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·THE·HISTORY·OF·
·REYNARD·THE·FOX·

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A



REYNARD THE FOX AT THE COURT
OF THE LION KING NOBEL



THE HISTORY OF
REYNARD THE FOX

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF
HIS FRIENDS AND ENEMIES
TURNED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
BY F. S. ELLIS § § §
WITH ILLUSTRATIVE DEVICES
BY WALTER CRANE § .



LONDON · DAVID · NUTT · § ·
· 270 · 271 · STRAND · MDCCCXCVII · §

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Reynard the Fox

THE · HISTORY · OF · REYNARD · THE
FOX · HIS · FRIENDS · AND · HIS
ENEMIES. HIS · CRIMES · HAIR-
BREADTH · ESCAPES · AND · FINAL
TRIUMPH. A · METRICAL · VERSION
OF · THE · OLD · ENGLISH · TRANS-
LATION · WITH · GLOSSARIAL · NOTES
IN · VERSE · BY · F · S · ELLIS · WITH
DEVICES · BY · WALTER · CRANE

DAVID NUTT, 270, STRAND

LONDON

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CONCERNING THE STORY OF REYNARD THE FOX.

SINCE the author printed his version of "Reynard the Fox" in 1894, he has so often been asked, "What is the origin of the story?" that he determined whenever the book was re-written it should be accompanied by a full and complete dissertation on the literary history of Reynard, and thereto evoked the aid of one of the chief authorities on the subject. But when the account came to be fully set out, which should trace Reynard back to the beginning of his literary life, verily the story appeared to have as many obscure corners, twistings and turnings, complications, intricacies, and doubtful passages, as were to be found in his own stronghold of Malperdy, whereof we shall hear anon.

It has therefore been deemed advisable to put no more introduction to a book, the prime object of which is the amusement of the reader, than may be readily apprehended, and as lightly digested as were Reynard's two pigeons in chapter twenty-eight.

Suffice it to say here that scholars who have made a special study of the subject are agreed as to the extreme antiquity of stories and apologues concerning the subtlety and wiliness of the Fox, an antiquity, greater perhaps than that of literature itself.

That the origin of the story is Indo-European seems to be allowed on all hands, but whether France or Germany can lay the better claim to the building up of the legends in Europe is still a moot point.

The history of the text upon which the present version is founded, is shortly this: About the year 1250 an author)

named Willem put together the story in Flemish verse from the various legends and tales then current. A little more than a hundred years later, about 1375, it was re-written, and a second part or sequel added, by an author whose name is unknown. This was subsequently turned into Dutch prose, and ultimately printed at Gouda in Holland by Gerard Leeu in 1479. Scholars have decided that Caxton did not make use of this edition for his translation, but of some manuscript or printed version which is no longer extant. The variations, however, between Caxton's original and the Gouda edition of 1479 are of no great moment. Upon the edition printed by Caxton in 1481 and worthily reproduced at the Kelmscott Press in 1892 the present version is founded.

Those who desire to study the subject in all its fullness and detail, must be content to await the learned treatise on the literary genesis and evolution of Reynard promised by Professor Logeman by way of introduction to his projected critical edition of Caxton's translation.

The author is desirous that the version now printed should be considered as altogether superseding that which he published in 1894.

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HIDDEN within this story men may find
Good learning, parables, and points diverse,
Which every man should mark who hath a mind
To master subtle knowledge (and the curse
O'ercome, which mankind mostly doth immerse
In ignorance and blindness), taught such things
As wise men utter in the courts of Kings

Or lordly prelates when they council hold,
Or where grave merchants meet to sift their cares,
Or common folk foregathering on the wold
To plain the hard dull lot of him who wears
His life in servitude and hardly fares
From birth till death's release. Good help and meed
This book shall give to all who rightly read :

For he who readeth it, or lists it read,
May gather witting of the base deceit
Wherewith the world doth cozen goodlihead ;
Not with the purpose cozenage to repeat
Against his fellows, but such things to weet
As serve for safeguard against wily shrews,
Eschewing warily the arts they use.

And he who will good understanding gain
Of all this matter, earnestly and well,
With humble heart must con this book, and fain

I

B

Proem.

Shall he then grow past power of words to tell,
Hoping for Heaven, and fearing nought of Hell.
But one short reading no man will suffice
To gather up fair wisdom's pearls of price,

Which, sought with pains, will yield a rich reward
To those who treasure them with care and love.
And many a gold-worth lesson will afford
This tale to him who through life's storms would
move

With calm content, ah! surely shall he prove
Sweetness untold, despite the world's annoy,
And passing hence find heaven's unending joy.





HOW THE LION KING NOBEL
SENT OUT HIS MANDEMENT
THAT ALL BEASTS SHOULD
COME TO HIS COURT. ❧❧

'T WAS near the days of Pentecost,
When woods grow green, and Winter's frost
Is clean forgot ; when fragrant flowers
Bedeck the meadows, brakes, and bowers,
Yet once again, and every tree
Resounds with gladsome harmony
Of joyous birds, who sweetly sing
Welcome to springtide's burgeoning,
That Nobel, Lion-King, and Lord
O'er every beast that treads the sward,
Made known his will to hold High Court
While dured the Feast, and bade resort
Thither, all those who humbly bowed
Beneath his sceptre ; straight a crowd
Of lieges gathered, great and small,
To keep the glorious festival
Proclaimed by heralds ; nor was one
Absent therefrom, except alone
The Fox, within whose bosom grew
Alarm for crimes whereof he knew
His hands right guilty. Small desire
He therefore had to face the ire
Of those who justly might complain
His theft and trespass, but full fain
Was he to hide his head ; and when
The King of Beasts appeared in ken
Of all his subjects, quickly rose
A storm of wrath from Reynard's foes

I. The King
holds Court.

While each from out his breast unlocks
Some long-pent grief against the Fox.



FIRST spoke the grey wolf Isegrym,
Whose eager eye and quivering limb
Betrayed his wrath : loud cried he : " Friends,
Before this Court I claim amends
Against the Fox, for crimes so great
(Devised and done with spiteful hate
Toward me and mine), that, when I speak
Thereof, all words sound vain and weak.
Give ear, most just and noble lord,
Whilst I with aching heart record
How Reynard hath destroyed my life :
For not alone my well-loved wife
Hath he insulted, but with mind
To mar my lineage, sought to blind
My three dear children as they lay
In bed.

Forthwith was set a day,
When Reynard forth should come and swear,
By holy saints, that he had ne'er
Thereof been guilty, but when brought
Forth was the sacred book, he thought
Him otherwise, and straightway stole
Back to his thievish lurking hole,
Crying that naught he set thereby.
Dear King, all this is openly
Beknown to many a beast who stands
Before thee here : Nay, more ! his hands

Are stained by evil deeds, which blot
 His life in such wise, that I wot
 No man exists whose tongue could tell
 All that I leave untold : so fell
 The trespass is that he hath done
 Against my wife, that while the sun
 Doth light the heavens no power shall save
 The Fox from that revenge I crave."

II. The Wolf
 complains.



AS ceased the Wolf, a hush profound
 Fell o'er the Court, when lo! a hound,
 Courtoys to wit, stood forth, and spake.
 "I, too," quoth he : "complaint would make
 Of Reynard Fox, who all the store,
 Laid up against the winter frore,
 Stole from my garner, so that I
 Of hunger's pangs scarce failed to die
 Through his most base misdeed."

Hereat,

Sprang sharply forward Tybert Cat,
 Whose swelling tail bespoke his ire,
 While flashed his grey-green eyes with fire,
 As cried he : "Gracious Lord and King,
 'Tis doubtless true that men may bring,
 With justice, many a charge of crime
 Against the Fox, but ill doth chime
 This plaint of Courtoys in mine ears ;
 'Tis but a tale of long past years,
 And I, not he, have right to make

III. Courtoys'
ill sort.

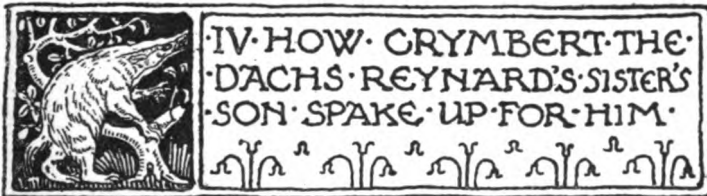
Complaint thereof; the hound did take
From me that sausage which by night
I from the Miller won, despite
His watchful care, while sound he slept.
Courtoys in claiming it, outstept
The bounds of truth;—except through me
He had therein no property.”

“ THOUGH Courtoys be to blame for this,”
Exclaimed the Panther, “ strange it is
That thou, O Tybert, shouldst appear
To shelter Reynard, when 'tis clear,
Past doubt or question, he hath been
A thief and murderer; well I ween
That in this world no man doth live
To whom he would in kindness give
The meanest gift: nay, though the King
Had direst need, no single thing
This thief would do to help or save
His life or worship; but the grave
Might o'er him close, without a sigh
From Reynard, could he win thereby
Some base advantage. List ye now
The tale of Cuwaert Hare: a vow
Did Reynard make that he would teach
The guileless creature how to preach
And say his *Credo*, so that he
Might one day fill a chaplaincy.
Betwixt his legs he made him sit,
And *Credo, Credo* cry: as it
Rose through the air I passed along,
And wondering much to hear that song,
Drew near the spot, and scarce need say
That once again his wonted play
The Fox enacted; soon he ceased
His task to teach the simple beast

How he should sing his *Credo* note,
And grasped him tightly by the throat.
M^{ost} haply, in the nick of time
I came to save him, or the crime
Had been fulfilled—behold! still fresh,
The wound that scores his tender flesh.

“Great King it is for thee to stretch
The hand of justice o’er this wretch,
Lest you, and all your royal race,
In shielding crime, should share disgrace.”

“Ye speak, Sir Panther, wholesome truth,”
Cried Isegrym, “it were, forsooth,
Idle to waste more words, this night
I fain would see the gallows dight
For Reynard, that his crimes surcease
Might give the world new rest, and peace.”



UPROSE in haste then Grymbert Dachs,
Exclaiming: “Sorely doth it tax
Temper and patience thus to hear
Foul charges made against my dear
Good Uncle Reynard: dost thou deem
That thou may’st slander thus mine Eme,
O Isegrym, while silent I,
His loving kinsman, stand anigh
And nought reprove? That saw doth tell
Good truth, which saith: ‘But rarely well
Speaketh a foeman’s mouth’; right glad

IV. The
Dachs
explains.

Were I if trial could be had
Betwixt ye twain : then should we see
Which best deserved upon a tree
To end his days. Stood Reynard near
Our gracious Lord, and had his ear
As thou hast had, then doubt I not
The case were changed, for well I wot,
Thy crimes made known, dismay would seize
Thy dastard heart, and on thy knees
Thou straight wouldst fall, and 'mercy' cry,
Convict of lies, and treachery.
How oft your sharp, white, grinning teeth
With cruel grip have met beneath
My dearest Uncle's russet fell,
A busy tongue 'twould need to tell.
But of more crimes than this I trow,
Justice demands the Court should know
The legend : did ye not misdo
When Reynard flung the plaice to you
From out the cart? Didst thou not eat
His share, thou base-born hungry cheat,
Leaving but prickly bone and gristle,
Dry, hard, and tasteless as a thistle?
Recall to mind that bacon fitch
My Uncle stole, and ye so rich
And dainty found, that all alone
You gulped it down, nor left one bone
To stay his hunger. Was it fair
That, when he claimed a modest share,
Ye laughing cried, with mocking scorn :
'Nay, Reynard ! look not so forlorn,
But if thou wilt, come take thy part
From out my gullet ;' and did dart
Therewith an angry murderous scowl,
Set off with such a threatening growl,
As well might scare him? And I deem

No scrap of that fair flitch my Eme
E'er tasted, though at risk of life
He gat it, when the farmer's wife
A sack threw o'er him. Can ye trust
One who hast proved himself unjust,
Treachurous, and selfish past belief ;
A rogue ingrained ; a common thief ?
What trash this fable of the strife
In days long past, about his wife !
Reynard paid court to her, while she
Received his love with courtesy ;
And Isegrym in truth were wise,
Such foolish scandal to despise,
Instead of scattering far and wide
A slanderous tale that well might bide
Forgotten. Then of Cuwaert Hare,
Good Heavens ! to think how great a scare
Is raised, because an idle scholar
Was gently shaken by the collar !
Shall truants rest then, unreclaimed,
Their faults excused, their masters blamed ?

Courtoys has dared to make complaint,
(As though he were himself a saint)
That he some winter store hath lost,
Laid up with special care and cost.
Well had he done thereof to hold
His peace, for, let the truth be told,
He did but steal it—thus, pardee,

Male quesisti et male

Perdidisti, in English done :

'Thou ill hast lost what ill was won'—

Who blameth Reynard, for this deft

And fair reprisal, made on theft ?

His action simply was to levy

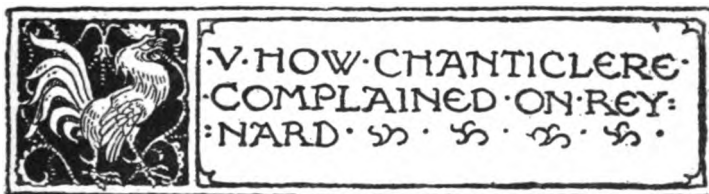
Distraint in manner of replevy ;

IV. The
Dachs
explains.

A righteous deed. All those who know
The law, right readily will trow
My dearest Eme (as man of worth,
Untainted honour, and high birth)
Scorned stolen goods, nor had misdome
To slay Courtoys outright—for none
Thereof could blame him—but he knew.
Too well what high respect is due
To legal form, and left the hound
Unscathed, who well were hanged or drowned.
Alas! What thanks, then, hath he gained?
Nay, none; yet nobly hath disdained
To answer slander, for a true
And gentle heart is his. But few
Hate falsehood like to him. He lives
A saintly hermit life, and gives
Heed to his priest's advice. No more
He hunts and fishes as of yore,
Nor taketh food but once a day,
Vowing henceforth to put away
From off his table all flesh meat.
With strictest penance doth he treat
His chastened body, and doth wear
Against his flesh a shirt of hair.
But yesterday I heard it said,
By some who know him well, that dead
He is to earthly joys. A cell
He builds, as anchorite to dwell,
Where once stood Castle Malperdy.
For winning gold no longer he
Hath lust, but cheerfully doth live
On such poor alms as men may give
To serve bare needs. He pale doth wax
With fast and prayer, which sorely tax
His strength, and humbly 'neath the sod
Desires to rest, at peace with God."

As Grymbert boldly spake these words,
 Broke on their view a troop of birds,
 A-wending towards them down the hill ;
 Chanticleere leads, while loud and shrill
 Their wail of woe resounds ; a bier
 Is seen—as slowly draw they near
 The wondering Court—on which lies dead
 A hen of fairest plume, whose head
 The Fox hath bitten off. They sing
 Sad funeral dirges, while they bring
 Before the Court their deep distress,
 And Reynard's untold gracelessness.

IV. The
 Dachs
 explains.



THEN forth stood Chanticleere, and smote
 Sadly his wings, the while his throat
 Gave out a loud and piteous cry.
 Beside the bier stood mournfully,
 Two fair young hens, the sisters twain
 Of her by ruthless Reynard slain,
 This Crayant, and that Cantart, hight.
 Each bare in hand a taper bright,
 Of whitest wax. No finer hens,
 Between fair Flanders and Ardennes,
 E'er scratched or cackled. "Welaway!"
 They cried, and "Ah! woe worth the day!"
 Two plump-fed pullets bore the bier,
 Who so bemoaned their mother dear
 That far and wide their grief was heard:
 And thus the sorrowful train appeared

V. The Cock
laments.

Before the King.

Then Chanticleere

Exclaimed : " Great Lord, we pray thee hear
What scathe thy loving friends, who stand
Before thee, suffer at the hand
Of Reynard Fox :

In April last,
When spring o'er earth began to cast
Her robe of green, I proudly walked
Abroad, and with my children talked,
Boasting the long drawn lineage we
Could claim, and praised our ancestry.
My noble brood I deemed unmatched,
For never finer birds were hatched
Than my fifteen ; dear daughters seven,
As bright and fair as though from Heaven
They claimed descent, and eight stout sons,
Of blood as true as that which runs
In royal veins. We safely dwelt
Within a well-walled yard, and felt
Secure, unharassed by a doubt
Of prowling beasts of prey. Without
Our high-walled yard there stood a shed
Wherein six stalwart dogs were fed,
Whose deep mouthed baying gave alarm,
And thus, exempt from fear of harm,
We lived content. Hereat so great
The Fox's envy grew, and hate
So deep and deadly filled his mind,
That day and night he strove to find
Some means whereby to scale the yard ;
And though our vigilance debarred
His schemes awhile, his soul became
At last quite mad, and all aflame
With hot desire ; but if anigh
He came our trusty dogs would fly

So fiercely at him, that sweat broke
From out his fell as thick as smoke.

“No stomach had he more to climb
Our wall, and quit were we long time
Of Reynard's face, till clad in weed
Of hermit coming: ‘Prithee, read,’
Quoth he, ‘for love and charity,
This letter,’ and displayed to me
A scroll, which bore your royal crest
And coat of arms in wax impressed.
Therein 'twas written that the King
Most earnestly desired to bring
All birds and beasts, throughout the realm,
Of which 'tis his to guide the helm,
In sweet accord and loving peace.
It bade all strife forthwith to cease,
And said: ‘let none henceforth scathe other
But dwell as brother should with brother.’

The Fox declared that he no more
In riot lived, as heretofore,
Nor e'er again would rob and roister,
But hermit-like, within a cloister,
Would penance do for past misdeeds,
With sighs and tears, and tell his beads
Morn, noon, and night, for now he meant
To pass as humble penitent
His few remaining years. His gown,
Made pilgrim fashion, fell adown
Below his ankles, and he ware
Beneath his robe, a shirt of hair,
Rough, hard, and knotted. ‘Now,’ quoth he
‘No more ye need have fear of me,
Sir Chanticleere; plain haws and hips
Alone henceforth shall pass my lips,
Varied, on feasts, by barley bread.

V. The Cock
laments.

Already do I feel the thread
Of life is worn, and near the goal
My steps approach, therefore my soul
I needs must think on, and but long
To say sext, none, and evensong,
And compline, lauds, and tierce, and prime,
Day in, day out, and thus my time
In pious works and prayers to spend,
With hope to make a blessed end.'

"As thus he spake—and 'neath a thorn
Lay down to rest—no child new-born
Could seem more guileless. Then a book
From out his vest he drew, with look
So grave and studious, that I thought
The way of holy life he sought
Within its pages. Therefore, gay
And blithe of heart, I went my way,
And crowing, strolled without the wall
In careless ease. My cheerful call
Brought sons and daughters round in haste,
And forth we strutted o'er the waste
By fear unchecked.

List now the hate
Of this false saint, and how, to sate
His ravening maw, he broke the truce
Thy law proclaimed. On some excuse
He came abroad, and as we stept
Across the green sward, slyly crept
Behind a bush, and quickly snapped
One of my children, which he clapped
Within his wallet, and since then
For cockerel, pullet, chick, or hen,
He hourly watches; horns and hounds
He scorns in suchwise, that no bounds
His ravin knows. Erewhile, fifteen

Fair children knew me, now are seen
To answer to my call, but four.
Well may'st thou judge, great King, what sore,
Keen sorrow racks my breast—see here
My daughter Coppen on her bier,
By Reynard slain but yesterday.
For burial was she snatched away
From out his clutches by our friends,
The guardian dogs. Dear Lord, here ends
My piteous tale ; I leave to thee
The Fox's doom and penalty.”

V. The Cock
laments.





·VI·HOW·THE·KING·SPAKE·
·TOUCHING·CHANTICLERE'S·
·COMPLAINT· ♫ · ♫ · ♫ ·

BURST forth the King—whose wrath did wax
Exceeding hot—"Sir Grymbert Dachs,
What say ye now to this recluse,
Your sainted Eme? A paltry ruse
Appears this tale of fast and prayer,
But hither shall the culprit fare,
Ere twice the sun sinks 'neath the sea,
To answer for his crime. Thy plea,
Good Chanticlere, is witness strong
Against the Fox, and thou ere long
Shalt be avenged. The Church's rites
Shall honour Coppen, and with lights
And incense, shall be sadly sung
Her vigil, while with pomp among
Her kin, shall she be laid to earth."

Then hushed was every sound of mirth,
While all in sad procession go,
Singing *Placebo Domino*,
With psalms, and versicles, and prayers,
Thereto belonging. Pious cares
Of vigil done, and commendation
Said o'er, with funeral oration,
The corse within the pit was laid.
Above, a noble tomb was made
Of purest marble, spotless white,
Than glass more clear, than pearl more bright,
And, deeply cut in during stone,

Her name and fate these words made known :

VI. The
King's good
word.

“Beneath the earth deep dolven, here
Lies Coppen, child of Chanticlere :
Reft of sweet life before her time
Was she, by Reynard Fox's crime.
Reader, not wasted were thy breath
In one short sigh o'er her sad death.”

THE King then summoned round him wise
And learned men, who should advise
How past all doubt these murders might
Be proved against the Fox, and Right
Once more hold sway throughout the land.

Ere long went forth the royal command,
That Reynard must appear before
The Court in person, and no more,
For cause or quip, should he refrain
From coming thither, under pain
Of hangman's rope.

Then Bruin Bear
Was charged that he with wisest care
Should do the message.

Quoth the King :

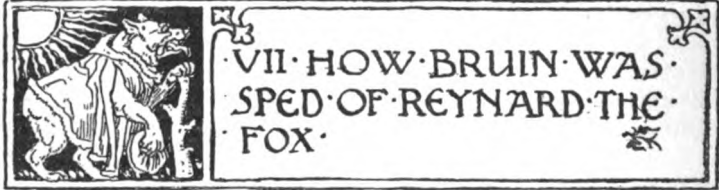
“Sir Bruin, thine it is to bring
The culprit hither, be thou steeled,
Both ear and heart, against him : yield
No trust or credence to his smiles,
Sly, crafty speech, or flattering wiles :
For doubt thou not that he will try
On thee some scheme of treachery :
Long have I known him for a shrew,
Fairspoken, but of heart untrue.”

QUOTH Bruin : “Good, my Lord, let be,

VI. The
King's good
word.

Think you this thief deceiveth me?
Or dost thou deem that I so ill
Have learned my lesson, that the skill
I lack to snare a Fox?"

So fared
He forth with merry heart, prepared
To brave the foe : assurance vain !
Less joyous he returned amain.



FORTH started Bruin on his way,
Rejoicing, light of heart, and gay
As bird in spring, and well assured
That by no Fox could he be lured,
To fault or folly, or could be
O'ermatched in craft, and subtlety.
The season was of opening June :
The blackbird's note, the ringdove's croon,
Sounded o'erhead, and far around
Fair flowers bedecked each hedgerow mound,
The hawthorn whitened every brake
Wherefrom the winds sweet odour take,
Ere pass they whispering through the sedge,
Beside the brimming river's edge,
Oft murmuring lovers' hopes and fears,
As erst they told of Midas' ears.
Hyacinth bells of purple deep,
Awaked once more from winter sleep,
And nature all, in wood and fell,
For spring-tide's wake, kept festival.

Blind to the joys of waning spring,
And deaf to birds' sweet carolling,
Sped Bruin onward, till he stood
Within a thick-grown darksome wood,
Wherethrough a secret pathway went,
Which Reynard oft-times took, when spent
With close pursuit, and close anigh,
A towering mountain rose, whose high
Steep side he needs must climb, to go
Towards Reynard's stronghold.

Ye must know

That many a dwelling had the Fox,
But here, high up among the rocks,
Was found the safest, and the best
Of all his burrows : once at rest
Within its well-built walls, he lay
Secure and safe, when driven to bay.

Now, when the Bear at last had come,
Before the Fox's mountain home,
Malperdy hight, he found the gate
Fast shut, so on his tail he sate,
In front thereof, and loudly cried :
" Ho ! Reynard—be ye there inside
Your castle wall ? Browning am I,
Sent by the King, to notify
His strict command, that forthwith ye
Appear at Court to make your plea.
He stoutly by his God hath sworn,
That should you this his summons scorn,
And dare refuse with me to go,
To bide his dooming, and to show
Him full submission, it shall cost
You life and good, for either tost
High on the gallows shall ye be,
Or on the rack die wretchedly.

VII. The
Bear's Intents.

Keynard, in time be wisely ruled
By one who hath at Court been schooled
In wit and wisdom : bow thine head
Ere yet the hour of grace be sped."

