiting on the others, went skirmishing upstairs to the kitchen between courses. Several times they had come tumbling in, squeaking and laughing; Timmy Willie learnt with horror that they were being chased by the cat. His appetite failed, he felt faint. "Try some jelly?" said Johnny Town-mouse.

"No? Would you rather go to bed? I will show you a most comfortable sofa pillow."

The sofa pillow had a hole in it. Johnny Town-mouse quite honestly recommended it as the best bed, kept exclusively for visitors. But the sofa smelt of cat. Timmy Willie preferred to spend a miserable night under the fender.

It was just the same next day. An excellent breakfast was provided—for mice accustomed to eat bacon; but Timmy Willie had been reared on roots and salad. Johnny Town-mouse and his friends racketted about under the floors, and came boldly out all over the house in the evening. One particularly loud crash had been caused by Sarah tumbling downstairs with the tea-tray; there were crumbs and sugar and smears of jam to be collected, in spite of the cat.

Timmy Willie longed to be at home in his peaceful nest in a sunny bank. The food disagreed with him; the noise prevented him from sleeping. In a few days he grew so thin that Johnny Town-mouse noticed it, and questioned him. He listened to Timmy Willie's story and inquired about the garden. "It sounds rather a dull place? What do you do when it rains?"

"When it rains, I sit in my little sandy burrow and shell corn and seeds from my Autumn store. I peep out at the throstles and blackbirds on the lawn, and my friend Cock Robin. And when the sun comes out again, you should see my garden and the flowers—roses and pinks and pansies—no noise except the birds and bees, and the lambs in the meadows."

"There goes that cat again!" exclaimed Johnny Town-mouse. When they had taken refuge in the coal-cellar he resumed the conversation; "I confess I am a little disappointed; we have endeavoured to entertain you, Timothy William."

"Oh yes, yes, you have been most kind; but I do feel so ill," said Timmy Willie.

"It may be that your teeth and digestion are unaccustomed to our food; perhaps it might be wiser for you to return in the hamper."

"Oh? Oh!" cried Timmy Willie.

"Why of course for the matter of that we could have sent you back last week," said Johnny rather huffily—"did you not know that the hamper goes back empty on Saturdays?"

So Timmy Willie said goodbye to his new friends and hid in the hamper with a crumb of cake and a withered cabbage leaf; and after much jolting, he was set down safely in his own garden.

Sometimes on Saturdays he went to look at the hamper lying by the gate, but he knew better than to get in again. And nobody got out, though Johnny Town-mouse had half promised a visit.

The winter passed; the sun came out again; Timmy Willie sat by his burrow warming his little fur coat and sniffing the smell of violets and spring grass. He had nearly forgotten his visit to town. When up the sandy path all spick and span with a brown leather bag came Johnny Town-mouse!

Timmy Willie received him with open arms. "You have come at the best of all the year, we will have herb pudding and sit in the sun."

"H'm'm! it is a little damp," said Johnny Town-mouse, who was carrying his tail under his arm, out of the mud.

“What is that fearful noise?" he started violently.

“That?” said Timmy Willie, “that is only a cow; I will beg a little milk, they are quite harmless, unless they happen to lie down upon you. How are all our friends?”

Johnny’s account was rather middling. He explained why he was paying his visit so early in the season; the family had gone to the seaside for Easter; the cook was doing spring cleaning, on board wages, with particular instructions to clear out the mice. There were four kittens, and the cat had killed the canary.

“They say we did it; but I know better,” said Johnny Town-mouse. “Whatever is that fearful racket?”

“That is only the lawn-mower; I will fetch some of the grass clippings presently to make your bed. I am sure you had better settle in the country, Johnny.”

“H’m’m—we shall see by Tuesday week; the hamper is stopped while they are at the sea-side.”

“I am sure you will never want to live in town again,” said Timmy Willie.

But he did. He went back in the very next hamper of vegetables; he said it was too quiet!!

One place suits one person, another place suits another person. For my part I prefer to live in the country, like Timmy Willie.