Lay Reynard just inside the gate,
Stretched forth at length. From tail to pate
He sunned himself, with half shut eye,
And dreamed of merry days gone by,
When no one blamed his loselry.
But when he heard the Bear begin
This speech, at once he sought to win
One of the cryptic spots, which he
Had wrought in castle Malperdy.
For this strong fortress, sooth to say,
Had many a dark and hidden way,
Narrow and crooked, short and long,
Designed to make all those go wrong
Who sought the Fox against his will :
And, if some tracked his steps, he still
Knew secret doors, where in and out,
From hole to hole, he passed about
With furtive steps, and stored his prey
At night-time won, for feast by day.

THEN mused the Fox, how might he bring
The Bear to grievous suffering
And deep disgrace, the while he bode
In worship, lightened of the load
Of chastisement, his meed and due.

Having this worthy aim in view,
He issued forth, and cried : " Dear Eme,
Ye be right welcome ! if it seem
That when ye called I tarried long,
Believe me well, 'twas evensong

Held my attention at the time.
 But surely he who made one climb
 O'er this long hill, of your high rank,
 From me shall win but slender thank.
 The road is steep, and hot, and dreary,
 And grieves my heart to see thee weary,
 O'erworn, and faint, while sore doth reek
 With dust and sweat, thy honoured cheek :
 All needless too was this, for I
 Had come to Court, spontaneously,
 The morrow morn. But less I grieve,
 Seeing that now shall I receive
 Thy comfort, counsel, and support,
 To help my plea before the Court :
 Yet seems it strange the King assigned
 To you this office ; could he find
 No humbler messenger to send
 On such a duty ? Well 'tis kenned
 Of all good men for true, that ye
 Rank next the King for family,
 Great wealth and lands. Ah ! well I would
 That in the Court e'en now we stood,
 As friends and brothers, side by side,
 But find it needful to abide
 At home to-day, through having fared
 On such rich meat, that if I dared
 To walk abroad, 'twere little wonder,
 Though that my belly burst asunder :
 The meat was new, and I for once,
 O'erstepped the bounds of temperance.
 Exclaimed the Bear : " Dear Nephew, say—
 What luscious food did Heaven purvey
 To give you such delight ? " " Dear Eme,"
 The Fox replied, " Small help I deem,
 'Twould be to thee, if I should tell
 The meat that savoureth me so well.

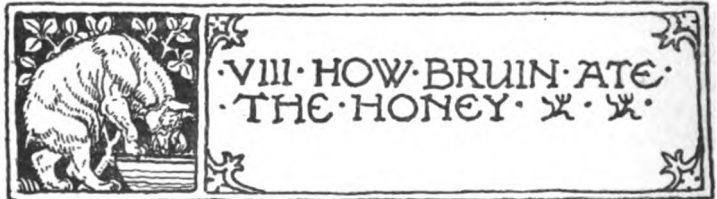
VII. The
Bear's Intents.

VII. The
Bear's Intents.

It is forsooth but simple food,
That suits the simple tastes of rude,
Untutored country folk, who fain
Must be to fill themselves with plain
And homely viands : honeycombs
I made repast on—in the homes
Of poor and hungry men, such fare
Is counted good.”

Cried out the Bear :

“ Reynard ! so little set ye by
Sweet honeycombs ? For my part I
Esteem them foremost of all meat,
Fragrant and luscious, soft and sweet,
Past measure : help me to obtain
Good store thereof, and ye shall gain
My lasting friendship while I live :
Prove only that thy hand can give
Such food in plenteouswise to me,
And count me thine eternally.”



QUOTH Reynard, seemingly agape,
“ Dear Uncle, surely ye but jape ! ”
Cried Bruin, with an oath : “ Nay, nay,
My words are naught of game or play,
But sober truth, no thing is this
Whereof to jest or jape ywis.”

Then spake red Reynard : “ If it be
Truth that ye love so heartily

Fair honeycombs, thou soon shalt hold
A store of luscious, bee-wrought gold,
In such great quantity that ten
Or twelve grown bears might feast, and then
A heap be left ; heaven grant that I
Your friendly help may win thereby."
"Nay ! dearest Nephew," quoth the Bear,
"Such plenty scarce can be, for were
Before me all that is for sale
From here to far off Portingale,
I, Bruin, all alone would eat,
In one great feast, that dainty meat."

Quoth Reynard : " Eme, ye scarcely know
What thing ye say, for I will show
Thine eyes a farmstead, where doth dwell
Lantfert, a husbandman, whose well
Of honey ne'er was known to fail ;
Nay, though ye drank it by the pail,
'Twould not give out for seven long years."
(Hereat the Bear pricked up his ears.)

"Now all this honey without end,
Shalt thou possess, if thou befriend
My cause at Court, and grant to me
Thine aid to foil each enemy."

A solemn oath then Bruin swore,
To be his nephew's friend before
All other men, if so he might
His belly fill, or day or night,
With fragrant bee-borne honey. Laughed
Thereat the shrew, with guileful craft,
And said, "Yea ! soothly, would ye load
Seven Hambro' barrels with that sweet food,
Yet will I pledge me to obtain

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Thy heart's desire, and make thee fain."
So well these words of Reynard pleased
The Bear, that straightway was he seized
With laughter, till he scarce could stand.
Beside him sat the Fox with bland
Deceitful smile, and thought: " Full soon,
Friend Bruin, thou shalt laugh to tune."

Then cried he: " Now no longer may
This matter tarry, let's away:
'Tis meet I work for thy behoof,
And put my friendship to the proof,
Past doubt or question; thou shalt see
That none can act more friendlily.
Of all my lineage lives not one,
Except thine own dear self alone,
For whom I thus would slave and swink."

" Thanks! thanks!" the Bear cried, " but I think
'Tis time we sped—we tarry long."

" Dear Eme," quoth Reynard, " with a strong
Quick pace step forward; follow me,
Thou, ere one hour goes by, shalt see
More honey than thou well canst bear."

The sly Fox bode the evil fare
His foe should find, but that he meant
A gibe, the Bear saw not, but went
With willing steps toward Lantfert's yard.

Now this same Lantfert laboured hard
At woodman's work, and many an oak
And elm he felled with sturdy stroke,
And drew them homewards, to abide

His craftsman's work in wintertide.
Within the yard it happed there lay
A forest king, brought yesterday
From out the wood, wherein he drove
Great wedges, which wide open clove
The massive trunk. Hereof was glad
The wily Fox, for thus he had
A ready snare to hand. Quoth he,
"Dear friend, behold this cloven tree
Whose hollowed body doth contain
Unmeasured honey, which to gain,
You need but place your nose between
This open space, and soon I ween
Will have thy fill : but prithee eat
In sparing wise of this choice meat,
For though the honeycombs be good,
It yet were well ye understood
The need for prudence, lest ye take
Some hurt of body. For my sake
I prithee have a care, lest blame
Fell on my head if evil came
To thee, my friend and guest."

"Nay, nay!"

Cried Bruin, "haste to put away
Such thought, dear Reynard ; dost thou ween
That I, sage Bruin, would be seen
To act a fool's part? moderation
Incumbent is on men of station."
Reynard replied : "Sound, wholesome truth
Thy speech betokeneth well forsooth :
Approach the tree's end now, and creep
Within the cleft."

With lumbering leap
The Bear trod toward the oak in haste,
O'erjoyed to think he soon should taste
The longed-for good ; his pointed nose

VIII. The
Bear's reward. Down thrust he, and his forefeet toes
Set well within the open space ;
Forthwith leapt Reynard toward the place
With lightning speed, and deftly twitched
The wedges forth :—as if bewitched,
The oak sprang to, and held the Bear
With iron grip.

He well may spare
To flatter, threaten, coax, or chide,
Fast in the tree-trap must he bide,
Imprisoned by the base deceit
Of Reynard Fox ; for head nor feet,
No craft or might, can freedom gain.
The foe, of Bruin's misery fain,
With light foot, gained a branching tree
And thence, clear-voiced, sang merrily :

“WHENE'ER you go a Fox to trap,
Bruin! Bruin!
Beware lest you by sad mishap
Catch ruin! ruin!
'Twould seem the Fox has been your match,
Bruin! Bruin!
And set a new-found trap to catch
You in! You in!
No more wilt thou the Fox betray
To ruin! ruin!
Farewell, then, till another day,
Dear Bruin! Bruin!”

The trapped, befooled, outwitted Bear,
Rends the soft drowsy summer air
With dismal howls. He strives to use
His sturdy sinews and strong thews
With such effect as might release
His paws and head, nor doth he cease

To strike the ground with savage beat
Of hinder paws, but both fore-feet,
And head, and ears, are fixed as fast
As though frore winter's fettering blast
Held them ice-bound with iron hand.
Finding force vain, he next with bland
And friendly words essays to coax
His wily foe. Quoth he: "A hoax,
Dear Reynard, surely ye but play
In merry sport; without delay
Thrust in the wedge, and once more free,
Such friendship will I show to thee,
That next beside the King shalt thou
Hold rule, and every beast shall bow
To thy behest."

Loud Reynard laughed,
Rejoiced to see his wiles and craft
Had so far triumphed; then quoth he,
In cruel jest, "It gladdens me
That thou shouldst in that honey find
A banquet suited to thy mind:
But, prithee, Bruin, have a care,
How ye enjoy that luscious fare,
Lest while ye wallow in its wealth
Delight should prove the bane of health,
And sickness follow in such sort
That thou shouldst be debarred from Court.
If I mistake not, on the brink
Of greater joys ye stand; some drink
Thou surely needest, and I see
Good Lantfert coming, doubtless he
A cool draught brings to quench thy thirst;
I trust that he will kindly first
Use well the goodly oaken stick
He bears to push well down the thick
And clammy sweetness, which I fear

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Gives thee misease. No longer here
My goodwill towards thee bids me stay,
But trust thou mayst a pleasant day
With Lantfert spend."

Then cheerily
He trotted off towards Malperdy.

When Lantfert, hard at work indoors,
Caught sound of Bruin's howls and roars,
With haste he seized a stout oak stick
Shod with an iron point, and quick
As lightning ran whence came the din.
Soon as he spied the Bear, "A gryn
Of newest kind," he cried, "is this
Wherein to catch a bear ywis!"
He first with all his might belabours
The helpless beast, and then his neighbours
From round about he runs to call,
With shouts that Bruin's heart appal,
Of, "Hi! run quick, I've caught a bear,
Speed! speed! good friends, the sport to share!"

THROUGHOUT the thorp the tidings rang
Like tocsin call, and each man sprang
To win some weapon; carls and wives
Rushed forth, as though their very lives
Hung on the race: Hal seized a stake
From out the hedge, while Hob a rake
Laid hurried hand on; Giles a broom
Snatched up to help on Bruin's doom;
The priest unto the winds did toss
His book, and seized his long staff-cross,
While quickly followed in his trail,
The clerk, with heavy threshing flail.
Distaff in hand, the priest's wife ran
To watch the sport the while she span:
Young girls, just turning life's first page,

And beldames, who in toothless age
Spelt finis, all would join the fray,
The Bear to bait, tease, maim, or slay :
Against him now is each man's hand
And, friendless, he the brunt must stand.

When Bruin heard the murderous shout
That rose from all this rabble rout,
With mighty wrestling did he strain
Freedom of head and limbs to gain.
His fore-feet freed with one great wrench
From out the knotted oak's firm clench,
He heeded little that his paws
Were spoiled of those defensive claws
That erst had armed them : then one more
Wild, frantic effort, and he tore
His head from out the cleft ; alack !
With loss of ears ! started aback
In panic fear the unhappy beast,
When forthwith Lantfert and the priest
Rushed on him, and from out the folk
A fearful storm of blows thick broke
O'er head and limbs, till death's dread fear
Sickened his brain, as far and near
Fresh foes come hasting, from whose eyes
Gleam glances, murderous as their cries.
Dickon the ploughman left his tillage
And, shouting, ran adown the village,
Coulter in hand : from forth his smithy
Rushed Gervase, snatching from the stithy
A red hot iron ; Wat the baker
Left loaves to burn ; the deaf shoemaker,
Seeing all run, threw down his last,
And hurried forth, his apron cast
Out on the road ; with clumsy gait
Hastes halting Hugelyn, while his mate,

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Old Ludolf, long and broad of nose,
Runs panting, lest the sport should close
Ere he arrives ; with reaping hook
Long fingered Bertolt comes ; a crook
Tall Ottram brings, wherewith to smite
The helpless victim ; strange delight
Find Batkyn and Ave Abelquack,
And old dame Bave, becrooked of back,
And every soul from out each cot—
Young, old, hale, sick, it mattered not,
Each time that they a blow can add,
To wound the Bear and drive him mad.
That fellow feeling held their mind
Was clear, but surely wondrous kind
It made them not, for never yell,
More fearful, burst from fiends of hell,
Than out the stormy crowd arose
Of Bruin's fell bloodthirsting foes.

Once more the Priest led on the fray,
And with his staff-cross made dread play,
While from his heavy threshing flail,
The clerk rained blows like April hail ;
Tall Ottram with his shepherd's crook
Seized the beleaguered beast, who quook
With mortal fear. While Bertolt fast,
Firmhanded, held him, Ludolf cast
A well-aimed spear, whose keen steel point
Found home beneath the shoulder joint.

The victim quivered, groaned, and sighed,
But whatsoe'er of ill betide
Must needs endure. Of all his foes
Stout Lantfert fiercest proved, and rose
His voice o'er all the rout. Then sprang
His brother forth, and wildly flang
His staff athwart sad Bruin's eyes,

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Blinding and maddening in such wise
The wretched creature, that a rush
At random made he through a bush
That grew beside the stream ; there stood
A heap of wives, and in the flood
He drave them toppling off the steep
High bank, within the rolling deep.
Foremost of all, the parson's wife
Was seen to struggle for her life
Within the gurgling tide, and when
Her spouse espied her, quickly then
He lost all lust to bait the Bear,
And cried : " Friends ! friends ! behold ye where
Within the stream my wife is thrown,
And 'neath its wave is like to drown :
O help her ! save her ! if ye may,
And henceforth shall ye from this day
Have full forgiveness, and release
Of all your sins, and Heaven's sweet peace
Bedew your souls." Ye well may wot
That all the crowd at once forgot
The hunting of the struggling beast,
And sought alone to serve their priest.

WHEN Bruin saw that every wight
Forsook his baiting, and the plight
Alone regarded of the wives,
Who strove and struggled for their lives
Like drowning sheep, he too leapt in
And strongly swam, with hope to win
His life and freedom : then with shout
And frantic yell, the priest cried out :
" Come back, false thief, come back, I say."
The Bear swam on, and cried " Nay ! nay !
Call as ye will, I come not back,
Still sounds within mine ears the crack

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Of stones and staves, and mighty fain
Of freedom am I once again."
Most heartily the honey tree
He banned, and cursed the Fox that he
Had so betrayed him that he crept
Fool-like therein, then wildly wept,
Lamenting loss of ears and hood.
Thus grieving, drave he down the flood
A mile or more, then lastly waxed
Aweary, and his strokes relaxed,
Made for the bank and came aland,
His limbs so bruised, he scarce could stand,
But length-long stretched, lay still, and groaned,
And sighed, and bitterly bemoaned
His wretched fate, his breath came quick,
Red blood suffused his eyes, and sick
He felt in head and limb, and cried
As one who recked not though he died.

HEARKEN what next the Fox hath done :
From out of Lantfert's yard hath won
His thievish hand, a well fed hen,
And in his wallet laid her, then
A by-track took he, that he weened
Was known to him alone, well screened
With thickset hedges ; as along
This path he trod a merry song
He tuned, and scarcely could contain
His joy, so blithe of heart and fain
He felt in deeming Bruin dead ;
And cried : " Now have I right well sped,
For he who most opposed and let
My work at Court, is killed, and yet
Wotteth no man the deed was mine,
And therefore doth my heart incline
To merriment." As he spoke these words,

His eyes the Fox cast riverwards,
And spied where Bruin lay at rest.

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Then straightway was his heart oppressed
With grief far greater than before
His joy had been. Vexation tore
His soul, and angrily he chid
At Lantfert, who he deemed had rid
The earth of Bruin :

“ Ah! lewd fool !”

He cried, “ thou hast not in the school
Of wisdom learned. God give to thee
A shameful death, who could not see
The chance thou hadst, but fool-like lost,
Of good bear-venison free of cost,
Unsought, yet placed within thine hand.”
Thus chiding came he to a stand
Near where the wounded Bear lay : bled
The poor sick beast from ears and head,
And whom but Reynard might he thank ?
Then standing near him on the bank
Loud spake the Fox, in cruel scorn :
“ Dear priest, God give you a good morn.”

Within himself the victim cried
“ Ah! ribald thief! would thou hadst died,
Ere thou cam'st hither.” Reynard said :
“ Forgat ye, when in haste ye sped
From Lantfert's yard, ye had not paid
For that rich honey which ye made
So free to feast on? Grievous shame
Such conduct were, and worthy blame
Of all good men. Wilt thou that I
Requite the owner honestly
On thy behalf? Pray found ye nice
And good that honey? Did the price

VIII. The
Bear's reward.

Well suit your purse? Desire ye more
From that exhaustless honey store?
And, dearest Eme, ere hence I go
Indulge my ardent wish to know
What holy order 'tis doth claim
Thy sacred vows? Some house of fame
Dost rule, as Abbot? Have the shears,
Which gave ye tonsure, nipped your ears?
The holy hood which hides your head
Seems, like your gloves, of deep blood-red.
Well fitted art thou, as I ween,
Within the choir to sing Compline."

The Bear with wrathful sorrow heard
These flouting gibes, yet not one word
Of answer deigned, whereas he saw
As yet no means whereby to draw
A worthy vengeance on his foe.
Slowly he turned his face to go
His homeward road, and then the tide
Once more he sought, and soon that side
Where lay the Court, with swimming, wan.
Alas! what troublous thoughts began
Now to assail him; much he fears
That when men note his loss of ears,
His wretched state will prove but sport
To those, who love him not, at Court.
His foremost paws are reft of skin,
And much he doubts his power to win
His goal on foot, yet needs he must,
And sitting upright, through the dust
And mire he strove, and thus progressed
A mile or twain, though sore distressed,
Rolling and wentling as he might.
When first from far he hove in sight,
Much wondered those who saw him, who

Could be this uncouth beast ; none knew
 The late proud envoy, till the King,
 Foremost in this, as everything,
 Exclaimed : " Lord God ! is this the Bear
 Who in such sorry plight doth fare
 Again to Court ? where then hath he
 Been thus entreated shamefully ?
 Both ears he lacks, and o'er his head
 Where skin late was, is he bebled ;
 With what wild set can he have been ?"
 Therewith the Bear cried out : " I ween
 That never since this world was made
 Hath Bear more basely been betrayed."

VIII. The
 Bear's reward.



· IX · THE · COMPLAINT ·
 · OF · THE · BEAR · UPON ·
 · THE · FOX · ♪ · ♪ · ♪ ·

THEN through the beasts who stood in ring,
 Stepped Bruin forth, and said : " O King,
 To thee with earnest voice I cry
 For vengeance on the perfidy
 Of Reynard Fox : behold, I pray,
 How handled have I been this day,
 By base device, while thee I served,
 My body torn, my frame unnerved ;
 My foremost feet bereft of claws,
 My ears shorn off, and both my jaws
 All skinless made."

" Say then how durst,"

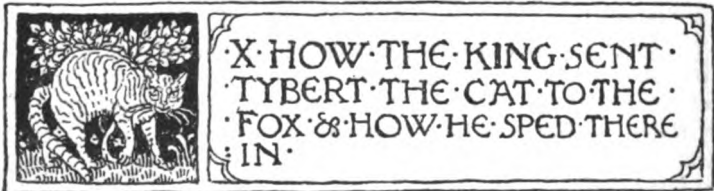
Exclaimed the King, " this beast accurst
 Such crime commit ? Now by my crown
 I swear, that ere two suns go down

IX. The Bear's
ill tale.

Such vengeance on his head shall fall
As Fox ne'er suffered."

Then for all
The wisest beasts he sent, and sought
Advice how justice might be wrought
On Reynard Fox for this great wrong :
And all the council, old and young,
Concluded well it were that he
Were once again dayed instantly
Before the assembly, to abide
Full judgment. Then all voices cried,
"Our will it is that Tybert Cat
Should serve the summons ; Bruin gat,
'Tis true, sore handling, far more fit
To match' the Fox is Tybert's wit
Than mere brute force."

The King, with grave
And solemn nod, approval gave,
And said no choice could better be
In such extreme emergency.



THEN spake the King : " Sir Tybert, thou
Shalt seek out Reynard, as it now
Hath been decreed, and shortly say
That yet a second time hath day
Been set whereon to bring his plea
Before the Court. Although he be
Right fell to other beasts, full trust
He hath in thee, and surely must

Give heed to all that ye advise.
But should he as a fool despise
Thy friendly counsel, say thou then
The King, advised by wisest men,
The third dread warning will declare,
And day him lastly.—Should he dare
Refuse to come e'en then, we will
No longer scruple to fulfil
Stern duty, but hot wrath will deal,
That knows nor mercy nor appeal,
And fire and sword shall ruthless rage
O'er all the Fox-born lineage.”
Spake Tybert then : “ Dear Lord and King,
The men who counsel thee this thing
Are not my friends : what can I do
To hale the Fox? Great King, with true
And earnest heart I humbly call
On thee to send some other ; small
And feeble am I—if the Bear,
Stout, bold, and strong, did evil fare,
And fail to bring him, little hope
Have I with such rude beast to cope.”

“ Nay, nay,” the King said, “ Tybert, ye
Are wise and learned, though ye be
Not big, and oftentimes good craft
With better aim may speed a shaft
Than mightiest strength.”

The Cat replied :
“ Dear Lord, thy will must I abide,
And shoulder set to do this work :
God give me grace, that though it irk
My heart right sorely, yet I may
Achieve the mission.”

Soon the way
Took Tybert towards Malperdy's height,

Tybert's
hard days.

And straightway hove within his sight
Saint Martin's bird—he quickly kens
The fowl of omen, bane of hens—
And cries aloud : “ Hail, gentle bird,
Since thou thy wings turn hitherward,
Oh ! fly the dexter side for luck,
Therefrom may I advantage pluck.”
Alas ! towards the left side flew
The bird, and sadly Tybert knew
Presage of harm : if towards the right
The fowl had flown, all gay and light
The Cat had journeyed, now with sorrow
He wended, fearing lest the morrow
Should bring mishap, yet ne'ertheless
He strove his failing heart to dress
In pleasant hope, as men oft do
Though boding fear their hearts imbue.

Malperdywards then Tybert ran,
And, when the Fox's house he wan,
Found Reynard standing at the gate.
“ The rich God's blessing on you wait,”
Quoth Tybert : “ from the King I come,
Whose menace threatens your life and home,
Unless ye wend with me to Court.”

Replied the Fox : “ May every sort
Of luck and blessing be thy lot,
Dear Tybert.” Thoroughly did he wot
That fairest words are small of cost ;
Yet while he spake his heart was crost
With evil schemes. “ This night,” said he,
“ As guest shalt thou abide with me
And share my homely frugal cheer :
Soon as we see white dawn appear,
Together Courtwards will we hie.

Dear Cousin, speak I truthfully,
Affirming that of all my kin
I love thee best, and hope to win
Thy fond regard. But yesterday
Came Bruin hither ; sooth to say,
I like him not, he looked so shrewd,
Of haughty mien, of manners rude,
Of voice so loud, of form so strong ;
And when he claimed that I along
With him should fare, I said him nay :
Though poor, much liefer would I pay
A thousand marks than with him fare.
But, Cousin, joy 'twill be to share
The road with thee, so soon as dawn
Doth drive drear night from wood and lawn."

X. Tybert's
hard days.

Exclaimed the Cat : " What needs delay ?
The waxing moon mocks waning day,
And true delight it were together
To fare in this sweet summer weather."

" Dear Cousin," quoth the Fox, " by night
Forego we many a pleasant sight,
The while, in open, cheerful day,
Good hap find wenders by the way,
When dark suspicion doth betide
Night-faring folk, therefore abide
Within my house."

" What sort of meat,"
Quoth Tybert, " have ye then to eat,
Should I make stay ?"

" For wholesome food,"
Quoth Reynard, " lack we not, with good
Sweet honeycomb—will that suffice ?"

Said Tybert : " Have ye then no mice ?"

X. Tybert's
hard days.

By honeycomb I set small store,
And though some folk esteem it more
Than aught, I far prefer a mouse,
Beyond all else the wealthiest house
Can furnish."

"Say ye so indeed,
Dear Tyb? thou then on mouse shalt feed
In royal wise : a priest hard by
Doth live, within whose barn there lie
Such heaps that, thereto were he fain,
A man with mice might fill a wain.
I, many a time, have heard this priest
Bemoan the harm they do ; a feast
Thou well may'st make there."

"Say ye so?"

Exclaimed the Cat : "pray let us go
Thither at once, and I am thine."

Quoth Reynard : "Doth your heart incline
Thereto so greatly, that above
All else beside, fat mice ye love?"

"If mice I love!" the Cat exclaimed :
"Yea! than all delicacies famed
For savour—venison, flavmes, or pasty—
I find fat mice more sweet and tasty;
Lead on to where fat mice abound,
And for all time shall I be found
Thy firmest friend :—though thou hadst slain
My sire and mother, and shouldst stain
Thy hands with blood of all my kin,
Such rare mouse feast my heart should win."

SAID Reynard : "Ye but mock and jape
Therewith."

The Cat said : "I but shape

My tongue to truth, so help me God ! ”
Said Reynard, with a gentle nod
Of seeming doubt, “ If so I wist,
It then should fall that, an ye list,
Of mice ye might in truth be full.”

“ Full ! ” cried the Cat : “ therein ye pull
A long-bow shot ; that scarce could be.”
“ Ye jape,” quoth Reynard.

“ Nay,” quoth he :
“ A fat mouse liefer would I hold,
Than noble, coined of finest gold.”

“ Forth fare we then,” cried out the Fox,
“ And ere once more the chiming clocks
With merry peal give out the hour,
Mice, thick as raindrops in a shower,
Shalt thou behold.”

“ Right well I know
’Neath thy safe conduct may I go,”
The Cat said, “ to Montpelier hence.”

“ Now speak’st thou like a cat of sense,”
The Fox replied, “ but why delay ?
Too long we tarry.”

Then away
They fared, till near the barn they stood,
Well built, and walled about with mud.
Now so it happed, that through a hole
Worked in the wall, the Fox oft stole
A fatted hen, and yet one more
Had snatched thereout the night before.
The priest had noted this, and set
A gryn with running noose, to let
The prowling beast from further theft ;
This Reynard saw, and planned a deft
And cunning trick, his foe to trap.

X. Tybert's
hard days.

So said, "Dear Tybert, lucky hap
Hath left a hole through which to creep
Within the barn, and there a heap
Of mice awaits thee, hark! how shrill
Their piping sounds—enjoy thy fill—
In then! while I abide thee here.
Nay, wherefore lingerest thou? doth fear
Withhold thy steps? My heart doth burn
With earnest longing to return
To Ermelyne, whose smiles await
Our coming, why dost hesitate?"

Quoth Tybert: "Is it then your rede,
Dear friend, with fearless foot to speed
Within this hole? These priests be oft
Most wily shrews, for all their soft
Fair glozing speech—I dread some harm."

"Oho! Dear Tybert, doth alarm
Pervade thy breast?" false Reynard cried:
"Dost fear that evil can betide
While I stand near? What aileth thee?"
The Cat, ashamed, sprang hastily
Within the hole—the cruel gryn
Flew home with sharp and sudden spin,
And caught him, as though swung from bough
With cord around the throat. Ah! now
Hath Reynard foully snared his guest:
Oh! treacherous host! Oh! Cat unblest.

In vain attempted he to spring
From out the hole, the tightening string
Held fast his neck. False Reynard saw
His dupe's distress, and heard him wraw
And shriek with pain, the while, above,
He laughing stood, and cried: "D'ye love
Fat mice, dear Tybert? are they good?"

Knew Martinet hereof, he would,
I make no doubt, with pleasure bring
Thee savoury sauce. How sweet ye sing
The while ye dine! Is that I pray
The custom used at Court to-day?
Lord God! If Isegrym did share
This feast with thee, I then should bear
A heart as light as bird in May."

When nought availed to break away
The cord which held him, Tybert mowed
And galped so hideously and loud,
That out his bed sprang Martinet,
And cried: "Thank God! the gryn I set
Hath caught the thief that stole our hens,
And scared the sheep from out their pens.
Arouse ye all to deal him due
And fit reward! Haste, all of you!
Shake off dull slumber and awaken!
Up! Up! The villain Fox is taken!"

The priest, barefoot, ran through the dirt,
All mother-naked but for shirt,
And Julock called, his wife, to light
An offering candle. Quickly dight
Young Martinet a heavy stake,
And dealt such strokes as well might break
The prisoner's bones, and tore his eye
From out the socket.

"Thou shalt die,"
Roared forth the priest, and drave a blow
Which missed its aim, or else allow
The Cat had lain.

"Nay, then my life
Shall dear be bought," above the strife
Shrieked Tybert, as the parson's calf
He seized and wellnigh bit in half.

X. Tybert's
hard days.

“Harrowe!” yelled out the priest. “I’m dead.”
And fainting, kissed the ground, and bled
In such full tide, that well ’twould seem
His spirit drank drear Lethe’s stream.

Hereat in wild despair his wife
Screamed, “Help! Oh! help! my love, my life,
Awake! look up! awake, I say,
Ah me! alack and well-a-day!
Accursèd be the hand which set
This hideous trap, through which hath met
My dearest man such evil fate!
What though the Fox should extirpate
All fowls that flock the teeming earth!
Shall wretched birds be counted worth
My husband’s life?”

The while that she
Thus raved, the Fox with ill-timed glee
Stood by, and watched her wild affright,
And then with mocking words made light
Of her distress.

“Dame Julock, now,”
Cried he, “’twere surely well to bow
Your head in thankful resignation
To Heaven’s good will, a dispensation
Of mercy can it fail to be,
If thy dear man, from earth set free,
Attains the heavenly mansions blest?
There shall he find sweet peace and rest
From thy sharp tongue. He loved to preach,
Each week, what joy ’twould be to reach
The home of saints. Nay, dry thy tears,
And let sweet hope assuage thy fears:
Though thou be widowed, yet thou may’st
Ere long the joys of wedlock taste
Once more, if fortune send some fool,

Unware how oft the cucking-stool
Had charge of thee for thy sharp tongue
In days gone by."

X. Tybert's
hard days.

Then gaily sung
The Fox for joy—and cried : " Good-day !
Time wears, and I must needs away."

THUS, Bruin, priest, and Tybert marred,
He blithely hied him burrowward.

Now hearken how the Cat escaped
The jaws of death.

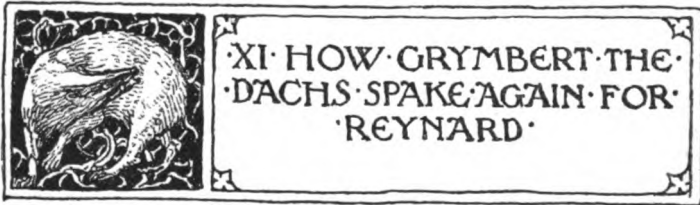
While all folk shaped
Their hands to tend the wounded priest,
They clean forgot the struggling beast,
Who ceased thereon to yell and wraw,
And plied his unspent strength to gnaw
And bite apart the cruel gryn
That wrung his neck, and thus to win
Sweet freedom—this achieved, he ran
With foot as swift as erewhile Pan
Pursued fair Syrinx ; till at last,
His strength foredone, his breath o'erpast,
His wounds grown stiff, all worn and spent,
With limp and stumble, forward went,
Through darksome hours, the weary wight,
Till morning waxed from grey to white
Above the hills, and lastly came
Before the Court, so bowed with shame,
And bent with grief, as must betray
To all men's eyes that he the play
Had been of adverse Fortune. Nought
He spake his woe, but humbly sought
Before the throne to lay his grief.

EXCLAIMED the King : " Hath then this thief

X. Tybert's
hard days.

And traitor once again defied
Our high command, and dared deride
Our envoy? Then by Heaven I swear
My hand no longer shall forbear
To crush this scorner of all right
And justice."

Quickly bid he dight
A solemn council, formed of wise
And learned men, who might advise
Some means whereby the Fox should be
O'ermastered in his subtlety,
And brought before the Court to make
Submission, or the upshot take.



WHILE Reynard's friends rejoiced, his foes
Wondered, when Grymbert Dachs arose
(The Fox's sister's son) and said :
"Dear Lord, though twice had trespassèd
My Eme, beyond what he hath done,
We have by no means yet o'ergone
The remedies that may be used
To bring him here. He hath refused
Thy summons twice, now let him be
A third time summoned, as a free,
Unhindered man. And if again
He scorn your bidding, quick must rain
Death and destruction on his head."

"Say, then, who think ye would be sped

On such an errand," quoth the King,
"And risk eyes, ears, and life to bring
So fell a beast to bay? Not one,
I trow, of all who live would own
Himself so lightly for a fool."

Quoth Grymbert Dachs: "Beneath thy rule,
So help me God! lives one who dare
This stigma brave. I forth will fare
In person, at thy word, to try
My skill in this emergency."

"Go forth, Sir Grymbert, but see well,"
The King replied, "that thou a fell
And subtle beast must deal with: ware
Ye need to be, lest he some snare
Or pitfall shapeth."

"Rest content,"

Quoth Grymbert, as he gaily went
His way, "that thou ere long shalt see
The Fox fall low on bended knee."

With nimble foot, and cheerful heart,
Malperdyward doth Grymbert start;
And thither come the Fox he found
At home, and littered on the ground
In darksome corner, Ermelyne
Lay with her whelps.

"Right well beseen

Ye be, dear Uncle, and fair Aunt,"
Quoth Grymbert, "nought could more enchant
Mine eyes than thus to find ye well,
But dearest Eme, plain truth to tell,
Great hurt your absence from the Court
Is like to cause ye: ill report
Men spread about thy life, and good
It were no longer ye withstood

XI. Dachs'
redes avail.

The King's command. Come, then, with me—
For, should ye still withhold, 'twill be
An evil case. 'Tis now the third
And latest warning that my word
Affords thee : plain unvarnished truth
Is this advice, and if forsooth
Ye dare neglect it, and abide
Till falls the morrow's eventide,
No wit can then avail to save
Or thee or thine, but thou must brave
Within three days a siege about
Thine house and home. The King with rout
Of armed men, will 'fore it set
A rack and gallows ; what shall let
Thee then from death? List all I say
For gospel truth, or on that day
Nor thou, nor wife, nor child shall 'scape
The grave, which open-mouthed doth gape
For all your lives. 'Tis therefore best
Ye Courtwards wend with me, and rest
Assured that there shall well avail
Thy subtle counsel : stranger tale
Hath oft been heard, than that thou quit
May'st go of all complaints, and sit
In honour o'er the heads of those
Ill beasts who boast themselves thy foes.
Yea ! many a time hast thou, ywis,
Run much more dangerous risks than this."

THE Fox replied : " Good sooth ye say,
Dear neighbour Grymbert, straightaway
'Twere well to wend with you, e'en now,
To face the Court, whereat I trow
My subtle counsel sorely lacks.
Once there, perchance the King may wax
Kind, good, and merciful to me,

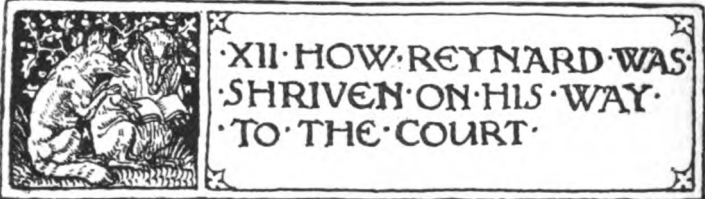
Can I but gain impartially
His ear to weigh what I have done.
Methinks, though my misdeeds had run
Much greater lengths, yet scarce could stand
The realm without me. 'Tis my hand
Hath ordered all things, and the King
Well knows my wit o'ermastering.
Though some right fell to meward be,
Yet, King and Lords, note carefully
My sage advice. When all are blind,
To Reynard must they turn to find
True words of wisdom ; ever best
His craft and cunning stand confessed.
Some cruel men with mind accurst,
Have sworn against my life the worst
That lieth in them—that I own
Hath oftentimes o'er my spirit thrown
A pall of sadness—many may
One friendless man to death betray.
Yet, nathless, were it well to go
With thee, dear friend, each bitter foe
To face and answer, than to set
At venture all our lives, and let
Them thus be lost. Now forth we fare
To meet my fate : right well aware
And conscious am I of the might
The King doth wield, and whatso right
And just he counts, that thing must I
Accept and bear with, patiently."

With tenderest voice, to Ermelyne
He said : " Dear dame, on thee I lean
To act as faithful prop and stay
Of this dear home, while far away
My duty calls me. Special care
Give thou to both our sons, and rare

XI. Dachs'
redes avail.

Shall be thy recompense ; first see
Thou well to Reynkyn, who shall be
My second self : dear Rosel's skill
In theft hath promise, and he will
In time, I trust, become a thief
Of great renown : past all belief
I love my children, and if God
Should give me grace to 'scape the rod
That threatens my life, and once again
To reach my home, ah ! then with fain
And grateful heart shall I to you
Give loving thanks :—dear heart, adieu.”
He turned and took the Courtward road.

Ah ! God ! how sorrowful abode
Lone Ermelyne then beside her small
Disfathered whelps, for he who all
The house provided, now was gone,
And she left helpless and alone,
Bereft of him who was to her
Protector, spouse, and victualler.



THE twain had fared but little while
When Reynard said : “ I feel how vile
My sins have been, and surely know
That now in jeopardy I go
To lose my life. I sore repent
The unholy way in which I've spent
So many years : no priest is here

To give me shriving, therefore, dear
And worthy Nephew, unto thee
Will I confess me—contritely ;
Assured I feel, that were I shriven,
I less should dread to go to Heaven.”

XII. Reynard
shrift prays.

Said Grymbert : “ Eme, if thou a mind
For shriving hast, thou must behind
Thee leave all lust to rob and steal.”

Quoth Reynard : “ That I deeply feel,
And so, *Confiteor tibi Pater*
A heap of evil deeds, and later
Will tell them fully, one by one,
And shrift received, and penance done,
Shall wend lighthearted.”

Grymbert said :
“ If thou the slough of sin wouldst shed
Through shrift, then English speak, I pray.”

Said Reynard : “ Much I grieve to say,
Few men have done more wickedness
Than he who humbly doth confess
To thee his sins, and penance craves.
A many beasts have found their graves
Through my misdeeds. Mine Eme, the Bear,
With honeycombs did I ensnare ;
And Tybert Cat, with hope of mice.
Then Chanticleere did I entice
From out his yard, with specious tale,
And ate his children. Time would fail
To go through all my crimes. The King
And Queen I slandered with a string
Of vilest falsehoods, which will stick
For ever by them. Many a trick
On Isegrym the Wolf I've played :

XII. Reynard
shrift prays.

A monk at Eelmare was he made
By my assistance, where I too
Donned monkish hood and gown. He drew
Therefrom small profit. When he sighed
To ring the bells, I tightly tied
The bell-rope round his feet, and soon
He rang therewith so wild a tune,
That, mazed and scared, folk ran to see
Who made such hideous minstrelsy.
And when 'twas found that Isegrym
Rang out the chime, they fell on him
With sticks and staves, till helpless left,
Half dead he lay, of sense bereft.
Another time the dullard sought
Fishing to learn of me, and bought
His knowledge dearly.

Just across
The fallow fields, at Vermedos,
A wealthy priest there lived, who kept
A well stored spence, wherein I crept,
When hunger prompted, through a hole,
And many a fitch of bacon stole,
Time and again. I thither led
The Wolf one winter's day, and said :
'Dear Isegrym, if you but creep
Through this small hole, a wondrous heap
Of beef and bacon may ye find.'
With joy he crept therein, and blind
To future chances, so much ate
Of savoury viands, that too late
He found so vastly had his size
Of girth increased, that in no wise
His body through that hole would pass
By which he entry gained. 'Alas!
Dear Reynard,' cried he, 'help me out!
My answer was a deafening shout,

As sped I down the village street,
And roused the neighbours ; then as fleet
As drives the south-west wind, I ran
To where the priest, good easy man,
Was set to enjoy his midday meal—
A fatted capon ; high the steel
Was raised with purpose to dis sever
The tempting morsel : with a clever
And well aimed stroke the fowl I cleared
From off the dish, and disappeared
Like lightning flash, then made my way
Towards the larder—‘ Stay, thief, stay,’
Roared forth the priest, ‘ who ever saw
So gross an outrage on the law,
As that a Fox should dare to come
And rob a priest, within his home ? ’

XII. Reynard
shrift prays.

“ Therewith he cast at me the knife
His right hand grasped, whereby my life
Came near its ending—then, the board
He loves so well, when richly stored
With dainty viands, hastily
Thrusting aside, right nimbly he
Jumped up, and rushed forth crying : ‘ Maim
Or slay the Fox ! ’ with either aim
A raging crowd of people flew
In hot pursuit, but passing through
The hole where lately Isegrym
Had made his entry, close to him
I dropped the capon on the ground—
Not for his benefit—but found
The burden more than I could bear :
And well it was I left it there,
For when the priest burst ope the door,
The capon found he on the floor
Beside the Wolf, while through the hole

XII. Reynard
shrift prays. By which I entered, out I stole
And went my way.

At once the priest
Clutched at the capon, and so ceased
To track my steps, with wonder stricken
To see the Wolf, (in whose eyes quicken
Alarm and terror,) loud shouts he :
' What wondrous vision do I see?
A red fox snatched away my capon,
And here the thief hath wolfish shape on !
Lay on, good friends, beat, break and tear
This plundering wretch, although he wear
A magic form.' Then fiercely fell
The crowd on Isegrym, pell-mell,
With sticks and staves, until he lay
As all foredone and dead ; away
They dragged him over blocks and stones
(A bag of bruised and broken bones)
Without the village bounds, and cast
His body in a ditch.

At last,
Once more to health and strength he grew,
But how that happed I never knew—
Nor greatly cared—my grief but slight
Had been though he had died outright.

" THE Wolf another time I led
To rob a henroost, where I said
A cock and seven fat hens arow
Sat on a perch. As down below
We stood and watched, a high fall-door
I pointed out, and said : ' The floor,
Where sit the birds, is just behind
That door, climb up, and ye shall find
Your heart's desire.' He laughing went,
Suspecting nought, but all intent

On plenteous feasting ; here and there
He snuffed about, then cried : ‘ Some snare
I fear ye set, or jape ye play,
Dear Nephew ; ’ softly quoth I, ‘ Nay !
The man, dear Eme, who good will win
Must something venture : further in
The birds are roosting, ’ then a shove
I gave, and lo ! the door above
Fell with a thundering noise adown,
That well might rouse a spell-bound town.

“ As through the house the clatter rang,
The slumberers started up, and sprang
From out their beds in wild affright,
Shrieking aloud, ‘ A light ! a light ! ’
And when they found ’twas Isegrym
Who caused their fear, they set on him,
And strook his body nigh to death.

“ Dear Nephew, shame admonisheth
My tongue to leave some things untold
That scarce were fitting to unfold
To youthful ears, but deeply I
Repent my past carnality.
Here ends this woful roll of crimes
That stain the memory of past times,
And breed remorse within my breast :
But now, unburdened and confessed,
My mind feels easier, shrift I pray
At thy kind hands, to drive away
The clouds that hover o’er my soul,
Thy healing words shall make me whole.”

GRYMBERT, who subtle was, and wise,
Replied : “ Dear Eme, this tree supplies
The means of penance ” ; straight he broke
A slender twig, of fair grown oak,

XII. Reynard
shrift prays.

And said, "Dear Uncle, wouldst thou quite
Absolve thy soul, thy body smite
Three times with this small rod, then bound
Three times across it on the ground :
Thou must not stumble, but keep straight
Thy legs, if thou wouldst expiate
Thy crimes : then take the rod in hand
And three times kiss it, this will stand
For token of obedience meek.
No further penance need ye seek,
But count your sins as wiped away,
From childhood's hour till this same day."
The Fox was glad.

Then Grymbert said :

"Dear Eme, henceforward be ye wed
To holy works, read well your psalms ;
Keep fasts and holy days ; give alms ;
Frequent the Church ; forthon leave sin,
And theft and treason, so within
Due time ye may to Heaven attain."
The Fox declared his heart right fain
Of holy counsel, and content
Seemed Grymbert—straight they Courtward went.

Beside the road they took, there stood
A Black-nuns' convent, fair and good
Of structure : capons, hens, and geese,
Strolled round the walls in careless peace ;
Or basked in sprawling heaps together,
Beneath the sunlit springtide weather.
These Reynard noted ; spake he nought,
But all astray his nephew brought,
Until they neared the fowls, when he,
All unawares, and suddenly,
Snapped at a heedless capon, strayed
Within his treacherous reach, and made

His feathers fly aloft in air.
The Dachs turned sharply, saw the scare,
And cried : " What Eme ! thou cursed man !
Wilt thou again incur the ban
Of sin, wherefrom thou art but free
Some few short seconds ? Wilt thou be
For one poor capon doomed to Hell ? "

" I own, dear Nephew, 'twas not well,"
Quoth Reynard, " but I clean forgot
My shrift—pray God I suffer not
This once—I swear that nevermore
Will I transgress ; " so turned they o'er
A little bridge, but Reynard's eye
Still watched the poultry—verily,
" That thing which in the bone is bred,
From out the flesh will ne'er be shed,"
And though to hang on gallows tree
Might be his fate, yet ever he
Watched every bird that came in sight
As passed they onward, left and right.
His glances Grymbert saw, and spake :
" Foul, false deceiver ! wilt thou take
Thine eye no instant off the birds ? "

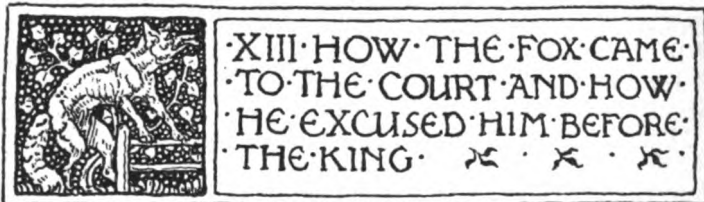
The Fox said : " Nephew, suchlike words
Ye much misdo to use towards me,
For sweet devotion, wofully,
Your speech disturbs : I did but say
A paternoster by the way,
For all the souls of hens and geese,
That through my means, have had surcease
From watchful care of these good nuns.
Alas ! my burdened memory shuns
The wicked deeds of past ill days."

Too well did Grymbert know the ways

XII. Reynard
shrift prays. Of Reynard Fox to give much heed
To suchlike pious talk ; with greed
The Fox's eyes still sought for prey.

So came they whence they went astray,
And Courtward turned.

Sharp, quick, and short
Came Reynard's breath as now the Court
They neared, for all too well he knew
How great his crimes, what meed his due.



SO soon as through the Court 'twas known
That Reynard Fox his face had shown
Within its pale, not one so poor
Was found of kin or friends, but sure
He felt that, 'gainst the Fox complaint
'Twas safe to make, though ne'er so faint
And slight his grievance.

Reynard's look
Was high and fearless, nought he shook
Or trembled coweringly, but went
With eye unmoved, and brow unbent,
By Grymbert's side throughout the street.
Yea! truly no King's son could meet
The gazer's eye with prouder stare,
As though the worth of one poor hair
He had not trespassed or misdome.

So marched he boldly to the throne,

Where sat the King, and cried : “ God give
To thee great Lord, the while you live,
Honour and worship : never King
Had servant who in everything
Was truer liege, than I have been
To thee through life : though some I ween
Now stand within this Court, whose joy
Would rise past words could they destroy
Thine old-time friend, yet God I thank
That nought believe ye them, but rank
Such false deceiving liars rightly,
Nor let their tales deceive thee lightly.
It well to God may be complained,
That lying flatterers have obtained
In these last days too much belief
In lordly Courts : with shame and grief
Deceivers and false shrews I see
In power and great authority,
To good men’s scathe ; I humbly pray
That God, to such, due hire will pay.

“ Peace ! ” cried the King, “ base thief and traitor,
Of honest men most vile delator,
Thou well canst gloze fair specious tales
To blind men’s eyes, but nought avails
By one poor straw thy flattering speech :
Deem’st thou thereby to overreach
Thy judge, and make of him a friend ?
Too well he sees thine aim and end.
Thy service towards thy King hath been
So base and treacherous, that I ween
Reward shall follow, just and due.
Wouldst thou then have me deem it true
That thou hast kept the peace I swore
Throughout my realm ? ”

The Cock no more

XIII. Reynard
at Court.

Could hold his wrath hereat, but cried :
“ Alas, 'twas through that peace that died
My children.”

Said the King : “ Hold still
Thy tongue, good friend, while I fulfil
Stern duty towards this losel thief,
'Tis mine to avenge thy thrice told grief.”

And then again did he address
The Fox, stern-voiced and pitiless.

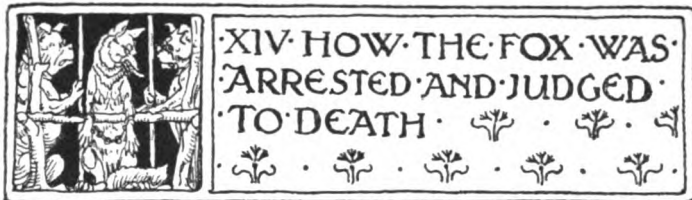
“ Oh, robber shrewd ! and murderer fell !
How true thy boast to love me well,
Thine hand hath shown on Bruin Bear
And Tybert Cat, who both declare
Thy deeds, though scant of words they be,
But that day's work shall cost to thee
Thy life, I swear *In nomine
Patris et Christi filii !*”—said

The Fox : “ Dear Lord, if Bruin's head
Is blood besprent, with broken crown,
Can ye with justice set that down
To my account ? He basely stole
Sweet honeycombs from out a bole
Of oak, which lay in Lantfert's yard.
If, in revenge, their owner marred
His head and limbs, am I to blame ?
Surely, ere through the water came
He hither, a beast so strong of limb
Might lightly have avengèd him,
For all he suffered. Tybert Cat
Next came, and friendly talk and chat
Awhile we held, then lastly he,
Scorning my counsel, suddenly,
Went off to rob the parson's house,
Whence stole he many a dainty mouse,

And thereby came to grievous ill.
My dear liege Lord, though thou shouldst spill
My blood, or blind, hang, seethe or roast
My body, yet I proudly boast
A conscience clear. Thou, King, art strong,
And I but feeble, yet no wrong
I fear to suffer through thy might,
'Fore all thou lovest truth and right."

As Reynard ended, Bellyn Ram
Stood boldly forth, and cried: "No drachm
Of truth or justice dost thou say,
Thou base-born Fox, and Dame Olwey,
My faithful spouse, will bear me out."

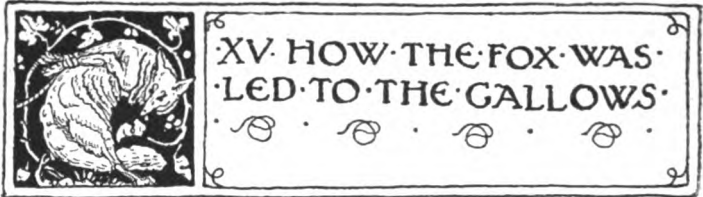
While yet he spake an angry shout
Of loud complaint arose. The Bear
With all his lineage, claimed a share
In Reynard's censure. Tybert Cat
Was joined with Isegrym, who sat
In moody wrath: the fierce Wild-boar,
Cuwaert the Hare, though trembling sore,
The Goat and Kid, Brunel the Goose,
Baldwin the Ass, from toil set loose,
The Bull, the Camel, and the Ox,
All raised their voices 'gainst the Fox,
With loud demand that forthwith he
Should be arrested. Readily
The King thereto gave ear, and cried,
"To prison with him—let him bide
In closest bonds—right well I wot
His crimes deserve a murderer's lot."



HEREON a parliament was held,
 Which found that so unparalleled
 Were Reynard's deeds, that nought but death
 Could wash their vileness. In a breath,
 Reynard to each gave full reply,
 And though all men spontaneously
 Agreed that ne'er did beasts devise
 More sound impeachments, yet so wise
 Were Reynard's answers, that folk stood
 Amazed to hear their likelihood.
 But pleadings done, and both sides heard
 By King and Council, 'twas averred
 That guilty was he, past a doubt.—
 Take note how oft it falleth out,
 The feeblest hath the worst.—Then gave
 The Court its sentence—that the grave
 Must close o'er Reynard, and that he
 Should deck the gallows speedily.

Alas! though still he sought to reach
 His judges' hearts with flattering speech,
 Nought could avail him. All as one,
 Cried out that justice must be done
 As now decreed,—yet still were left
 Some faithful friends, whose hearts were cleft
 With woe to think the Fox must die,
 And roomed the Court most mournfully.
 The King took note, how younglings went,

Of Reynard's kin, with heads low bent
In grief, and musing thereon said :
" Behoveth counsel ere we shed
The Fox's blood ; although a shrew,
Past doubt or question, no small few
Who own his lineage smack of good."
While thus he communed, nearby stood
The Cat, the Wolf, and Bruin Bear,
On whom devolved the ungracious care
Of hanging Reynard. Tybert cried :
" How now? why lag ye? eventide
Comes on apace, why friends so slow?
See here stout hanging-trees arow,
Whereon to sling the Fox ; if he
Should 'scape this peril, who can see
What next may hap? So great his wit,
And subtle craft, that fraught were it
With folly past belief, to give
Him yet another chance to live,
And mar us once again ; why stand
We idle thus? Let each set hand
To place the gibbet, ere 'tis night.
Said Isegrym : " Here ready dight
Behold a gallows," then he sighed ;
That saw the Cat, and mocking cried :
" What ! Isegrym, be'st thou afeard?
Or is thy memory grown so seared,
That pity overmastereth will
To hang the recreant who did kill
Thy brethren twain? An' ye were good
And wise, so long ye had not stood
A-tarrying when ye might repay
The debts of many a long past day."



DEEP growled the Wolf, and said : “Ye make,
Sir Tybert, much ado, and take
My will to task—in case we had
A halter here, most wondrous glad
And willing should I be to lend
My help to speed the traitor’s end.”

The Fox, who long had held his peace,
Now spoke, and said : “To me surcease
Ye well may give, and short my pain
If so ye will, behold the bane
That lightly doth the means afford :
See ! hangs round Tybert’s neck the cord
Which caught him, when his greed for mouse
Led him to rob the good priest’s house.
Active and lithe, he well can climb
And fix the rope ; why lose ye time ?
Ah ! Isegrym, ah ! Bruin Bear,
Say, is it meet that thus should fare
Your nephew at your ruthless hands ?
I live too long. The law commands
The deed ye do : let Bruin lead,
And Isegrym, take thou good heed
To hold thy prisoner, lest he take
Some chance his cruel bonds to break.”

Quoth Bruin : “Rarely have I heard
Friend Reynard speak so wise a word,
For long years past.”

Then Isegrym
Prayed kith and kin, who stood by him,
To see the prisoner did not slip
By some new wile from out their grip :
By beard and ears some held him fast,
While others round his fore-feet cast
A trammelling net.

XV. Fox days
seem short.

The victim heard
With grief their speech, which in him stirred
Terror, and touched his heart anigh,
Then lastly spake, with long-drawn sigh :
“ Alas ! dear Eme, methinks much pain
Ye take to do me scathe, yet fain
Would I beg mercy : though my grief
Seems to afford your heart relief
And pleasure, yet I feel assured
That, knew my Aunt what woe endured
Her well-loved nephew, of old days
She would bethink herself, and raise
Her voice in his behalf. Now he
Am I, to whom whatever be
Your will, that can ye work. May shame,
In life and death, surround your name,
O Tybert Cat ; and Bruin Bear,
May'st thou of shame have equal share,
For both have done to me the worst
Within your power. Though death at first
Seem strange and hard, yet can I die
But once. My Father's death did I
Behold soon pass, and now I wend
That unknown path, fear nought the end.”

Quoth Isegrym : “ Since ye bestow
Your curse on us, because too slow
Ye find our work, may ill betide
Our souls if longer we abide.”

XV. Fox days
seem short.

While Isegrym, upon the right,
Warded and watched the wretched wight,
Against his left was set the Bear,
And thus they led him forth to where
The gallows stood. With ready will
Ran Tybert forwards, wearing still
The cord around his neck which caught
His head within the gryn, and wrought
To him such punishment that yet
He writhed beneath it—ne'er forget
Could he the woes of that dread night,
Fruit of the Fox's vengeful spite.

Thus Reynard, safely kept by three
Stern gaolers, fared on towards the tree
Where felons use to meet their fate.
The King and Queen, in solemn state,
Followed, and in their wake did wend
Long courtier trains to watch the end.
Then fell the Fox in mighty dread
Of grisly death, and visions fled
Athwart his brain of how he still
Perchance might cozen fate, and fill
With shame those men who sought his life,
Setting the King with them at strife
Through tales and leasings."

"Though," thought he,
"My lord be now sore wroth with me
For righteous cause, yet in the end
Perchance he may become my friend:
For if some specious tale I spin,
So well invented as to win
Credence of King and Council both,—
Wise as they be,—and make them loth
To hang me, then once more may I
My foes o'ercome triumphantly.

Quoth Isegrym : " Consider well,
Sir Bruin, how 'twas through this fell
And evil beast your crown of red
Ye came to wear, to-day his head
Shall bear your burden. Tybert, climb
The gallows swiftly, lose no time
To bind a riding knot around
The cross-branch, high above the ground :
This day I trust, we all may see
Our foeman's end ; beware lest free
Again he break : Sir Bruin, now
Hold fast, whilst I against the bough
Set up the ladder." Bruin said :
" I well shall help him."

Fear and dread,
Fell hard on Reynard, who exclaimed :
" Now is my spirit quelled, and tamed,
For death stands bare before mine eyes,
And all my past misdeeds arise,
To drive my soul to Hell : great King
And gracious Queen, I ask one thing,
Ere I depart, one little boon,
That may in some degree attune
To Heaven my spirit. 'Tis nor less
Nor more than this, that I confess
To thee, and those who stand anigh,
My past misdealings openly.
Thus purged, and cleansed, my soul no more
Shall feel encumbered as of yore,
Nor others be hereafter blamed
For treason worked by me, or shamed
For theft of mine. Hereby to me
Grim death shall somewhat easier be,
And when his waters o'er me roll,
Pray God to spare my sinful soul."



XVI · HOW · THE · FOX · MADE ·
HIS · CONFESSION · OPENLY · BE ·
FORE · THE · KING · AND · ALL ·
THOSE · WHO · WOULD · HEAR ·
IT ·

WHEN those who stood anear him heard
The humble boon the Fox preferred,
They cried : "O hear him, gracious King,
For is it not a little thing
He lastly asketh of thee?" Said
King Nobel : "Nay then, by my head,
Since the desire it seems to be
Of all this goodly company
That Reynard full confession make
Of crime, ere he the journey take
Whence none return, I grant amain
The boon he asks."

Oh, then was fain
The Fox, who inwardly did cry :
"Give aid, O Spiritus Domini!
Though round about stands many a man
Who willingly my life would ban ;
Yet courage from despair I take,
Good luck be mine!" and forth he spake :

"GOOD PEOPLE, hear the tale how I
Have spent my days from infancy.
From that first hour that I was yeaned,
Till dawned the day that saw me weaned,
Believe ye well, the woodland wild
Had ne'er beheld a sweeter child :
Blameless and pure I lived, and played
With tenderest lambkins, nought afraid

Or fraying, till I chanced to bite
One of my playmates, then good-night
To innocence ; so wondrous sweet
I found the blood, that other meat
I scorned henceforward : next I heard
The bleat of kids and goats, which stirred
My veins, and twain I straightway slew ;
Forthwith I callous waxed, and knew
No pleasure greater than to kill
Hens, ducks, and geese, rejoiced to spill
Their blood for sport.

One winter's day

I came on Isegrym, who lay
Asleep within a hollowed oak ;
Awaking, friendlywise he spoke,
And forthwith claimed to be mine Eme :
' If that be so,' quoth I, ' 'twould seem
Well we were comrades ;' straight quoth he :
' With right good will,' most cordially.
Alas! I sorely did repent
Of that alliance—thus it went :
Each gave his promise to be true
Toward his fellow, and a due
Fair share to give of each day's spoil :
Then set we forth with earnest toil
To hunt the woods and fields; his part
It was to rob great beasts, my art
Sufficed the smaller things to steal :
But when the business was to deal
The food betwixt us, less than half
Fell to my share ; if ram or calf,
Or wether took we, for his own
He claimed it, and the barest bone
Would yield to stay my need, and drave
Me off right rudely, as a slave.
Then, when we gained a cow or ox

XVI. Old sins
confessed.

Alas! still worse would fare the Fox,
For Isegrym his wife would bring
To join the banquet, and a string
Of seven lean cubs, and quickly gone
Was Reynard's share. But fortune shone
Bright-eyed and gracious at this time,
In suchwise that Golconda's clime
Holds not more treasure than belongs
To me this moment. Poet's songs
Have ne'er imagined such untold
And heaped-up riches. Silver, gold,
And precious stones past counting, gems
And pearls, befitting diadems
Of mightiest kings lie gathered where
My hands have hidden them, and there
Must they remain, for now, alas!
Those treasures never more can pass
From out the darkness where they lie,
Since he stands here, condemned to die,
Who wots alone their lurking-place.
Perchance some happy wight may trace
In distant age his footstep thither,
Where rests that hoard which nought can wither
Or waste or change. The man who gains
That glittering wealth, seven goodly wains
Will need to bear it whence 'tis hid.

“My Lord, if thou hast will to rid
The earth of him who hath the power
This harvest in thy lap to shower,
Speak thou the fatal word, and he
Will humbly bow to thy decree.”

At first the King had barely listened
To Reynard's tale; but brightly glistened
His eager eyes when once he heard

Fall from his lips the magic word
Of GOLD, and straightway seized was he
By hell's foul fiend cupidity.
With hot desire his spirit burned
To touch these riches, and he turned
His voice, forthwith, from tone severe
To blindest fluting : " Reynard, dear,
Tell me," quoth he, " where may I find
This glorious hoard? I have no mind
To deal with thee severely ; say
Where dwells this treasure, and away
Thy chains and shackles shall be cast."

XVI. Old sins
confessed.

O'er Reynard's sinking heart then passed
A gleam of hope. " My Lord," he cried,
" I fear lest you your best friend chide,
When he avows that this great wealth
Was gotten by an act of stealth.
Nay, start thou not ! except for that,
The chance is great ye had not sat
This day on that high throne where ye
Fair justice deal so worthily.
'Twould seem I was designed by Fate
To drag to light and dissipate
The vilest plot that ever yet
Was planned by reckless men to set
Themselves in place of those whom heaven
Hath in its highest wisdom given
To rule the world. Had this plot sped,
Thou hadst been murdered in thy bed !"
Therewith deep horror seized the Queen,
And cried she : " Reynard, dost thou mean
That men we trust in would imbue
Their hands in blood? Conjure I you
By that far road your soul must go,
To clearly speak, and make us know

XVI. Old sins
confessed. "The full dread truth."

Oh, hearken now
How Reynard's flattering words shall bow
The King and Queen to give their love
And kindly wills to him above
All other men, and hinder those
Who labour for his death ; unclose
His pack of lies shall he, and fair
Soft glozing speech so bring to bear
On all his matters, that 'twould seem
His life and acts with virtue teem.

With sorrowful countenance he spake,
And said : " For thy beloved sake,
Great Queen, since thou conjurest me,
Will I relate the tale : 'twould be
Of small effect that I should lie,
Doomed, as I am, forthwith to die.
Ye well may credit that my soul
I will not jeopard, but the whole
Plain truth set forth—for should I tell
One falsehood, all the pains of Hell
Must be my lot. I nought will say
That may not be in plainest way
Made good and sure.

Now hear it shown,
How good King Nobel, by his own
Most trusted servants should have been
Murdered, and you, most gracious Queen,
Had shared his fate. Alas ! what grief
Wrings my sad heart to think the chief
And foremost movers in this plot
Were men of mine own blood. Did not
My conscience urge me on to lay
This treachery bare, would I betray,
Think you, my nearest kith and kin ?

But that small voice which works within,
Moves me to speak, devoid of fear."

XVI. Old sins
confessed.

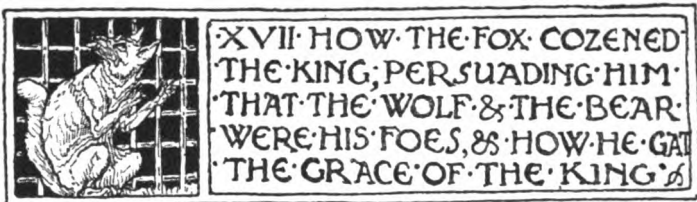
The King with grave and heavy cheer,
Replied : " I charge thee, Reynard, now
To say in face of death, if thou
Herein dost speak plain, simple truth ? "

Exclaimed the Fox : " Deem'st thou forsooth,
Here, standing on the very brink
Of Heaven, or Hell, that I should think
'Twould serve my turn to forge a lie ?
Nay ! ten times would I rather die
A thousand deaths than I should be
Condemned to fire eternally."
Then with a mighty trembling shook
His frame, as though death's agony strook
His bones and marrow, but the while
He inly laughed with cynic guile,
For well he saw how matters turned.
The Queen, whose heart with pity burned
At Reynard's feigned distress, then prayed
The King for grace, and begged that stayed
Might be the strife of tongues, while pause
Was given to Reynard, that his cause
He might set forth, unchecked by dread
Of evil hap.

King Nobel said :

" Let silence reign, that Reynard may
Tell forth whate'er he hath to say."

Then spake the Fox : " Let all men hold
Their peace, while clearly I unfold,
As now commanded by the King,
A tale of treason, that will bring
Some great ones low—the truth shall spare
No man—let guilty souls beware."



NOW hearken how the Fox began.
 His eye around the Court he ran,
 And then the faithful Grymbert called
 To be his witness, and forestalled
 Thereby the moment he might need
 Support and help, for he would plead
 Grymbert's good name, when any doubt
 Was cast on tales he told about
 His friends or foes.

"My Lord," quoth he,
 "The onerous charge now laid on me
 Is one which I have long forborne:
 Past power to tell, my heart is torn
 Betwixt stern duty, and the thought
 That mine own honour must be bought
 By others' woe—and lasting ruin
 To Tybert, Isegrym, and Bruin.

"To clear the tale, must I go back
 To days when lived my Sire—alack!
 That his respected name should be
 Involved in fraud and treachery.
 Thus, then, it happed: my father found
 Deep dolven down beneath the ground
 The precious hoard of untold wealth,
 Which great King Ermanric by stealth
 In long-forgotten times concealed
 From envious eyes. When now revealed

(By magic arts, none other knew)
To my dear Sire, alas! he grew
Henceforth so proud, that he aspired
To rule the whole wide world, and fired
With this strange madness, in despite
Of law and reason, sense and right,
Tybert the Cat, as envoy sent
To journey o'er the vast extent
Of wild Ardenne, seek out the Bear,
Make him the offer of a share
In wealth untold, with vows that he
Would homage do and fealty
To Bruin, and anoint him King
In your despite, and shortly bring
Your royal line to nought. The Bear,
Dazzled at this great prospect, sware
To follow out his rede, for long
His heart had dreamed of suchlike wrong.

“ Hot foot, he straight to Flanders sped,
And there, as he were King and head
Of beasts, my Father hailed him. Then,
With subtle wit past mortal ken,
The wise and helpful Grymbert they
Seduced to join them, nor made stay
Thereat, but sought out Isegrym,
And much I grieve to say, with him
The Cat conspired.

 Beside a thorp,
'Twixt Ghent and Yft, the west and warp
Of treason wove these five, discussed
Their plans, and boldly putting trust
In help and counsel of the fiend
Who reigns in Hell, they lightly weened,
By aid from him, and through the store
My Father owned, they need no more

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

Doubt full success.

Oh! hearken now,
Great King, how ill from ill doth grow.
These five men pledged a solemn oath,
And plighted each towards other troth,
Confirmed by vows sworn on the head
Of Isegrym, that in thy bed
Thou shouldst be murdered, while the Bear
Should mount thy throne, and boldly wear
At Acon, sacred stole and crown :
My Sire, moreover, vowed to drown,
By bribes, all efforts that thy friends
Or lineage made to stay the ends
These traitors purposed, conquering right
By ill-got wealth and hireling might,
Till loyalty's voice was quenched in death.

“ But thus it happed—when morning's breath
The conclave brake, my nephew dear,
Young Grymbert Dachs, such merry cheer
Had made o'ernight, that still he lay
Foordrunken through the following day.
And then to Dame Sleepcap, his wife,
Told forth the plot, but on her life
Charged her, that she should nought reveal
To living man. Beneath the seal
Of holy shrift my wife she told,
On pilgrimage, but bade her hold
Her shriving close, and made her swear
By those three holy Kings, whose fair
And precious shrine bedecks Cologne,
She ne'er would make the plotting known
Till death, nor dare for love or hate,
In any form to violate
The fateful secret that she held.
Hidden she kept it till it welled

Forth from her burdened heart to me
What time we next joined company ;
But strictly charged that I should keep
The dread disclosure hidden deep
Within my breast. Moreover gave
She then, with solemn words, such grave
And certain tokens that she spoke
Unblemished truth, that straight I broke
Forth in a fearful death-cold sweat,
The while she showed the wide-meshed net
Of foul conspiracy. Like lead
My heart became, and wellnigh dead
Within me felt, while stood my fine
Soft fur, like quills of porcupine,
Straight out on end.

And then thought I,
A likeness may be traced hereby
Betwixt the Frogs and us,—they dwelt
For ages free as air, yet felt
Desire for change, and therefore cried
To Jove, and prayed he would provide
A Lord to rule them : and he gave
To them King Stork, who made a grave
Far down his throat, for all who said
They owned their souls, and ere long dead
Was half the Kingdom. Then they plained
Their lot, and gladly had regained
Their ancient freedom, but too late
Came vain regret, henceforth their fate
It was to suffer, for no more
Could freedom reign as heretofore
Within their state.

So doth it seem,
That had this most nefarious dream
Of wicked plotters once been brought
To full fruition, past all thought

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

Our woe had been—by traitors ruled !
Ah ! then my heart was sharply schooled
In dread and fear, when visions crossed
My mind that Fortune's freak had tossed
Us all beneath the shrewish might
Of Bruin, who would those requite
He loved not, with affliction's fire:
But thee we know for Lord and Sire,
Of noble birth, and soul benign,
And should we tamely then resign
Thy rule to live beneath a Bear ?
Whilst thou hast filled the kingly chair,
All men have lived their lives in peace,
Blessed with content, and fair increase
Of worldly goods, and should we throw
Thy house aside for one we know
Hath bred in long ancestral line
Folly and madness ?

Grief was mine
By day and night, the while I thought
How I might wreck, and bring to nought
My father's counsel, which would make
This traitorous churl great lordship take
Beyond his fellows : then I prayed
On bended knees to Him who made
This wondrous world, to safely keep
With watchful love which knows not sleep
Our gracious Lord and King in health,
For nought I doubted that the wealth
My father owned he would employ,
In league with traitors, to destroy,
Or set aside, our honoured Lord ;
Therefore I sought to trace that hoard
From earliest dawn till darkling eve ;
Nor did my zeal one corner leave
Unsearched or covert ; every stone

I dug beneath: each moss-o'ergrown
And shaggy rock I hid behind,
And through each dry stream-bed did wind
To track my Father's slot or tread:
And time and oft, above his head,
'Mid leafy branches would I watch
With patient eye, intent to catch
Some hint of where the treasure lay—
In shine or storm, by night and day,
His every movement I espied.

“ At last it happed one Christmas-tide,
That, as I flat upon the ground
Lay couched, my parent with a bound
Appeared from out a hole. My breath
Came short and quick, for certain death
Were mine in case my form were seen.
He scanned around, but friendly screen
A bush afforded, and I lay
Unnoticed, ah! what words could say
The throes I suffered?

When the land
He deemed all clear, he scraped the sand
With painful care across the hole,
Yet worked with vigilance, and stole
A frequent glance around to see
If any watched: then, carefully,
The sand once more made smooth and plain,
With tongue and tail, till not one grain
Appeared displaced; and thus I learned
Some hints which I full oft have turned
To good advantage.

Well content
The ancient seemed, and straightway bent
His steps towards home.

Ye well may wot

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

My eyes had closely marked the spot,
Long sought with sleepless pains, and when
Its master well had passed from ken,
I lightly bounded towards the hole,
And burrowing deftly, as a mole,
Scratched, clawed, and scraped, with eager feet,
The sand away, till entry meet
For one of slim-built form was made.

“ My Lord—I hesitate—afraid
To put in words the view that burst
In glory on me when I first
Effected entrance. None I ween
Who live, except myself have seen
A sight so wondrous and so fair,
Past dreaming, and beyond compare
For sparkling splendour. Ne'er King reigned
Since earth began, but with unfeigned
Surprise and wonder had beheld
The scene that dazed my vision. Quelled
My spirit seemed within me when
I gazed around : nor gods nor men,
Foretime or late, have ever known
More wealth and treasure than was shown
In one vast heap—far flashing gold,
Plenteous, as though Pactolus rolled
His ruddy sands therein : moonlight
Could scarce have made the cave more white
Than glittering silver showed it ; gems
Enough to broider all the hems
Of royal robes that e'er were worn
Since Kings first ruled : the gorgeous morn
Ne'er dyed her mantling in such hues
As flashed and sparkled : rich tissues
From looms of Perse and Ind were there
In bales unnumbered, and more rare

Than tongue can compass : from the wall
Gleamed trophies fitted to recall
Great tales of high romance : rich suits
Of armour, such as fame reposes
The godlike heroes bore of old ;
Bright burnished steel, inlaid with gold ;
Fair silver hauberks, fine as gauze
Spun from the web the silkworm draws
For shroud around him, yet as steel
Hard tempered, that no blade could feel
Its way therethrough.

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

Of suchlike gear
As queens and high born ladies wear,
Mine eyes beheld a paradise
Beyond all telling, past all price ;
Necklets and bracelets, chains and rings,
Beset with emeralds shaming spring's
New undimmed raiment ; coronets bright
With diamonds flashing like the light
Of sundawn's bursting ; lustrous pearls,
Dazzling as teeth of laughing girls
In bloom of youth ; rich rubies, red
As that young blood by Herod shed :
Sapphires of such surpassing hue
As mocked the heaven-reflected blue
Of sunniest ocean : topaz rare,
That flashed forth gold ; and opals fair,
The myriad hued.

O'erhead there swung,
And through the cave sweet odours flung,
Rich lamps, with dædal chasings wrought
By curious craftsmanship, and fraught
With fragrant spices.

Far around
In heaps, and scattered o'er the ground,
Lay coins of every clime and realm.

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

Lightly might wealth so great o'erwhelm
My Father's mind with maddening dreams
Of wild ambition. But meseems
That powerless sound mere words to draw
The faintest sketch of all I saw
Within that wondrous cave. As vain
It were to count the falling rain,
Or number daisies on the lea,
Or tell the myriads of the sea,
As strive to bring before thine eyes
By force of words, the wondrous prize
Once lost, now thine.

My faithful wife
I sought forthwith, who by her life
And hopes of heaven, on bended knee
Swore solemn oaths of secrecy.

"Then swinked we ceaseless, night and day,
This good to carry far away,
And hide within a deep haw-haw,
And then vast tons of earth to draw,
And heap o'erhead : now verdant grows
The grass thereon, and waving rows
Of willows mark the hiding-place
Of this great treasure.

Ever apace,
While thus we laboured, grew the plot
Of treasonous crime. Ye well may wot
That burning to fulfil his bent,
With thrifty speed my Father went
To join his miscreant friends, who backed
His wild ambition till he lacked
Ruth, fear, or pity.

Hear ye now
Their hell-born project, and I trow
Thou wilt accord that but for me,

Great King, thou'dst fared but wretchedly.

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

“ The Bear and Wolf sent far and wide
The news o'er all the countryside,
That men might earn unheard-of wage,
In ready coin, would they engage
To fight for Bruin, while my Sire
With nimble foot, which nought could tire,
Bare treasonous letters through the land.
Ah! little wist he while he planned
And plotted thus, his treasure-store
Had vanished! and he nevermore
Should find thereof one penny, though
He fondly hoped at one great blow
To win the world.

When he had been
O'er all the land that lies between
The Elbe and Somme, and listed there
A band of fighting men, who sware
To haste to Bruin's aid as soon
As springtide waked the ringdove's croon,
Homeward he sped again to meet
His friends and fellows, who did greet
With open ears the tales he told
Of scapes and dangers manifold,
Endured and overcome, while he
Had scoured the land of Saxony,
Where hounds and hunters day by day
Pursued him so, that scarce away
He brake with life.

He next displayed
Letters to that fell four, which made
The treacherous heart of Bruin light
And gladsome. Well equipped and dight
With arms, they said, were seventy score
Akin to Isegrym, who swore

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

That they, with Foxes, Cats, and Bears
Unnumbered, would from out their lairs
Come trooping forth at trumpet call
To Bruin's aid, but one and all
Strict stipulation made that they
Should first receive a full month's pay.

“ All this, thank God! I heard and spied
And noting how my Father hied
Towards where he trowed his treasure lay,
With hurried footsteps, in the grey
Dim twilight followed, unperceived.
Ye Gods! My bosom throbbd and heaved
Wellnigh to bursting as he drew
Anigh the fateful spot: I knew
What rage would seize him when the truth
Flashed on his senses: and forsooth
When came he near, and saw the hole
Gape wide, across his visage stole
A fearful look of blank despair,—
He entered straight, and soon as ware
Of what had happed, came rushing forth,
Looked east, looked west, looked south, looked
north,

But no man saw, for I lay hid
Securely; next he wildly chid
His evil fortune, then a tree
He mounted, and, O misery!
Before mine eyes a corpse he swang,
While through mine ears his death cry rang
And ringeth yet.

Dull, dead and cold
My heart still turns, as I behold
In memory's glass that awful day:
Yet who shall rashly dare to say
That he hath erred, whose one pure aim

Hath been to shield from death and shame
His sovereign Lord, and break the might
Of bold rebellious men ?

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

But Right
And Justice seem, alas! astray,
When I behold the unblushing way
In which these traitors, round their King
In Council seated, barefaced fling
At me proud scornful looks, while I
Am left,—despised and spurned,—to die !

“ To save thy life, dear Lord, I let
My own dear Father perish ; yet
Small thanks are mine. What other one
Of all who stand around had run
Such risks as fell to my sad lot ?
I pause—’tis vain—they answer not ! ”

While Reynard spake, a fierce desire
To win this treasure-hoard ’gan fire
The hearts of King and Queen, who cried :
“ Nay, Reynard, wilt thou not confide
To us where this great storehouse lies ?
Or wilt thou rashly dare despise
To gain our mercy through this good ? ”

Quoth Reynard : “ Nay, then, by the rood !
How should I tell so great a thing
In face of traitors, who would bring
My soul to death ? Each man of them
Would inly triumph, and contemn
The Fox for one of slender wit.”

“ Nay ! here we find occasion fit,”
Exclaimed the Queen, “ to pardon all
Thy past offences, and recall
Thee to our Council, if but wise

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

And true thou provest.”

Quick replies

The Fox : “ Dear Lady, should my Lord
Of royal graciousness, afford
To me full pardon, and forgive
The past ill time, ne’er yet did live
Monarch on whom so rich a shower
Of wealth hath fallen, as shall dower
His crown withal : for as ’tis said,
The tale of stars that o’er us shed
Their influence, hath alone been told
By him who made them, so this gold
No mortal man can tell.”

Then cried

The King : “ Ah! Dame, would ye confide
In legends Reynard doth relate?
Saving your reverence, innate
It is with him to rob and lie,
And though for once he willed to try
Plain-spoken truth, so in his bone
Is falsehood grafted, and so grown
Within his flesh, that much I doubt
If aught can drive that foul fiend out.”

Replied the Queen : “ Nay, good my Lord,
’Twere well to trust the Fox’s word,
For though he showed so fell before,
He now is changed, and will no more
Lie, jape, or steal : we all have heard
With what plain speech he hath preferred
Against his nephew and his Father,
Gross charge of crime, which he might rather
Have laid on other beasts, if he
Had mind to practise loselry.”

Answered the King : “ Great Dame, if thou

Wilt have it so, my mind shall bow
To thy desire, e'en though I thought
That my accord thereto were bought
By some great scathe that might befall
Myself or crown. Now hear men all :—
An oath I swear by that same crown,
And by my kingly ermined gown,
That should the Fox but once again
Miso and trespass, I will rain
Such vengeance down on him, and those
Who own his lineage, that the crows,
And other carrion birds, shall feed
For years untold on all the breed
Of Foxes, and their race shall be
Destroyed till past the ninth degree.”

Then Reynard fixed his eyes stoundmele
Against the King's ; such joy did feel
His heart he scarce found voice to speak,
But lastly, all subdued and weak,
Said :

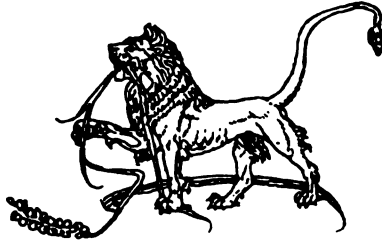
“ Gracious Lord, he were not wise
Who strove with foolish japes and lies,
To cozen one whose wit acute
Hath long been held beyond dispute
Or question ; thou for judgment sound
Art through the world's wide space renowned,
And shallow-pated must he be
Who strives in wit to master thee.”

The King from off the greensward took
A straw, with grave judicial look,
Then said : “ E'en brittle as this straw,
I count that stern time-honoured law,
Whereby thou art condemned to die
For murder, theft and villainy.

XVII. The
Fox well goes.

See now, before thine eyes is broken
In twain this straw, let that be token
Of pardon for thy past misdeeds,
And full oblivion for the redes
Whereby thy Father sought to ruin
Our noble state, and 'stablish Bruin
On that illustrious throne where we
Hold rule with peace and equity."

Once more fair hope began to buoy
The Fox's heart, which leapt for joy
To hear these words, and in his brain
Arose forthwith a brilliant train
Of bold-eyed fiction, which the King
Should blind and hoodwink, and the string
Of lies he told make seeming fair
In such degree, that Wolf and Bear,
Cast down from high estate, might prove
The woe of thraldom, while above
Their abject heads exalt, he might
As champion pose, of Truth and Right.





XVIII · HOW · THE · FOX · GAVE ·
HIS · THANKS · TO · THE · KING · & ·
TOLD · OF · THE · HIDING · PLACE ·
OF · A · GREAT · TREASURE ·

THEN said he : “ Gracious King and Queen,
I praise my God that ye have seen
It good, thus freely unto me
To do such worship ; heartily
Thereof I thank ye, and will show
What strong and grateful love doth glow
Within my faithful breast : no King
Holds rule within this wide world’s ring
Whose treasure-house shall equal thine ;
For that great wealth, which now is mine,
To thee I freely give.”

Then took
The Fox a straw in hand, with look
Of grave assurance : “ Hold,” quoth he,
“ This straw, and know most certainly,
King Ermanric’s great wealth henceforth
Is thine.”

As though ’twere thing of worth
The King received the straw, and threw
It gaily from him—then there flew
Across his face a joyous smile.
The Fox laughed inwardly the while,
For now the King gave ready ear
To all his counsel, and in fear
Stood many lest they fared but ill
Beneath the Fox’s crafty will.
Then quoth he straight : “ I prithee lend
Attention while I bring to end
The tale of how this treasure may,

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

For ages lost and hidden away,
Yet once again be won by thee,
Its destined Lord by Heaven's decree :

“ In Flanders, on the eastern side,
A forest lies, deep, dense and wide,
Known as the wild-wood Hulsterlo.
Most drear it is, and round it blow
Fierce howling winds, while near to it
Rolls the black tide called Krekynpit.
A lone and savage wilderness
Is all this land, and dire distress
Find those who wend therein ; a year
Oft flitteth by, when come anear
To that sad spot nor man nor wife,
Unless forwearied of their life.

“ Keep well the name of Krekynpit
In memory's hold, for interknit
Therewith is all the mystery
Of where the precious hoard doth lie.
Now prithee lend most careful ear
The while I indicate a clear
Unerring key by which to win
The long-lost treasure that within
The fosse lies hid. To me alone
These mystic sentences are known :

King am I and master here,
Right o'er all this wealth I claim,
Each man who his life holds dear
Knoweth well to fear my name.
Yield before my might, O gates !
Nobel bids ye to obey,
Powerful is the prince who waits,
I am he who brooks no nay,
Think ye not to shun the fates ;
Bolts and bars away ! away !

“ These words thou thrice must boldly speak
Whene'er the treasure-store ye seek,
But go thou not alone the while,
For as in that far distant isle
The three sweet-voiced Hesperides
Kept guard o'er golden fruit, so these
Drear lands wherein my toil hath piled
This golden hoard, are watched by wild,
Fierce demon sprites. Have therefore care
To choose some faithful friends to share
This dangerous questing, and thy Queen
Shall bear thee company, for ween
Ye well no stranger canst thou trust
In such emprise, but surely must
Thy very self set hand thereto.

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

“ Now hearken further to the clue :
Whene'er ye come to Krekynpit,
Note where the lake in two doth split,
Leaving a tongue of land between,
With towering poplars well beseen :
Then find two silver birchen trees,
And search around the root of these
Until ye see two small white stones,
Graved with a skull and cross-laid bones.
Then if ye six feet further follow,
And stamp, an empty sound and hollow
Shall greet thine ears : dig there, and ye,
Six short feet down, a door shall see
Made fast with curious bolts and locks,
Contrived to overpass the shocks
Of rage or rapine ; thrice stamp hard,
And speak the watchword—straight unbarred
Shall be the door, stretched open wide,
Which strongest spoilers had defied,

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

And all the glorious glittering prize
Lie bare before thy wondering eyes.

“ My tongue forbeareth to repeat
The unheardof wealth that soon will greet
Thy ravished sight, for thou ere long
Wilt own that fable, tale, or song
Hath never told of aught so rare
As that thou ownest.

Yet more fair
Than all beside do I esteem
One marvel which the brightest dream
Hath never pictured, 'tis the crown
Of Ermanric, whose high renown
Still fills the world. Of purest gold
Deft dwarf hands forged it, in the old
And mighty days : wot well that this
Cost many a thousand mark, ywis,
For precious stones : around it stand
Storied, all deeds the King's right hand
Victorious wrought o'er land and sea,
Swaying the wide world mightily.

“ This glorious work, the traitorous Bear
Aspired as sovereign Lord to wear :—
Vain futile dream !—Thy goodly head
Shall o'er that crown new lustre shed.

“ Dear Lord, when all this good is thine,
And doth in radiant splendour shine
Around thy throne, from brimming heart
Thy voice shall cry : ‘ How true thou art,
O Reynard Fox, whose subtle wit
Won all this treasure, and with it
Hast dowered thy King : God give to thee
Fair fortune, wheresoe'er ye be.’ ”

“ The King looked wondrous grave, and shook

His head—seemed deep in thought—then strook
His beard, and said : “Thou, too, must come
To point the weird and distant home
Thy hands chose out for this great good ;
Who else can thread the intricate wood
But thee alone? I oft have heard
Of London, and a household word
Is Paris : Acon and Cologne,
For sacring rites and shrines are known
To all who live, but Krekynpit
Doth sound as though thy japing wit
Had forged the name.”

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

Of little good
These words to Reynard smacked, he stood
Dumfounded, then with injured air
Turned on the King a haughty stare,
And cried, “My Lord, dost thou the way
Desire to know that leads from May
To Rome's great city? Dost thou dream
I'd lead thy steps towards Jordan's stream?
Your knowledge of the country's lie
Argues small wit in geography.
'Fore heaven I wot not what ye ween,
But when my witness thou hast seen,
Thy weening changed will be I trow.”

Then with a calm unruffled brow,
He cried : “Stand forth, O Cuwaert Hare,
Before our gracious Lord, and bare
Thy soul of everything thou know'st—
Why gaze ye then as though a ghost
Arose to scare thee? Wherefore quake
Thy limbs thus wretchedly and shake
With trembling as thou wert acold?
Pluck up good heart, and speak with bold
Clear utterance, by the faith and troth

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

Ye owe the King ; as on thine oath,
I charge thee speak."

Then Cuwaert cried :

"Nay, trust ye well, although I died
For speaking truth, I will not lie."
Quoth Reynard : "Say then manfully,
Know ye where standeth Krekynpit ?
Or is thy mind all blank of it ?"

"Twelve years ago, I knew it well,"
The Hare replied, "a place most fell
And lone it is : within a wood
Named Hulsterlo it stands ; small good
Found ever woman, man, or child,
In that obscure and lonesome wild.
Sorrow and hunger, fear and cold,
Past all that ever tongue hath told,
I underwent in that drear spot.
Some desperate men had cast their lot
Therein with Father Symonet
The Frisian, hoping thus to get
Share in the villain coin he made,
And by that base nefarious trade,
Report gave out, that they and he,
Caroused in jovial company.
But that was ere the time I found
Good fellowship with Ryn the hound,
Who hath from many a danger saved
My little life, and thereto braved
The direst peril of his own.
If he were here, most clearly shown
'Twould be by his true tongue, that I
Ne'er trespassed 'gainst his Majesty."

"Enough !" exclaimed the Fox : "refrain
All further words, and quick regain
Thine home, thy fellowship and friends."

Then turning towards the King : " this ends,
I trust, my Lord, thy cruel doubt :
Is not then all my tale without
One blot or flaw ? "

" Forgive, I pray,"

The King replied, " that so astray
Suspicion led me : now the road
I prithee lead toward where is stowed
The precious hoard."

" Dear King, I deem,"

Replied the Fox, " that strange 'twill seem
Should I the least reluctance show
To seek that good, but ye must know,
That thou behold'st in me a man
'Neath holy Church's curse and ban ;
And therefore 'twould great censure bring
On thy most reverend name of King
If thou in company wert seen
With one accurst, and well I ween
'Twere grievous wrong should blur of blame
Sully thy pure and spotless name
Through my demerit. Hearken while
I tell the wretched tale, though vile
Perchance it make me in thine eyes.

" My condemnation did arise
After this manner : Isegrym
Was seized, long years past, with a whim
To wear the shackle of such vows
As monks are bound by, and to house
Himself within a Convent's walls,
'Neath shaven crown : but soon the calls
Of hunger caused him to repent,
And round the countryside he went,
Complaining that his death 'twould be
To stay within the monkery.

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

Although he day by day devoured
As much good meat as would have dowered
Six other monks with ample food,
Yet stoutly swore he by the rood,
That still he hungered, and complained
That if the year through he remained
Within the Cloister, he must die.
This touched my tender heart, and I,
As being near to him of kin,
Advised that he no longer in
The holy building should abide.
Thereon he fled, and woe betide
My wretched self ; since then, accurst
I wander o'er the land, athirst
For Papal absolution ; soon
As breaks the morrow's dawn, that boon
To seek, I take my way towards Rome,
And, ere again I see my home,
I must across the perilous sea
Wend to the Holy Land, and ye
Shall see my face no more until,
The curse removed, I may fulfil
All tasks ye call on me to do.

“ To fare to Krekynpit with you
While 'neath the Holy Father's ban
Would more dishonour bring thee than
I dare give thought to : men would say
Ten thousand evil things should ye
Behold thee wend with one whose state
Is known for excommunicate.”

The King said : “ Since it seems ye stand
Beneath the Church's curse, and banned,
In virtue of the Pope's decree,
The danger seemeth verily

Supremely great, and might bring down
Dishonour both on State and Crown,
If I to Krekynpit should wend,
Faring with thee as guide and friend.
'Twere doubtless better that I take
Cuwaert as pilot, till ye make
Your peace with Holy Church, and I
Strict counsel give ye, that ye try
To rid thee rathely of this curse."

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

"My Lord," exclaimed the Fox, "lest worse
My state should grow, I straightway start
Towards Rome, and having made depart,
My foot shall tire not, day nor night,
Until my soul, made pure and white,
From sin's dark stain once more shall be
Fit for thy kingly company."

"Reynard," the King replied, "I deem
That now in goodly train ye seem
Towards holy life : God give ye grace
The path of penitence to trace,
Till all fulfilled is thy desire
To free thy soul from curse so dire."

Whene'er this parleying was done,
Raised on a high-built vantage-stone
King Nobel spake, with strict command,
That all the motley train should stand
Around the throne within a ring
Where sprang the fresh sweet grass, and bring
Themselves in order of estate
And birth. But foremost, and elate
In royal favour, Reynard stood
Without a blush beside the good
And gracious Queen, whom he, above
All others, had good cause to love.

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

Then spake the King : " All ye who here
Stand round about, give careful ear
To that I say. Or rich or poor,
Or young, or those who near death's door,
Must know, that in good days gone by,
None in our counsels ranked more high
Than Reynard Fox : until alas !
In lapse of time it came to pass
That he, by ill desires misled,
Committed divers crimes, and fled
The hand of Justice : taken and tried,
Condemned and sentenced, he had died
By hangman's hands : but all have heard
How he, with plain straightforward word
Hath laid all bare a fearful plot,
And e'en hath hesitated not
To charge therein his kin and friends.
This have we counted full amends
For trespass done, and hence the Queen,
And we ourselves to mercy lean,
And once more take him to our grace,
Restored to fill his former place
Within our Council, wherefore I
Command that henceforth ye apply
Your hearts in such wise as to give
To him due worship, and to live
With him, and all those beasts whom he
Calls kin and friends, in amity.

" I charge, moreover, that ye pay
Respect and honour every way
To Reynard's wife and children, greet
Them aye with deference, as is meet
Toward those of rank.

Let no man dare
Henceforward grievance to declare

Against the Fox.

XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

“ In former days
He hath misdane, but now betrays
Awakened conscience and deep woe
For ancient wrong, and fain would show
Henceforth how deeply penitence
Hath stirred his heart. He Romeward hence,
So soon as rays of morning break,
Will pass on pilgrimage, and take
No thought of rest until he win
The Pope's free pardon for the sin
Which mars his life.

Then o'er the sea,
Of peril heedless, fareth he
As pilgrim through the Holy Land,
And when his well-loved native strand
He once more treads, exempt from stain
Of sin, new life begin again.”

The Raven Tyselin, who spoke
But rarely, gave a boding croak,
And leapt across the Court to where
In parlance stood the Wolf and Bear,
With Tybert Cat beside them : “ Now
What say ye caitiffs? for I trow,”
Quoth he, “ your day henceforth is o'er ;
The King will list your plaints no more :
Afar from Court may ye retire
Now Reynard courtier is, and squire ;
In high esteem and favour great
His sovereign holds him. Though of late
Ye fondly hoped to overreach
His plans, he may in turn impeach
Your doings. While forgiveness free
His trespass gains, the twain of ye

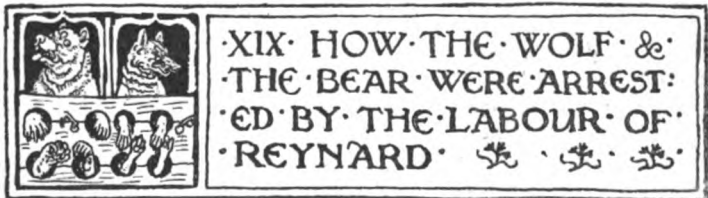
XVIII. The
Wolf's dread
care.

Are doomed for crime and treachery."

Cried Isegrym: "Think not that I
Will credence give hereto, ye lie
Sir Tyselin, bird of perjured throat."

"Not so," the Raven croaked, "ye dote,
And dream half waked, ye foolish pair."

Then towards the King strode Wolf and Bear,
While half in hiding Tybert Cat,
In deadly fear and trembling, sat
And listened: fain would he forgive
Reynard his loss of eye to live
In friendship with him now, for dread
Shook him, lest hot resentment led
His foe to do him mischief worse
Than heretofore, and many a curse
He poured on that ill day when Fate
Brought him beneath the Fox's hate.



WITH haughty step across the field
Stalked Isegrym, resolved to yield
No jot to Reynard. To the Queen
He gave mock thanks, though angry spleen
Shone through each specious word he spake,
The while he shaped his tongue to make
Fresh charge of crime against the Fox.

Burst forth the King : " Thy treason shocks
All sense of justice : dost thou think
That vaunting speech can make me shrink
From that stern duty which I owe
To all my subjects? Learn to know
That laws once 'stablished may not be
Made nought of with impunity."

XIX. The
Wolf's lost
shoes.

The Marshals forthwith gave he charge
That they no longer left at large
Bruin or Isegrym. Ne'er yet
Were rabid dogs more ill beset
Than this sad twain. So fast and hard
Their limbs were pinioned, as debarred
Or rest or movement, while sharp pain
Each joint endured ; nor could they gain
Relief by roaring. Through the night
Thus lay they, nor did morning's light
Assuage their wretchedness.

Hear now
How Reynard's envious heart did show
Foul rancorous hate.

He firstly made
His suit before the Queen, that flayed
Might be so much of Bruin's hide
From off his back, as would provide
Himself a useful travelling scrip,
Of such good sort as might equip
A pilgrim Romeward bound, and asked
Moreover, seeing that he basked
In favour now, the right to choose
Whereso he list two pairs of shoes.

Then mark again what vengeful spite
Was masked beneath this plea to dight
His feet with travelling-gear. Quoth he :

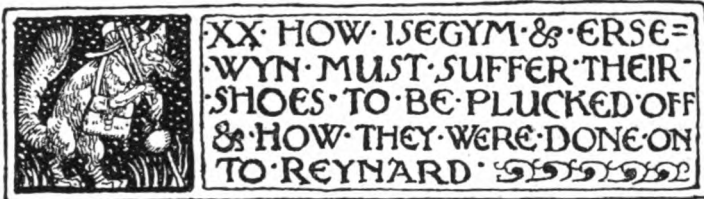
XIX. The
Wolf's lost
shoes.

“ Dear Queen, most needful 'tis to me
That someone four good shoes should lend
Of kind all pilgrims wear who wend
To distant lands. Now Isegrym
Hath four such shoes, and if from him
I borrowed two, and then two more
You gave me from the needless four
Aunt Ersewyn wears (who loves her home
So well that rarely doth she roam,
And therefore hath but small excuse
To keep two pair in constant use),
Then would I, wending on my way,
Thy soul's health make my matin lay,
While, that ye meet no scathe or wrong,
Should be my daily evensong :
Before all else 'tis just and right
Thy pilgrim should, both day and night,
Assail the throne of Heaven with prayer
To make thy soul its constant care,
And grant that when ye pass from this
Sad world ye find eternal bliss.”

The Queen replied : “ Dear Reynard, thou
With wisdom speakest ; well, I trow,
Behoveth it that two good pair
Of shoes ye gain before ye fare
So far afield. To keep thy feet
Safe, sound, and whole, 'twere more than meet
Ye be well shod, for ye must pass
O'er rocks and mountains, and, alas !
By many a sharp and stony way ;
Therefore with firm assurance may
Ye take one pair from Isegrym,
And wherefore should ye not benym
A pair from Ersewyn's feet, for those
Will match your Uncle's ? Evil blows

The wind that carrieth nought of good
 To one or other, and though should
 The loss of shoes be loss to each
 Of life, yet you thereby would reach
 The pious end ye have in hand,
 Namely to gain the Holy Land
 With speed: despatch ye to engage
 In this most needful pilgrimage."

XIX. The
 Wolf's lost
 shoes.



SUCHWISE did this false palmer trim
 His tale, that he from Isegrym
 Won two good shoes.

No fowl at roast,
 Or victim lashed to whipping-post,
 E'er lay or stood more helpless than
 The wretched wolf: salt rivers ran
 Adown his cheeks the while they haled
 His claws from off his feet, nor failed
 To lay the nerves and sinews bare,
 Till red the life-blood flowed.

Like fare
 Dame Ersewyn must befall: the claws
 Were reft from both her hinder paws
 As supine lay she on the grass
 With heavy cheer, and so, alas!
 Reynard hath gained what they have lost
 With dire misease, and cruel cost.

Then laughed the Fox, and scorning spake:

XX. Rey-
nard's far fare.

“ Dear Aunt, much sorrow for my sake
Thou now dost suffer : poignant grief
I feel thereat, yet some relief
It is to know that thou (whose fond
And kindly love I prize beyond
That of all beasts who claim to be
Of kith or kin allied to me)
Shalt freely that sweet pardon share
In search of which I now must fare
Across the sea, sustained by hope
Of mercy from our Lord the Pope.

So woe was Ersewyn, weak and worn,
She scarce had voice to speak her scorn
And wrath of heart, but feebly said :
“ Ah ! Reynard, well thy spite hath sped
Thus far, yet trust I heaven will send
Such guerdon on thee, that thy end
May carry warning for all time,
That though unblushing fraud and crime
Prosper awhile, yet those who sow
The wind, the whirlwind's blast shall know.”

Bruin and Isegrym kept peace :
Reproachful words give little ease
To tortured backs, or shackled limbs ;
Silent they lie, while anguish brims
Their eyes with tears.

The wary Cat

Had disappeared, well judging that
Occasion given, small doubt it were
The fate 'neath which the Wolf and Bear
Now writhed, the Fox would put on those
Who, friends to them, must be his foes.

No sooner rose the morrow's sun,

Than, willing work so well begun
To carry through, the Fox with grease
Prepared his shoes, and ne'er did cease
To laugh the while he dight his feet
Therewith, then made all haste to meet
The King and Queen, 'fore whom he came
With merry cheer, devoid of shame
Or blush. Quoth he : " A fair good-morrow,
Great Lord and Dame, unflecked by sorrow,
Befall ye both ; your royal grace
I dare beseech, ere yet I trace
My pilgrim steps, for one boon more.
'Tis this : that as was used of yore,
The Church's holy fellowship
May bless the palmer's staff and scrip
I bear from hence, for this would gain
Me praise and honour, and I fain
Beneath the Church's ward would wend.

The King exclaimed : " Ho ! straightway send
For Bellyn Ram," to whom quoth he :
" Sir Bellyn, it behoves that ye
For Reynard Fox should sing High Mass,
Ere he on pilgrimage doth pass
Across the sea. Scrip, shell and staff,
Bless thou for him, on our behalf."

Replied the Ram : " An impious thing
The Pope would count it, should I sing
High Mass for one who 'neath the curse
Of Holy Church lies bound, and worse
Than death itself would hap to me."

Exclaimed the King : " That scarce can be !
For, hath not Master Gelys said
That though a man his life had wed

XX. Rey-
nard's far fare.

To all the sins the world hath known,
Yet, when he once the priest hath shown
Goodwill to mend, and vice forsake,
Desiring earnestly to take
The Church's precious Sacrament
Of holy penance, and be bent
By ghostly counselling to live,
That God will pardon, and forgive
His sins in gracious mercy? So
When Reynard shows desire to go
Across the perilous wide sea,
Throughout the Holy Land, shall he
Be not of all his sins made clear,
To live in God's most holy fear?"
Then answered Bellyn :

"Gracious King,

On thy good safeguard must I fling
Myself, if I this office do,
Or else with bitter tears might rue
The pains which Bishop Prendelor
Would deftly wield, should he before
His dread Archdeacon Loosandbind
Call me to answer, or else find
That it behoved him to employ
Sir Rapiamus, whose prime joy
Centres in worrying humble clerks."

The King waxed wroth, and cried : 'It marks
Thee out least grateful among men,
And proves thy churlish mind, that when
But once for many a year I ask
Of thee some light and simple task,
Then straightly fall ye to excuse
The debt ye owe me, and abuse
My kindly nature : sooner I

Would hang than urge thee to comply
With evil grace."

XX. Reynard's far fare.

When Bellyn saw
The King thus wroth, the Church's law
He clean forgat, and quook with fear—
Then to the Altar drew anear,
And having sung with solemn voice
His Mass, from holy books made choice
Of portions oportune to read
O'er Reynard.

Marvellous small heed
He set thereby, except that it
Told to his weal and benefit
That thus 'twas 'fore all eyes made known
How much was he in worship grown.

When Bellyn Ram had duly sung
His Mass devoutly through, he hung
Around the Fox's neck the scrip
Late cut from Bruin's hide. "Now grip,"
Quoth he, "this palster straight and stout,
And so thou art, beyond all doubt,
Right well arrayed thy voyage to take."

Most woful cheer did Reynard make
As came he towards the King, and feigned
As though his eyelids scarce refrained
From bitter tears: but no worse smart
Distressed, in truth, his crafty heart
Than keen vexation, that hard fare
(Equal to that which Wolf and Bear
Endured) some others had escaped,
Yet nevertheless his face he shaped
As worn with grief, and faltering spoke
With sobs, as though each word would choke
His utterance: "All good people pray

XX. Reynard's far fare.

For my lone soul when far away
From home and friends, as I for ye
Will duly tell my rosary."
E'en while he glozed, the Fox would fain
Begone from thence, for guilt's dark stain
Lay on his soul, and well he knew
What stern requital was his due.

"Dear Reynard," quoth the King, "I grieve
Sorely ye take such hurried leave
Of those who love thee': prithee stay
Till night once more gives place to day."

Quoth he: "Dear King, the time is ripe
That I should Romeward wend, to wipe
Away the Church's ban, and wage
War with the fiend in pilgrimage."

"May God go with thee," cried the King:
And all those beasts, who in the ring
Stood crowding round, he straight decreed
Should lend their aid the Fox to speed
With strictest safeguard on the way.

Alack for Wolf and Bear, who lay
Fast bounden, while dared no man seek
To salve their wounds, or even speak
Them kindly words.

Oh! had ye seen
How Reynard boldly trod the green
And fragrant turf, with mincing gait,
Of mien most grave, albeit elate,
With wallet, staff and shoes equipped,
Ye sore had laughed: no bride e'er tripped
To Church in daintier sort than he
Showed now to all men, outwardly.

Then crowed his heart with joy to think
That men who strove to make him drink,
But that same morn, Death's bitter cup,
Were even those who now bore up
His name in honour, and the King,
Whose wrath had been the masterstring
Of all his actions, so was fooled
By cunning flattery, and o'erruled
By greed of gain, that now was bent
His will to suit his foe's intent !
Oh Reynard ! Fox of double face,
True pilgrim wert thou of deuce ace !

He loudly cried : " My Lord, I pray
Ye come no further on the way
Whither my steps tend, lest some harm
Befall thereby : no small alarm
I feel lest those two traitors, who
Now lie in durance, might to you
Work grievous ill, by treacherous plot
Shouldst thou wend hence, for well I wot
Their cunning schemes.

Therewith he stood

On hinder legs erect : " My good
Dear King and friends," quoth he, " a great
And precious pardon doth await
My soul at Rome : if ye will be
Partners of equal share with me
Therein, let orison and prayer
Besiege kind Heaven, to make its care
Your faithful pilgrim."

" Rest," cried they,
" Sure of our prayers, both night and day."

Then turning round his face, he bade

XX. Rey-
nard's far fare.

The King a last adieu : so sad
And doleful looked he, that but few
Stood by who felt not pity's dew
Bestream their cheeks. Then quickly he
Cried out with merrier cheer : " I see
Two dear friends close at hand who might
Attend my steps, and thus make bright
And cheerful, long and toilsome fare.
Dear Bellyn Ram and Cuwaert Hare,
We ever staunch good friends and true
Have been since earliest breath we drew ;
Through all the ills and woes of life,
No angry words, or bickering strife
Have ever torn our souls, nor e'er
Your tongues have plained on me, but fair
And evenhanded have ye been.
Right virtuous, pure, and well beseen
Moreover, is your mode of living,
A notable example giving
To other beasts of ghostly life ;
Your hearts know nought of angry strife
Or envious hate ; ye hanker not
For flesh, but simple grass, I wot,
And tender leaves, are all ye need.
Ah ! once, from worldly longings freed,
Such diet was my daily use
When lived I as a poor recluse
In hope of heaven."

With such fair words
Of flattery, he these twain, like birds,
Hath taken in his fowler's net
Of wily speech : and so they let
Him guile them, till they stood before
Malperdy's dark and treacherous door.



XXI · HOW · CUART · THE ·
HARE · WAS · SLAIN · BY ·
REYNARD · THE · FOX · §

THITHER arrived, the Fox exclaimed :
“ Dear Bellyn, though in truth ashamed
To stay my journey, yet great need
I have of Cuwaert’s help to speed
Some private matters ; rest thou here
The while we enter ; much I fear
That taking leave of Ermelyne
Will be a sad, heart-breaking scene,
When she perceiveth that I bear
The scallop shell, and pilgrim gear ;
And Cuwaert, in her sore distress,
May speak sweet words of gentleness
To solace her.”

The Ram replied :
“ Nay, rest assured I will abide
Thy rathe return with ready heart,
I see it wrings thy soul to part
Thus quickly, and devoutly pray
That Cuwaert’s kindly comfort may
Assuagement bring to Ermelyne.

And thus with guileful speech ’tis seen
How Reynard lured the simple Hare
Within his Castle.

Found they there
Dame Ermelyne and her cublings twain.
Scarce could her eyes from tears refrain

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

Of joy at Reynard's safe return.
Small wonder that her heart should burn
With anxious fear, lest gaol or death
Her partner held, but now a breath
Of deep relief she drew, yet saw
With marvel that his dexter paw
A palster held, the while a scrip
Of bearskin, slung across his hip,
He carried : short and quick, she said,
"Oh ! tell, dear Reyner, hast thou sped ?
And wherefore then this strange attire ?"
Quoth he : "Thou'dst judge me for a liar
Should I set forth the exciting tale
Of prison and judgment—but a veil
Shall rest thereon—yet must thou know
Some news of moment : forth I go
On pilgrimage far oversea.
Nathless, with will to honour me,
Our gracious Lord in pledge hath ta'en
The Wolf and Bear, who safe remain
In bondage, till once more I come
Unscathed to my beloved home.
Beyond this boon, a further debt
I owe the King. With deep regret
I needs must tell you that the Hare,
Towards whom such kindly love we bare,
Was first, by witness of the King,
Among those men who dared to bring
Foul charge against me, therefore he
Is freely ours, and freely we
With him may deal : by life and troth
I feel my kindly heart wax wroth
With such a traitor."

When he heard
This oath, quick fear and anguish stirred
The victim's breast, who fain had fled,

But, 'twixt the gate and him, with dread
Feroocious aspect, Reynard stood,
And cried : " O traitor ! nought but blood
Can expiate thy many crimes
Against me wrought in bygone times."

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

Loud screamed the Hare : " Ho ! Bellyn ! aid,
Ere this false pilgrim Fox hath made
A victim of thy friend."

Small care
Had Reynard of his cries, but tare
With ravenous teeth his throat atwo ;
Then grinned : " Ha ! ha ! how kindly blew
The wind that brought this timorous beast
Within our borders—dainty feast
We one and all of him may make,
And having eaten well, will slake
Our thirst with blood—right heartily
I thank our noble Lord that he
Hath blessed our board with generous cheer ;
Feast we to-day devoid of fear,
And if the King hath aught to say
In reprobation of the way
In which I've entertained the Hare,
With lightsome hearts will we prepare
To face the worst—no single snap
Of fingers care I what may hap !

Quoth Ermelyne : " Ye but mock, I trow,
And beg that ye will tell me how,
Unscathed, thou didst escape from Court,
And wherefore did the Hare escort
Thy footsteps hither."

Quoth he : " Dame,
From deadliest foe, the King became
My warmest friend, for so I plied

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

His ear with flattering tales, that died
Within his breast the cruel hate
He lately bore me, and as great
Became his love : but quickly, thin
As frailest webs that spiders spin,
His friendship yet will wax, I fear,
If he through some kind friend should hear
How Cuwaert happed to meet his death :
Then doubtless would he waste his breath
In oaths profane, and vows to check
My course, and put around my neck
A cord.

Methinks 'twere well to steal
From forth this spot, ere yet we feel
His kindling ire, and strive to find
Some countryside, where heaven is kind
In giving plenteous food, and we
May pass our life days jollily.
I know a woodland, not far hence,
Where shadowing trees and thickets dense
Afford good shelter, and the air
Is sweet and healthful past compare.
Seven years 'twill serve us. Many a pheasant,
Partridge, and woodcock, will those pleasant
Green alleys give us : shady dells
Are there, where bubble crystal wells
Of freshest water, and thereout
Ofttimes may we a spotted trout,
Scoop up with nimble paw : Ah! God!
What joyous days, despite the rod
The King holds o'er us, may we spend
In that sweet solitude, and end
Our lives there, void of fear and woe.
Truth is, the King hath let me go
Because I led him to believe
That he might wondrous wealth achieve

From out a fosse at Krekynpit
(A place that lives but in my wit),
By digging thence unheard-of treasure.
We scarce need doubt, that past all measure
Will rage his anger when the truth
Flashes across him—then forsooth
He'll hunt my life with most extreme
And deadly hate: ye well may deem
That many a bold and barefaced lie
I had to forge, and many a sly,
Well rounded tale must needs invent
Before his stern resolve was bent
From my destruction unto that
Of my delators. Tybert Cat
Hath fled away, and Bruin Bear,
With Isegrym the Wolf, doth share
The dreary prison lately mine.
Peril and death no longer twine
About my footsteps: wot ye well
That having freed me out that hell
Of woe, small lust have I to come
Therein again. Now once my thumb
Is safely drawn from out the mouth
Of our most gracious Lord, no drouth
Feel I to thrust therein my head."

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

"Ah! Reyner dear," Dame Ermelyne said,
"My counsel is we wander not
From out this forest; well we wot,
In this our ancient home, each hole
And all its windings; each tree bole
Some friendly landmark points: its night
Hath no more terror than the light
Of fair-eyed day, and therefore I
Give earnest counsel we should try
No unexplored and stranger-land.

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

Here have we subject 'neath our hand
What thing soe'er our hearts desire.
What Baron dares to boast of higher
Or more established rank than thou
Among our neighbours? Sweet, I trow,
And pleasant is our ancient home,
And, though our Lord the King should come
On slaughter bent, and lay his siege
Around us, dost thou deem our liege
Could work us harm? Consider ye
How many crossing-holes there be,
And secret by-paths, ways, and tracks
Known well to us, the while he lacks
The wit to follow in and out
Their dædal turnings; much I doubt
That ever he will find his way
Herein; but one thing sore dismay
Doth cause within my loving heart,
To wit—that thou must soon depart
Far oversea."

Loud laughed the Fox,
Then cried: "Dear Ermelyne, it shocks
Me much to find that thou so ill
Hast learned my practice: forthwith still
Thy fear of this far faring; pray,
Dost thou believe I must away
Forth on this pilgrimage, because
I spin a fable thin as gauze
To blind the dull-eyed King? Dear Dame,
Set nought thereby: no spark of shame
Have I for broken vows. A man
I knew of old (whose wit outran
A thousand others) oft declared
That he from perjury's guilt was spared
Who took a forced bydwongen oath
Pressed on, that is, to one that's loth,

And, as the vow was pressed on me,
 To make a pilgrim-voyage o'er sea
 To distant lands, against my will,
 Small purpose have I to fulfil
 The oath I swear. 'Twould not avail
 To me the worth of one cat's tail
 To follow out this pilgrimage,
 And therefore will to your most sage
 And prudent counsel give good heed.
 What care I though the King should speed
 His hosts against us? Here abiding,
 And in our fastnesses confiding,
 We need not fear what strength or might
 Can work against us, but will fight
 Brute force by subtle wiles. Unkind
 Were Fortune's hand could we not find
 (When I unpin my pack of wares)
 Good means to foil the King's weak snares.
 If harm he seeks, by Heaven, I vow
 That ne'er on any man till now
 Did such a storm of ruin break,
 As that 'neath which his throne shall shake."

XXI.
 Cuwaert's
 sad fate.

Now, while this murderous meal and chat
 Went forth inside, impatient sat
 Bellyn without, and lastly grew
 Impatience into anger: "You
 Long needless parleying hold," he cried,
 "Dost then suppose that nought beside
 I have to do, but loiter here
 And wait your pleasure? Doth a mere
 Adieu take all this time to say?
 Why, in the Devil's name, I pray,
 Doth Reynard keep you?"

When he heard
 This boisterous call, with gentle word

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

Came Reynard forth, and softly said :
"Dear Bellyn, prithe be not led
To use harsh words towards thy friend
Good Cuwaert Hare ; he doth but spend
Brief space in comforting his Aunt,
Whose loving mind grim fear doth haunt
She ne'er shall see her husband more.
Dost deem it fitting thou therefore
Shouldst thus be wroth ? 'Tis his desire
That forward go ye, while her dire
O'erwhelming grief he strives to assuage
With kindly comfort ; I engage
His flying foot will soon o'ertake
Thy sober pace. 'Twould surely make
Thy tender heart to bleed, if thou
Shouldst see the anguished grief that now
Bows down my wife to think that I
Must wend as pilgrim."

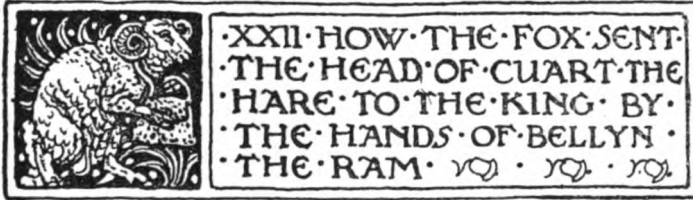
"Verily,"
Quoth Bellyn, "When I called, I thought
That Cuwaert cried for help, and sought
To know what ailed him."

"Did ye fear,"
Exclaimed the Fox, "that evil cheer
Had fallen on Cuwaert 'neath my roof?
That would indeed be sharp reproof
To my most hospitable house,
Wherein, I trust, the meanest mouse
Were safely sheltered. Hear ye then
The sad and simple story: when
Entering, I told dear Ermelyne
That we must part, ye well may ween
What sorrow seized her: straight she fell
In deathlike swooning: surely well
Might Cuwaert cry for aid, and he
Shrieked therefore: "Bellyn, help thou me."

The Ram made answer : " Sore afraid
Was I, when thus he cried for aid,
That Cuwaert suffered grievous harm."

XXI.
Cuwaert's
sad fate.

" Good friend," the Fox cried, " no alarm
Thou needst to feel for one who stays
Beneath my roof-tree: it would raise
Shame in my breast if I the life,
E'en of my children or my wife,
Accounted holier than the guest
Who deigns 'neath my poor cot to rest."



THEN quoth he further : " Bellyn, pray
Rememberest thou how yesterday
The King and Council gave command
That ere I left my native land
My special care should be to send
To him two letters? Ready penned
Behold them in my hands ; wilt thou
Take charge of them ?"

" Shall I, then, trow,"

Quoth Bellyn, " that by thee were writ
These letters? Though I knew thy wit
Surpassing good, I never wist
That so adroitly thou couldst twist
Thy hand to such rare work ; 'twill fill
My soul with joy to aid thy will ;
But cursed by evil hap I lack

XXII. Bellyn
runs post.

A proper mail wherein to pack
Epistles fit to please the King."

Quoth Reynard : " Such a trifling thing
As that shall be no hindrance, see
The famous scrip which purposely
The King bade work from Bruin's hide :
To none of all my friends beside
Thyself I'd trust it : safe therein
Will ride the letters writ to win
Worship and praise from our good Lord."
Quoth Bellyn : " Nought could else afford
My heart such joy as this great trust."

Straight Reynard sped indoors, and thrust
Within the scrip sad Cuwaert's head :
Forth came again, and lightly said,
With cheerful visage : " Let me deck
With this fair scrip thy well-formed neck ;
But wouldst thou love and friendship gain
From those who rule at Court, abstain
From reading that it holds, and if
Ye deem our gracious Lord seem stiff
And formal with you, well ye might
Tell him your hand 'twas did endite
The letters twain, and by your rede
And solemn counsel were agreed
The well-weighed matters found therein ;
And thereby shalt thou doubtless win
The Royal favour."

Waxed right glad
The simple Ram, assured he had
Rare chance of credit, thanks, and praise.

Quoth he : " How greatly 'twill amaze
The King and Court to learn that I
Can read and write so skilfully.

And though, in truth, thereof I know
No jot, yet oft it happeth so,
That God's good wisdom doth permit
Some men, possessed of little wit,
By means of simple trick or fraud,
To gain their neighbours' meed and laud
For work or sapience not their own :
The truth hereof will soon be shown
By my example. Tell me though,
Dear Reynard, shall not Cuwaert go
To witness my success at Court ?”

Quoth Reynard : “ He doth now exhort
His Aunt to patience, saying she
Should dry her tears : 'twould, therefore, be
Well that ye part alone. Beside,
I must in private speech confide
To Cuwaert some most subtle things.”

Sped Bellyn forth, as though the wings
Of that gold-fleeced Ram he wore,
Who, long days past, to Colchis bore
Young Phryxus through the air.

Midday

Was barely past before where lay
The full Court came he, and the King
Much marvelled when he saw him bring
Again the scrip but lately made
From Bruin's fell : awhile he stayed
In silent wonder lost, then cried :
“ Whence come ye, Bellyn ? wherefore tied
About your neck is that same scrip
Which Reynard's suit availed to clip
From off the back of Bruin Bear ?
And tell us on your honour, where
Is now the Fox.”

XXII. Bellyn
runs post.

“Whate'er I know,
Great Lord, most gladly will I show,”
Replied the Ram: “at your command
I went with Cuwaert hand in hand,
To Reynard's house: elapsed short space,
When said he: ‘Haste thou to retrace
Thy steps, dear Bellyn; wilt thou take
Two letters for our liege Lord's sake?’
‘Nay,’ quoth I, ‘by my hopes of Heaven,
Most gladly would I carry seven
To please our Lord;’ forthwith brought he
This scrip, wherein, as you may see,
Are two epistles, writ with care,
In whose inditing goodly share
My hand is proud to claim: I trow
That having read them, ye'll allow
That ne'er with subtler craft and skill
Were letters framed.”

“It is our will,”
The King replied, “that Bochart read
These letters; knoweth he at need
All manner languages.”

The Cat
Untied the scrip, while Bellyn sat,
Proudly, with all-expectant eyes.
Judge then his horrorstruck surprise,
When Bochart drew forth Cuwaert's head,
And cried: “Alas! behold this dread
And ghastly sight!”

The King exclaimed:
“By Heaven! my wisdom lies ashamed
That e'er my kindly heart believed
This villain Fox, who hath deceived
Our credence grossly.”

Then was seen
Of all men, how the King and Queen

Were sick at heart, and grief so deep
Assailed their Lord, that all the heap
Of Courtiers held their breath afeard :
Till lastly he, with head upreared,
Sent forth a loud and bitter cry
That seemed to shake the very sky,
And such deep terror spread around
That none dared speak, but stood as bound
By magic spell.

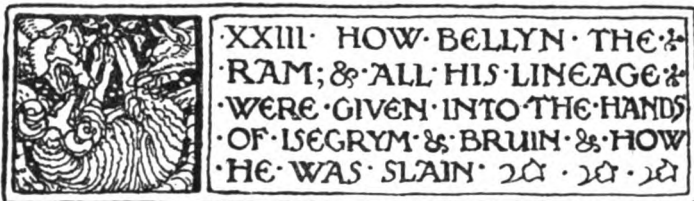
The King's near sib,
The Pard, Sir Fyrapeel, with glib
And fearless words was first to speak ;
Quoth he : " Great Lord, it shows but weak
For thee to sorrow madding-wise,
As though the Queen were dead, arise,
And show thyself of nobler cheer.
Art thou not King? Do not all here
Submit to thy unbounded sway ?

The King made answer : " Truth ye say,
Sir Leopard, but this subtle shrew,
This born deceiver, doth imbrue
His hands in blood unchecked, and show
Such reckless spirit that scarce I know
Where wisdom mastereth wrath. My friends,
The Wolf and Bear, to serve his ends
Have I foredone, and now most sore
Remorse doth rack me that, before
My best and noblest Barons, I
Gave my belief implicitly
To this depraved and worthless Fox.
'Tis through my wife that all these mocks
And japes befall me ; ne'er I wot
Hath man good sterling counsel got
From woman, since our Mother Eve,
Her trusting husband did deceive

XXII. Bellyn
runs post.

In Eden's bowers with foolish prate.
Now clearly I perceive, too late,
That grossly have I been befooled,
Letting my judgment be o'erruled
By intercession of my wife,
And through her vain advice my life
Is spoiled and wasted : shamed will stand
My name henceforth, throughout the land.

"What though," replied Sir Fyrapeel,
"Thou hast herein misdome, I feel
Assured that thou ere long canst take
Such vigorous order, that 'twill make
Amends in full to those misused.
All past offence would stand excused
By Isegrym and Bruin Bear
And Ersewyn if ye let them share
(To compensate for shoes and skin)
Bellyn, and all his kith and kin,
For evermore : with plainest breath
The Ram declared that Cuwaert's death
Was his contrivance, therefore he
Deserves to abide the penalty.
And passing this, I give ye rede,
Delay no moment, but with speed
Let one and all go forth to fetch
This murderous Fox, condemned as wretch
That hath no further claim on law,
And hang him straightway ; this will draw
All hearts to thee in full content—
My bolt is shot—my counsel spent."



“**W**ITH ready heart,” the King replied,
 “ I list this rede, and straight confide
 To thee, Sir Fyrapeel, the charge
 To comfort, soothe, and set at large
 The prisoners, whom 'tis clear that I
 Condemned to bonds too hastily.”

Quick-footed, towards the dungeon took
 Sir Fyrapeel his road, and strook
 From off the limbs of Wolf and Bear
 Their manacles, and cried : “ A fair
 And ample pardon doth the King
 Award ye ; straightly doth it wring
 His royal heart with bitterest woe,
 To think his wit hath wandered so
 From wisdom's path, as once to trow
 The tale this base Fox told, but now
 With heart afire doth he repent
 His folly, and through me hath sent
 Strongest assurance of his love,
 And earnest purpose, that above
 Your former state shall ye be set
 In highest honour, till his debt
 Of restitution be apaid.
 Moreover, Bellyn Ram is made
 Your dower in fee, with all his kin ;
 Henceforward free from taint of sin
 His lineage ye may drive and slay,

XXIII. The
Ram's
checkmate.

Harry and bite, till dooming day
Crack o'er the world.

Ye both may hunt
Moreover Reynard, till the brunt
Of sharpest vengeance he hath felt,
And all his kindred have been dealt
Measure and mark of crime's reward.

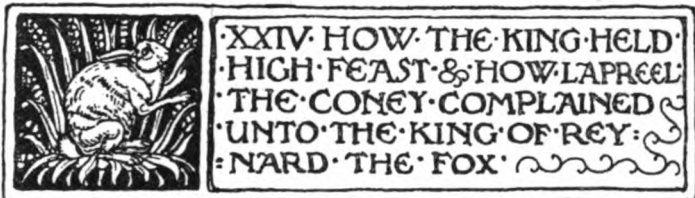
"The King's great bounty doth accord
This goodly grant and grace to you
In faith that ne'er will ye misdo
Against his realm, but lieges be
With homage, faith, and fealty.
Hail, then, with grateful thanks the rede
I give, and rolling years shall breed
New honours, whence all honours spring."

Thus did the noble Leopard bring
To happy end and good success
His mission. But most dire distress
Fell on the wretched Bellyn, who
Forewent his life : nor after knew
His kindred peace, for Wolf and Bear
Held chartered right and power to share
Betwixt them all the ovine race,
In whatsoever time or place
Occasion haps, and ne'er have they
Found respite since that fatal day.

The King, to show new love and care
For Isegrym and Bruin Bear
Above all other beasts, the Court
Commanded to the fields, where sport
And cheerful joyance filled the hours
Twelve days and nights ; the woodland bowers
And upland plains with pipe and song

Resounded, while the merry throng,
 Forgetting grief and woe and pain,
 Rejoiced that Heaven smiled once again ;
 For sorrows past are soon forgot
 By beasts and men alike, God wot !

XXIII. The
 Ram's
 checkmate.



TO this most glorious feasting came
 Each beast and bird, to which a name
 Was given when erst beneath the shade
 Of Eden's sinless groves arrayed,
 Adam, uncursed, beheld them ; ne'er
 Since man's dread fall, till now, had care
 So fled their hearts, and made them light
 And joyous as that first sweet night
 They knew existence. Soul entranced
 To merry piping shawms they danced
 The stately hove-dance, timed with beat
 Of faultless rhythmic touch : all feet
 That twinkled there knew well the pleasure
 Of perfect cadence fallen to measure
 That now sunk low, and now swelled high
 From out the storm of minstrelsy.
 Unsparing tables well ordained
 Were freely piled ; fair plenty reigned
 Unchecked, and reptile, bird, and beast
 Avowed that ne'er before a feast
 So full and bounteous eye had seen.
 Then, banquets ended, on the green,
 They, stretched at ease in careless rows,

XXIV. Joy
rules the
Host.

Regaled their eyes with rarest shows,
While music's murmur, like a sea,
Brake on their ears unceasingly.
Well may the hearts of all men long
To see such pageants, hear such song
Yet once again ; but now no more
Like festals reign ; their time is o'er.

The only beast that held aloof
Was Reynard Fox ; beneath his roof,
Unheeding, lay he wait to do
New harm or mischief ; well he knew
Small welcome could he hope to find
With that good King, whose trusting mind
His lies had treacherously betrayed.

Hear once again how he displayed
Good will towards his fellows.

When
The feast had dured eight days, in ken
Of all the joyful throng appeared
Laprael the Coney (as it neared
The stroke of noon), all out of breath
He gasped, as one who barely death
Hath 'scaped, and falling down before
The King and Queen, cried : " I implore,
Great Lord, that thou to my complaint
Give gracious ear, while I attaint
Reynard the Fox of treacherous crime,
Marring this happy restful time
Of peace and joyance.

Yester morn,
So soon as night's dark veil was torn
From day's bright eyes, I came, with will
To reach thy Court, o'er yonder hill
Where Reynard's castle rears its head.

He stood without the gate, and said,
 With pious air, his beads ; a gown
 Of pilgrim form he wore, and down
 His eyes were cast, with studious look,
 Seeming to read some holy book.
 Noting him thus engaged, I thought
 To pass him by unharmed, and sought
 To speak him fair, so gently said,
 ' Good-morrow, Reynard ; ' but instead
 Of kindly answering word, he raught
 His right foot forth, and therewith caught
 Me such a blow 'twixt eyes and ears,
 As wellnigh stunned me ; blinding tears
 Suffused my sight, while terror-tost
 My soul was, lest I forthwith lost
 My head ; but, God be thanked, so light
 And nimbly flits my foot, that right
 Across the path I sprang, and fled,
 Yet barely 'scaped his claws—a thread
 My life had hung upon—then he,
 With grinning scowl, snarled angrily.
 Nor void of reason was my fear,
 For as all men may see, one ear
 Alone is left me, and four holes,
 In girth as great as barley boles,
 His claws have riddled through my head ;
 So deep the wounds are, and they bled
 So fast, that nigh aswoon I fell,
 Yet leapt forth sharply, or you well
 May judge no Lapreel had to-day
 Stood here to tell his tale ; away
 I ran, nor stayed my course until
 Betwixt us lay yon towering hill.

XXIV. Joy
 rules the
 Host.

" Dear King, of tender pity, grant
 That ere the sun doth fall aslant

XXIV. Joy
rules the
Host.

The mountains, thy command shall fetch
Forth from his lair this murderous wretch,
For, he at large, no man can go
In safety o'er the heath, or know
Good peaceful days : this treacherous shrew
But lives new schemes and plots to brew."



·XXV· HOW· CORBANT· THE·
·ROOK· COMPLAINED· ON· THE·
·FOX· FOR· THE· DEATH· OF· ∞
·SHARPBECKE· HIS· WIFE· ∞

NO sooner Lapreel's tale was ended,
Than through the summer sky descended
The purple-plumaged Corbant-Rook :
His beak stood wide, his feathers shook
With wild excitement, while he cried :
"The Fox most grossly hath defied
Thy peace, great Lord, and swift redress
I claim against his frowardness.
But yester morrow forth I went,
With Sharpbecke, spouse beloved, intent
On frolic mirth and joyous play,
To ramble o'er the heath : there lay
Reynard, as though death's cold hand bound
His limbs—like any caitiff hound.
His glazed eyes stared, his lolling tongue,
From out his mouth, all listless hung :
And Sharpbecke, filled with pity, said :
'Ah ! well-a-day ! the Fox is dead !'

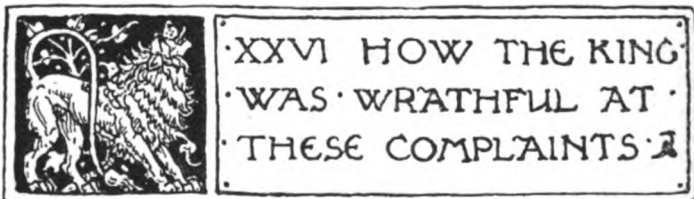
"All round about his body we
With tearful eyes searched carefully
To note some certain sign of death.

As last resort, to test his breath,
Sharpbecke, with tender love, her ear
Laid close beside his mouth : no fear
Or doubt had she, but that misfell
In grievous wise, for, woe to tell !
The felon Fox did only wait
His time, and she alas ! too late
Beheld her danger, for he caught
Her head and bit it off ; distraught
With horror, loud I shrieked, and cried :
' Ah ! would to Heaven that I had died
For thee, dear wife, alas ! alas !
That such a fearful scene should pass
Beneath mine eyes.' Then instantly
He leapt afoot and ran at me,
Scowling so murderously, that fear
Of death shook all my plumes, but near
The spot there haply stood a tree
Where refuge sought I hastily.
And thence, with heartstrings torn, I saw
The murderer fill his ravenous maw
With Sharpbecke's corse : a cynic grin
His face bore while he slonked her in,
Till flesh and feathers, beak and bone,
Had disappeared. With many a groan
I watched him feast, until he went
Back to his lair : then, worn and spent,
And whelmed with grief, adown I flew,
And gathered up, to bear to you,
The few poor plumes his greed had left.
I sat awhile as one bereft
Of life : a thousand marks would be,
Though coined of gold of Araby,
Sum all too small to tempt again
My spirit to undergo such pain
And peril. Sorely doth it irk

XXV. The
Rook's great
woe.

XXV. The
Rook's great
woe.

My soul to show the piteous work
This caitiff wrought. If thou wouldst praise
And worship gain, and happy days
Of peaceful rest, 'tis thine to inflict
On Reynard Fox a vengeance strict
And lasting. No man then would dare
To lightly heed the sword ye bear,
Or hold your safeguard in despite ;
Else surely nor by day or night
Shall Lord or Liege in safety go
Along the highway, to and fro
As need impells them. Mighty Lords
Should rule in such wise as affords
Safety to all : they much misdo
Who heed not this, and sore shall rue
Their slackness lastly, when they be
Found partners of foul felony
Which duty called their hands to hold
In check with firmest grasp. O'erbold
Perchance ye count me, when I pray
Thou keep thy foot in virtue's way."



KING Nobel's wrath was thoroughly stirred
When thus, alike from beast and bird,
Rose new complaints of outrage done
By Reynard Fox : as fire doth run
Through carded flax, so ran the spark
Of anger through his veins, and dark
His visage lowered, while shook his limbs.

E'en as a boiling pot o'erbrims
 And spits and hisses, so he burst
 Wellnigh with fury, swore and curst
 All those around him, while his eyes
 Shot fire as forth from leaden skies
 Forked lightning glances : loud he brayed
 As roars a furious bull ; affrayed
 Thereat were all his Court, and quoke
 With deadly fear. At last he spoke
 With voice of thunder : " By my life,
 And by the troth I owe my wife,
 And by my crown, I vow and swear
 That now the law's strong arm, laid bare,
 Shall strike the Fox such deadly blow
 That henceforth all the world shall know
 To dread my vengeance ; and in times
 Far distant, through all lands and climes
 My wrath shall still be told. O'ernice
 Was I to let the Fox entice
 Me thus so lightly to receive
 His words for gospel and deceive
 My practised ear with lying speech
 Of how as pilgrim he would reach
 Rome and the Holy Land ; what touch
 Of falseness guides his tongue to smutch
 And hide the truth ! Oh, wily Fox,
 That thus can stuff thy sleeve with flocks !
 But out alas ! the font and spring,
 Of all these foolish acts, which bring
 To me disgrace, I count the Queen,
 'Twas her weak womanish rede I ween
 That spared the Fox. But not the first
 Am I who bent his ear to curst
 Weak prate of woman. Jezebel
 Brought Ahab down to very Hell
 By ill advice ; Macbeth did slay

XXVI. King
 Nobel raves.

XXVI. King
Nobel raves.

Good Malcolm, Scotia's King, astray
Led by his wife ; and thousands more
Of men have rued the day with sore
Repentance, that a woman's tongue
Was suffered weight to bear among
Their counsels. Now do I command
And pray all nobles of the land
Who hold of me, and have desire
To keep my friendship, that they fire
Their hearts and minds to wreck this great
Unheard-of trespass, and abate
This murderer's power, that henceforth we
May live our days out peaceably
In wealth and worship : forward go
Our banners till the Fox lies low."

When Isegrym and Bruin heard
With what stout speech the King upstirred
All men against the Fox, they grew
In hope that shortly vengeance due
They might upon their foeman take,
But dared no accusation make
For very dread : at last the Queen,
With stately port, and noble mien,
Calm words of reason spake in French,
Hoping thereby his wrath to quench :
" Sire, pour Dieu ne croye toutes choses
Qu'on vous dise, ni vous dispose
A jurer legèrement, a man
Of worship should not curse and ban
Till all the matter doth appear
Past doubt or question, fair and clear ;
I pritheee calm the unreasoning ire
Thy words betray : as King and Sire
Of those who bend before thy throne,
Thou shouldst not let thy oaths be sown

Broadcast and heedlessly around.
But give each question most profound
And careful thought : at last when plain
The whole is made, 'tis thine amain
Thy course to steer betwixt the two
Who claim a hearing, giving due
And careful thought to try which one
Of rival suitors hath misdone
Against his neighbour : oft it haps
That he who plains hath made the lapse,
And *Audi alteram partem* is
A proverb writ in gold ywis ;
As such it should for ever be
Shrined in a judge's memory.
'Tis true I held the Fox for good
And loyal, therefore 'twas I stood
His friend, and time may prove him just.
Thou deem'st he has betrayed my trust ;
But whether he prove or good or ill,
I trow thy kingly worship still
Were best assured didst thou proceed
With care and caution, giving heed
To each nice point. Such seems to me
The unblemished path of equity.
'Tis clear that howsoe'er ye shape
Your judgment, scarce may Reynard 'scape
Your hands, but must forthwith obey
Thy will, although at last ye slay
Or bind him fast."

Quoth Fyrapeel :

" Dear Lord, methinks the Queen doth deal
Herein with subtle wit, and ye
May safely do that thing which she
Now counsels. But 'twere well to call,
In solemn conclave, one and all
Of those ye count for just and wise :

XXVI. King
Nobel raves.

Should their united wits advise
That Reynard's guilt is clear, all doubt
Ends, and at once may ye, without
More question, hang him : but though he
Were twice the thief and shrew that we
Account him, yet my counsel 'twere
He nathless should enjoy a fair
And patient trial, and aright
Be judged."

" Sir Fyrapeel, we quite
Agree," quoth Isegrym, " to this,
Seen, it displeaseth not, ywis,
Our gracious King : just, fair, and good
Thy speech is, but if Reynard stood
Here, and could prove that he were thrice
As clear of every crime and vice
As child new christened, I could yet
Show deeds as foul as e'er have met
Desert on gibbet. Thus his life
Is forfeit to the cord or knife
Of outraged justice. Nought I say
Thereof, but calmly wait the day
Of his appearing. This one thing
Note well : the Fox hath told the King
Of wondrous treasure-hoards below
The ground, far off at Hulsterlo,
Near Krekynpit. No bolder lie
Hath ever yet been forged by
The father of all untruth, yet he
With bold unmatched effrontery,
Beguiled the King's belief, and sore
And cruel racking pains therefore
Have fallen on me and Bruin Bear :
Yet mark ! my very life I dare
To stake, that not the smallest word
Is true that rounds the tale we heard

Told by this perjured thief.

E'en now

He pills and plunders men who go
Bypast his house across the heath.
Nathless, Sir Fyrapeel, beneath
Thy wit and our good King's desire
I bow me ; all that ye require
Must needs have place. If will were his
To heark the King's command, ere this
The Fox had come, but each behest
He laughs to scorn, as though a jest
Or jape he counted it."

Then said

The King : " Now swear I by my head
That furtherforth no envoys wend
To this falsé Fox, nor will I spend
More words or threats, but straight ordain
To all true men whose hearts are fain
To help their King, that ere six days
Are past, by divers roads and ways,
They come with bombards, guns and bows,
Both horse and foot in serried rows,
To march, whene'er their Lord and Liege
Sends summons forth, and straight besiege
Malperdy's height ; a solemn vow
I make herewith : ere seaward go
But seven day's suns, will I root out
Reynard the Fox, lest men should doubt
If he or I be King.

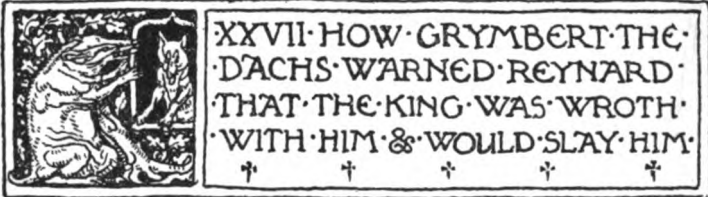
Ye sires

And noble lords, in whom the fires
Of truth and loyal faith burn bright,
Speak forth if lust ye have to fight
In this just cause."

The summer air

XXVI. King
Nobel raves.

Was rent with shouts, and swords sprang bare
From untold scabbards to the cry
Of "Nobel ! death or victory !"



WHEN Grymbert Dachs, own sister's son
To Reynard Fox, heard censure run
One-voiced against his Eme, he stood
Tongue-tied with terror, while the blood
Tingled with anger through his veins:
Well knew he, nought but loss of pains
'Twould be (how bold soe'er he spake
The wrathful words which wellnigh brake
From out his lips) to seek to stay
The tide of wrath, therefore away
With hurried steps he turned and fled
Forth from the Court, and hasting sped
By shortest route to Malperdy.
For bush, nor rock, nor haw, stayed he,
But ran so swiftly that the sweat
Bedewed his fell, for still the threat
King Nobel uttered loudly rang
Within his brain, and thereof sprang
A thousand fears: the while he went
(Although his strength was wellnigh spent
And overworn), the kindly elf
Thus talked and communed with himself.

"Alas ! dear Eme, what evil plight
Art thou now cast in ! Death's drear night

Hangs o'er thine head, and little hope
Seems left that thou and I may cope
With this new danger ; yet to save
My closest kinsman's life from grave
And imminent peril will I try
My furthest craft and subtlety.
Behold ! fresh scalding tears bedew
My cheeks to think what pitfalls strew
Thy path, dear Reynard : shouldst thou die
The death that threatens thee, may I
Thy suffering share. As chiefest head
Of all our lineage, thou hast led
The clan through many a tangled maze.
What other knows the intricate ways
Of life to thread as thou dost ? Ne'er
Art thou at loss to find some fair
And good excuse to help thy friends
In time of need : no man depends
On thee in vain : with such keen skill
Thou weavest words, that good seems ill,
And ill seems good : thy wit doth win
With ease each case thou speakest in."

XXVII.
Grymbert's
fears grow.

Sped on the wings of love and fear,
Unhindered, Grymbert drew anear
The Fox's stronghold, where he found
His Eme without the gate : hale, sound
And mirthful seeming, while he played
With two young pigeons, who had made
Impatient flight from out the nest,
High-built aloft, with view to test
Their half-fledged wings, and helpless lay
Prone on the earth, till past that way
Came Reynard, who, whene'er he spied
The helpless nestlings, loudly cried
With greedy joy, and brought them straight,

XXVII.
Grymbert's
fears grow.

To serve for supper, towards his gate,
And there disported him.

When he
Caught sight of Grymbert, suddenly,
Ceasing his play, with pleasant voice
He cried: "It truly doth rejoice
My heart past measure, Nephew dear,
To see thy cheerful face draw near
My poor abode; no man I vow
Could be more welcome than art thou
In rain or shine: of all my kin
None ever had the grace to win
Like thee my love and high esteem.
Prithee, how fares the Court? ye seem
Asweat, as thou hadst ceaseless run
Hither in haste: hath aught been done
Or said of moment in the great
And busy world, whereof of late
I wot so little?"

"Ah! dear Eme,"

Exclaimed the Dachs: "my tongue doth teem
With evil tidings; ye have lost
Both life and good! for such the cost
Must prove to thee if by his oath
The King should stand, though I am loth
To credit all that he hath sworn;
To wit, that ere seven days are born,
With trumpets blare, and roll of drum,
All men who own his sway shall come
Hither in arms; folk skilled with bows,
Horsemen and footmen, and all those
Who shoot with guns and bombards; brand
And torch he bids them bear in hand
To fire thy house: Oh! be thou ware
Of this great peril and prepare
Before the storm to bend thy head,

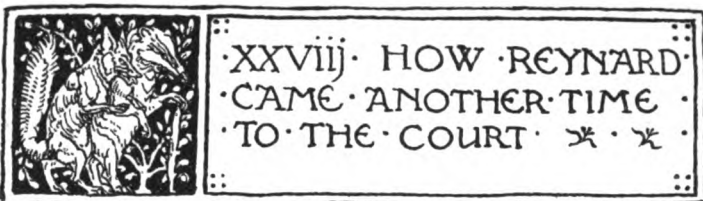
And thus once more escape the dread
And fatal stroke. The King is now
More clipped in friendship's bond, I trow,
With Isegrym and Bruin Bear,
Than I with thee ; they closely share
His inmost counsels : what they will
Is forthwith done, and both instil
Into his mind such tales of thee
As thief and murder carle, that he
O'erbrims with anger. Then Lapreel
And Corbant-Rook have made appeal
For outrage fresh. Alas ! quite sick
I feel at heart lest thou shouldst lick
The dust in death."

XXVII.
Grymbert's
fears grow.

" Puff ! " cried the Fox ;

" Dear Nephew, deem'st thou on such rocks
As these my long tried craft will split ?
Nay ! cheer thy face, for not one whit
Doth this affright me. Though the King
And all his friends, whose voices ring
So loudly through the Court, have sworn
My death, I well may treat with scorn
Their boastful threats ; doubt not that I
Will o'er them ride triumphantly.

" How loud soe'er they please to talk
With clattering speech, my wit shall balk
Their brainless babble ; ill would go
The Court if I should cease to show
My face there : mighty dull 'twould be
Lacking my wiles and subtlety."



“**D**EAR Nephew, well methinks it were,
 We gave no further thought or care
 To such light troubles ; come ye in,
 Though young, these pigeons be not thin,
 But plump and fat, no better meat
 Than pigeon knoweth man ; I eat
 Them bones and all ; e’en swallowed whole
 They suit digestion ; sometimes dole
 Affects my stomach, therefore light
 And tender food, I love at night
 As wholesome fare.

Dame Ermelyne,
 Your loving Aunt, ye have not seen
 A fortnight past ; most friendlywise
 Will she receive thee ; but these lies
 That some have told of me, speak not
 Within her hearing, well I wot
 Her anxious heart, and fear that she
 Might take your news right heavily.
 To face all foes my heart is fain
 And, ere the dew dries, we again
 Will Courtward bend our steps, where, if
 I can but get fair hearing, stiff
 And sharp my speech shall be, and nigh
 The quick shall touch some shrews. Stand by
 Thine Eme, dear Nephew, as a friend
 Should do—nought fear I then the end.”
 “Dear Eme,” quoth Grymbert, “all my good

Is thine to deal with as ye would
If 'twere thine own."

" May Heaven repay
Thy kindness," said the Fox : " one day,
If I but live, will I requite
At full thy friendly love."

" Despite
All that great Lords may say or do,"
Quoth Grymbert, " faith is mine that you
Will clean outspcak them."

Reynard said :
" 'Twould seem as though my favour sped
Well with the Leopard and the Queen ;
Having their friendly help, I ween
For all the rest I need not care
The worth of one poor fragile hair,
So for my safety rest content."

No more they spake hereof, but went
Within the Castle, where they found
Dame Ermelyne seated on the ground,
Her cubs beside her : " Sit and rest,
Dear Grymbert," cried she, " honoured guest
Thou ever art." " Dear Dame," replied
The Dachs, " my bosom swells with pride
To see my cousins grow such fair
And thriving youths, a nobler pair
One scarce could meet with."

While he spake
The Goodwife busied her to make
The pigeons ready, and dight the feast.
Exclaimed the Fox : " If but the least
Foreshadowing had I thou hadst been
Our guest, dear friend, past doubt were seen
Our board more richly graced : so rare
Thy visits are that scanty fare

XXVIII.
The Fox
all braves.

To set before thee grieves my heart :
But sit ye down, and take thy part
With cordial welcome."

Doth it need
To say that when four Foxes feed
On two young pigeons, and a Dachs
Doth join the banquet, surfeit lacks ?

The while they feasted " Tell me true,"
Quoth Reynard to his guest, " how you
Esteem my children, Reynardine
And Rosel, both of them, I ween,
Shall in due course bring great renown
To all our lineage, handing down
The Fox's name in high repute.
Already are they most acute
And cunning ; many an artful wile
They deftly practise to beguile
Pigeons or roosting fowls, and pluck
From pond or stream fat goose or duck
With wondrous skill ; I trust ere long
To see them both so stalwart, strong,
And crafty grown, that all our meat
They win with ease : but first to cheat
Hunters and hounds must they be taught,
And well to know a gryn, lest caught
Be they untimely. When their wit
Is quite matured, I reckon it
Will amply fill our larder store
With delicate meats, that heretofore
No fox has known.

And then again
My fond paternal heart grows fain
To see what touching likeness they
Bear to their Sire, for, even in play,
Ofttimes I note how they dissemble

Dark spite, and make their wrath resemble
 Sweet kindly love. I always teach
 My boys, that would they overreach
 Their fellows, they should strive to bear
 A seeming frank and careless air,
 And keep a pleasant genial smile
 About their lips, though hate and guile
 Possess the heart ; then when the foe
 Suspects no ill, a sudden blow
 Destroys him, or his throat asunder
 Is bitten : oft bystanders wonder
 To see the practice of the Fox :
 But though perchance it sometimes shocks
 Folk's feelings, 'tis a plan that I
 Have followed most successfully.
 My heart grows warm to see how runs
 The true Fox blood in both my sons."

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 The Fox
 all braves

Grymbert replied : " With glad surprise
 I mark how prudent, grave, and wise
 My cousins wax, and oft with pride
 Shall thank kind Heaven, that I'm allied
 To younglings dowered with wit and worth."

The feasting o'er, the Fox brought forth
 The bowl, and cried : " Bereft of song
 And ruddy wine, life drags along
 With weary steps—fill high the glass !"
 And soon, *in vino veritas*,
 He sang with voicing loud and clear
 Devoid alike of care or fear :

I.
 " Ever since I was born
 I have felt bitter scorn
 For worthy respectable people,

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all braves.

So with merry heart sing,
Here's a fig for the King,
Nought care I for law, crown, or steeple.

2.

'Tis my honest belief
An industrious thief
Is a blessing to all good society,
To the humdrumming round,
Wherein most men are bound,
He furnishes pleasant variety.

3.

At a good thumping lie,
No one better than I,
And thus always I get out of trouble,
And if one's not enough,
I can tell quantum suff.,
And explain all away like a bubble.

4.

Suspicion and hate
Lightly sit on my pate,
As though they belonged to another,
And when it doth suit,
Though men call me a brute,
They are ready to treat me as brother.

5.

Then all the world through,
Perish thought, care and rue,
For ever I'm happy and jolly,
And respectable men
Will all envy me when
I am laughing at them for their folly."

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As ended he this moral strain,
Laughed Reynard, till he cried again,
Then said: "Dear Grymbert, wears the day
Far into night, 'tis time to stay
Our revel, prithee take thy rest,
See here a littered bed of best
And softest straw that may be found
For many a mile of country round
To give repose to weary limbs."

Adown they lie, and slumber dims
All eyes ere long, save only those
Of Reynard, who no whit could close
His mind to anxious thoughts, but still
Conned o'er and o'er again those ill
And threatening news that Grymbert brought:
Though bold his speech, he knew them fraught
With direst danger; deep he sighed
To think what evil might betide
Unless a well devised excuse
Could gain at least a short-lived truce,
Till some new-forged and specious tale
Might o'er the King's dull wit prevail
Once more.

At last the morning loomed
Above the hills, and Reynard roomed
Malperdy's height with spirit sore
And troubled, though he nathless bore
His anguish calmly. Leave he took
Of Ermelyne with dolorous look
And anxious words.

"Alas!" quoth he,
"How shall I bid adieu to thee,
Partner of joys and pains? I go
With Grymbert towards the Court, but know
No reason why within short space

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all braves.

I should not, fain of heart, retrace
My steps unscathed : but should I make
A lengthened stay, let no fear shake
Thy steadfast heart, and even though ill
Report ye hear, yet do thou still
Hold fast fair hope, and ever keep
Our castle well. Forbear to weep,
And rest assured that I shall blind
The King with lies, and know to wind
My foes around my fingers till
They bow and bend to serve my will."

With tears spoke Ermelyne : " Reyner dear,
Some undefined deep boding fear
Weighs down my heart. Why shouldst thou deign
To trust thy body once again
Within the toils? Scarce yet is past
The dread remembrance of your last
Most perilous visit, when ye sware
That no persuasion foul or fair
Again should draw thee."

" Dame," quoth he,
" Past doubt or question, wonderly
This world's adventure is : it goes
Ofttimes by other ways than those
One weeneth of ; for sometime when
Or this or that seems good to men,
That seeming good must they forego :
Now to the Court must I, although
With most reluctant steps ; yet dread
My heart is stranger to, and fed
With hope am I, that five short days
Elapsed, once more my hand will raise
Our gate's familiar latch."

Away
He turned his face, and while the grey

Dim twilight broke to morn he went
With Grymbert courtward, sore intent
On what might next betide.

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The Fox
all braves.

The heath
Was quickly gained, and straight the sheath
Was drawn from Reynard's tongue.

“Dear friend,”

Quoth he : “ ’tis needful to amend
The shriving given by thee days past :
Most earnestly I hoped ’twould last
For good and all, but since that time,
I grieve to say, my life from crime
Hath not been clear. Some shrewd ill turns
My heart is conscious of, and burns
Again for shrift. The wretched Bear
I flayed alive, with wish to wear
A scrip or wallet of his skin,
And with excuse to travel in
Stout gear, caused both the Wolves to lose,
For my behoof, those well-made shoes
That they were born with.

Then the King

I cozened with a fine-spun string
Of lies more wild than erst were heard
By mortal man, and thereby stirred
His wrath against the Wolf and Bruin,
In full persuasion they would ruin
His royal estate, and basely slay
Him and the Queen. I scarce need say
’Twas mere invention :—false also
Was that fine tale of Hulsterlo,
Whose wondrous wealth of hidden gold
Was nothing better than a bold
Unblushing lie, for well I wist
That no such place did e’er exist.

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all braves.

Then Cuwaert Hare, and Bellyn Ram,
Decoyed I treacherously with sham
Of kindly talk to Malperdy,
Assurance given that they should be
My fellow pilgrims: straight I slew
And ate the Hare, and thereon grew
So reckless, that in scorn I sent
His head by Bellyn to present
As gift to our most gracious King:
From thee I learn that thence did spring
A sea of sorrows to the Ram
And all his kindred.

Next I am
Bound to confess that yesterday,
As Lapreel Coney, on his way
To Court, by-passed my house, I gave
Him such a buffet, that to save
His life he forward leapt and ran
Swift as aforetime sped that man
Who outpaced Atalanta, or
Most surely had he served me for
A supper even as Cuwaert did.
As to the mischief that betid
Dame Sharpbecke, wife to Corbant-Rook,
There's no denying that I took
Her down at one great gulp, and he
Might justly feel in some degree
Displeased and angry.

But just now
One thing recurs, which was, I trow,
O'erlooked when last you gave me shrift.

“ Confessed at full, I might uplift
My heart to Heaven devoid of flaw,
But now sad memory tends to draw
My soul towards Hell—for gross deceit

Therein I practised : pritheer treat
My new shrift kindly.

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The Fox
all braves.

As the way

I took with Isegrym one day
Betwixt Houthulst and Elverding,
Approaching near we heard the ring
Of well shod hoofs : a fine red mare
Soon overtook us, while a fair
Well-fed black colt beside her went :
As mostly haps, the Wolf was spent
And wellnigh dead for hunger, so
Quoth he : 'Dear Reynard, pritheer go :'
And ask that Mare if she will sell
Her foal ?'

Quoth I : 'The truth to tell,
I much mislike the ungrateful task,
Yet nathless will make bold to ask
The question : ' so with courteous air
Spake forth : 'Dear madam, may I dare
Without offence to inquire if you
Will sell your daughter ?' No ado
She made, but answered : 'Yea, sir, yea !
'Tis quite the fashion of the day.'
Then said I : 'Pritheer name the sum.'
Quoth she : 'If thou wilt kindly come
Behind me, there may'st thou behold
The price in plain-writ figures told ;
Perchance some learned clerk ye be
Who cons all writing readily.'
I marked her twinkling eye, and knew
Its look meant mischief ; quoth I : 'You
Mistake me, madam, weak and small
My schoolcraft runs, but let me call
My learned friend, 'tis he would buy
Your foal.'

'Pray let him come anigh,'

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Quoth she, ' his learning will suffice,
I doubt me not, to spell the price
Writ plain in figures on my hoof ;
Pray wherefore stands thy friend aloof ?'

" To Isegrym then ran I straight,
And cried : ' Now may'st thou satiate
Thine appetite with well-fed colt ;'
' Ha ! ha ! ' laughed he, ' the whole I'll bolt
In one great feast.'

' Stay Isegrym,'
Quoth I, ' the red Mare hath a whim
Ye lift her hinder hoof and read
The price for which 'tis well agreed
That she the tender colt will sell :
If thou a scholar art, right well
May'st thou decipher what is writ,
Though my dull eyes make nought of it,
Seeing I truant played from school.'

" ' Dear Nephew, deem'st thou me a fool ?'
The Wolf replied, ' pray, what should let
My skill in reading ? Never yet
Were letters made by mortal man,
But what with equal ease I can
Read off, as though they spelt my name.
My school was Oxenford, and shame
Should count it could I not construe
French, Latin, Dutch, and English. Few,
Like me, are licensed in both laws,
Or e'er had chance to gather saws
From doctors of the finest wit.
Ofttimes in higher courts I sit,
And give forth sentence.

While I go

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To lift the beldame's foot, and know
Her daughter's value, rest thou here.'
Then forth he went, devoid of fear,
Straight towards the Mare and asked if he
Could buy her foal, and what would be
The price.

Quoth she : ' No great amount :
Lift thou my dexter hoof, and count
The figures writ there.'

He replied :
' Pray let me read : ' when she aside
Shot forth her hoof, just newly shod
With six stout nails, and o'er the sod,
Supine, lay Isegrym extended
All motionless, as though were ended
His earthly course.

The Mare and Foal
Tripped lightly off, and then I stole
Close up, where lay the Wolf half dead,
Most sorely wounded. Out his head
The blood poured forth, and like a hound
Well thrashed he howled, until the sound
Made echo hideous.

Then to him
Quoth I : ' Dear Uncle Isegrym,
How fares it with thee? Hast thou sated
Thy maw with colt's flesh, and abated
The pangs of hunger? Wherefore gave
Ye nought to him who kindly drave
For thee the bargain? What was writ
Beneath the Mare's hind hoof? Was it
In rhyme or prose? Canst thou rehearse
Some passage, sentence, line or verse?
I trow 'tis cantus that ye sing
So clear that all the woodlands ring
With thy sweet notes.'

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all braves.

‘ Ah! Reynard,’ cried

The Wolf, ‘twere well ye cast aside
Your heartless japing, and that tone
Of mocking ceased : a heart of stone
Might well be melted at the plight
In which ye see me. Never wight
Endured worse handling as I ween
Than gave me that long-legged quean.
Within her iron shoe were pricked
Six hard-wrought nails, wherewith she kicked
My wretched head enough to cleave it—
Ah! Reynard, wilt thou then believe it?
Each nail I took to be a letter
Most foully made of me its debtor!
Never again shall I have need
Letters of such-like sort to read.’

“ ‘ Dear Eme,’ exclaimed I, ‘ if the truth
Thy mouth proclaimeth, then forsooth
I marvel greatly, for it seemed
From thine own telling that ye teemed
With wit and wisdom, but ’tis clear,
To judge from this strange tale I hear,
That clerks by studying much in schools
May sometimes grow most learned fools.’

“ Here ends the tale how Isegrym
Suffered such scathe in head and limb
As brought him nigh to death.

And so,

Dear Nephew, thus at full ye know
All wrongful deeds my search can find
In that great garner of the mind
Which men call memory : now I feel
Much eased, for holy shrift will steel
My heart to suffer ill, and none

Can say how roughly chance may run
Against my luck at Court. But fear
Shall void my heart when, once more, clear
My soul is made of deadly sin ;
Though death fell on me, I should win
Eternal bliss, and therefore light
As air shall feel when throughly dight
With holy shriving."

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The Fox
all braves.

Grymbert said :
"Great trespass hast thou done, but dead
Must he who once is dead remain,
And crimes committed, ne'er again
Can be recalled—yet I assoil
Thee wholly, for within the toil
Of death I greatly fear ye stand,
Unless thou clean canst wash thine hand
Of some foul acts, whereof the worst
Is that ye dared, with heart accurst,
To send the innocent Cuwaert's head
(By Bellyn Ram, as letters sped,)
Within your wallet to the King.
Moreover, with a trumped-up string
Of leasings did ye seek to blind
His heart and eyes with tales unkind
Of other beasts.—'Twas evil done."

Answered the Fox : "What man can run
His course throughout the world, and see
Its crooked, wily ways, yet be
Pure as a chrisom-child? Nay, nay ;
He lives not who can soothly say
That, having honeycombs o'erpicked
And handled, he hath never licked
His fingers. Ofttimes grow I vexed
To think how widely from that text
I swerve, which bids each man to love

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all braves.

And duly reverence God above
All things within this world, and then
Each other one of Christian men
E'en as himself he should regard.
Nephew, I find most wondrous hard
It is to keep this law. The will
That works within my breast doth still
Wage war against the outward wit,
And when sometimes a holy fit
Comes o'er my spirit, mighty dull
I feel, as though a-gathering wool
My wits had gone, and scarce know what
It is that ails me, for a knot
Of tangled thoughts disturbs my mind.
Thank God! I now have left behind
My sinful life and evil hate.
No longer am I reprobate,
But love pure holy thoughts, and climb
In contemplation towards sublime
And heavenly things—when quite alone—
But many a rock and stumbling stone
I find when through the world I fare.
Loose Priests and Prelates meet I there,
And in their wicked foot-spores tread,
By fleshly lusts enticed and led
To merry, jovial life, and thus
Good thoughts are lost, and riotous
Luxurious times succeed; men sing,
Pipe, laugh, and play, till everything
That tends to goodness is forgot.
Prelates and Curates, as I wot,
Do ill, yet preach all otherwise;
From them I learned the japes and lies
I now am famed for. In the Court
Where haughty Churchmen most resort
Are leasings freely plied; men dare

Scarce tell to these great Lords a fair
Outspoken honest case, but must
Use flattering falsehoods would they thrust
Their causes forward, else the door
Is in their faces flung, before
Ever their plea be heard. And so,
Dear Nephew, thus the world doth go :
Here, men must flatter, pray, and curse,
And there, some well-worn cheat rehearse,
So twisted that it shows all fair.

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“ Another time, with cautious care
Seek out your neighbour's weakest point,
And then (as through an armour joint
Thou'dst thrust thy sword) with skill ye may
Word-wound the foe, and gain the day.
Or sometimes, if ye deal with simple,
Unwary folk, ye may bewimple
A lie in such unwonted wise
That, 'neath its strange new-fangled guise,
Semblance it bears to fair-eyed truth.

“ Or, if one be devoid of ruth,
And glibly speak his sentence out,
Unchecked by stammer, drawl, or doubt,
Then, though he utter nought but lies,
Success may follow, and for prize
A scarlet robe may he obtain
Fair trimmed with gryse, and ever fain
May spend his life-days, seen he shall
Find honour both in temporal
And spiritual Courts, and do
His own free will, whate'er ensue.

Great doctors tell us that at times
To lie or jape, in small things, chimes

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all braves.

With life's hard needs, for that man who
Speaks ever truth can scarce glide through
This evil world. The best man may
Lie when the need comes, but away
Drive ill effect by later rede."

Cried Grymbert: "Surely thou shalt speed
Dear Eme, in all ye undertake,
For thy clear spirit is awake
To every point that e'er hath been
Made doubt or question of. I ween
That whatsoever part ye took,
Your subtle speech would make it look
Or right or wrong, as pleased ye best.
What need hast thou to be confessed
Or seek my shrift? 'Tis thou shouldst be
The Priest, and shriving give to me
And other guileless sheep. Ye know
The world's estate so well, and show
Such subtle wit, no man could stand
Against thy pleading, more than sand
'Gainst hardest adamant."

Thus they talked
In friendly fashion, while they walked
The Courtward road: but when they neared
The royal precincts, sore afraid
Grew Reynard's heart: his courage sank
To zero; yet no whit he shrank
From gaze of those who stood around,
But forward strode as he were bound
On some high mission to the King.

The Dachs, with earnest will to bring
Relief and comfort o'er his heart,
Stood close beside him, and apart
Whispered: "Good Uncle, have no fear,

Ofttimes much better than a year
One day may prove."

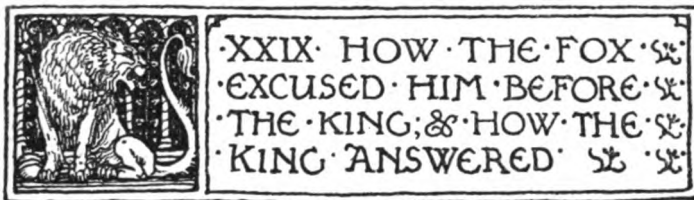
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The Fox replied :
"God thank you, Nephew, none beside
Would solace give, as thou hast done."

Then forth he stepped with air of one
Who boldly saith : "What will ye then ?
Behold me !"

Close within his ken
A many of his kinship stand,
And some he knew for those whose hand
Was aye against him, yet were some
Who loved him well.

When lastly come
Within the Court, upon his knees
He fell, and straight a hum, like bees
Swarming in haysel-time, arose
From dearest friends and direst foes,
While cried he : "Sire, for old days sake
Lend me thine ear !"—and forth he spake.



'MAY God from whom no thing is hid,
And whose almighty power doth bid
This lower world, and that unseen,
Preserve ye both, great King and Queen,
And grant ye, in his bounteous grace,
With clear unerring wit to trace
Which man hath right, and which hath wrong :

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Fox speaks
fair.

For many, alas! there be among
Your courtiers, who by outward show
Belie their inmost minds and throw
A veil o'er evil deeds thereby.
I would that God showed openly
Men's trespass, and all thoughts he writ
Clearly on each man's brow : then it
Were plainly seen, most gracious Lord,
What wight is he that doth afford
To thee due service, rathe and late
Striving to cross unkindly fate
For thy behoof, and all thy will
To bring to birth, though nought but ill
He hath from evil shrews, who thrust
Thy truest friend aside. Unjust
And cruel men now boldly charge
Foul crimes against me, and a targe
Have made of my fair name, to shoot
Their poisoned darts at, though it boot
Them little deal. Harrowe! I cry
On this false crew (who would belie
My love to thee, most honoured Lord,)
With trust that thou wilt ne'er accord
Thine ear to those, whose aim and end
Is death to thy most faithful friend.

“ Therefore, dear Lord, do I beseech
That in thy wisdom, thou to each
And every man wilt justice deal
By right and law, and here appeal
To thee as judge, that thou declare
Where lies the guilt. I ask but fair
And equal measure. Ere I go
From out this Court, the world shall know
What man stands here : no flatterer thou
Behold'st before thee, for I vow

To set my life in such clear light
That thou wilt cry: 'The Fox hath right.' "

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Silence profound as that of morn,
Ere day's wild turmoil yet is born,
Reigned o'er the Court as Reynard ceased ;
But inwardly each listening beast
Wondered to hear how stoutly spake
The Fox, e'en while his heart must quake
With conscious guilt.

At length the King
Broke the dead hush.

" Although ye bring
Your case before us in suchwise
As might deceive some folk, the lies
And garbled truths, thou dar'st to speak
With sounding phrase, are all too weak
To help thee more. Nay, Reynard, nay !
Thy race is run, and thou this day
Shalt as a miscreant hang. The pain
That thou must suffer I would fain
Shorten, and thus forbear to chide
Those crimes which thou wouldst gladly hide
With glozing speech. How much of love
Thou bearest towards us, nought could prove
More plainly than the latest deeds
Thy life is charged with ; evil weeds
But evil garnering find ; the Rook
With reason plains him, that ye took
Traucherous advantage when his mate,
Sharpbecke, would aid thee : murderous hate
Against Lapreel hast thou displayed
When he polite obeisance made
In passing near thee. Know'st thou not
The proverb, that an earthen pot
May go too often to the well ?

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Fox speaks
fair.

So likewise, Reynard, thou may'st swell
Thy pack of lies to bursting ; now,
The measure of thy crimes I trow
O'erbrims, and thou must surely die."

At these words Reynard's heart beat high,
While deathlike sweat o'erspread his frame,
And hot and cold his life-blood came.
"Alas!" thought he, "had I but known
How things would turn, then far Cologne
Had held me rather than this Court,
Where risk is mine to be the sport
Of adverse fortune. Now my cue
It is to brave the matter through
With new-framed falsehoods."

"Sire," he cried,

"Reason it were, ere ye decide
My condemnation unto death,
To suffer that my latest breath
Were spent in self-defence ; for erst
My counsel was by no means worst
Or lightest reckoned in thy need ;
Hath not the Fox been true to speed
Thy good when other beasts have gone
Their way, and left their King alone
To combat fiercest foes? If now
Ill beasts belie me, will ye trow
Their words, and bid that I refrain
My tongue from daring to complain
Against their slanders? Time hath been
When thy dread Majesty would ween
My voice the worthiest. Old good deeds,
And wise and worthy foretime redes,
Must quicken in thy heart. See here,
Moreover, how, flockmeal, anear
Thy throne doth stand a goodly heap

Of those who own my lineage. Deep
Would be their grief if I should lose
My life ; for though light words they use
To mewards, and would seem to set
But little by me now, they yet
Would sore resent it should they see
Their kinsman suffer wrongfully.
My Lord, I ask thee, dost thou dream
That one who in his soul did deem
Him guilty of such damning crimes,
As I am charged with, would betimes
Attend thy Court, as I this day,
In midst of foemen ?

Nay, Sire, nay !

Most surely not for all the gold
That wealthy Crassus held, thrice told,
Had murderer ventured hither. Free
I roamed, as fish that haunt the sea,
Or birds that wing the air : what need
Had I, if conscious of misdeed,
To put myself in reach of law ?
But God be thanked, so clear from flaw
My life is, that I fearless come,
As one who wins his well-loved home.

“ Though some ill shrews would do me spite
In secret, yet in day's fair light
They dare not speak.

But yester eve,

As night her filmy web 'gan weave,
My Nephew Grymbert brought the news
That some vile dastard dared accuse
Anew my blameless life ; at first
My righteous indignation burst
Beyond control. In rage I leapt
About my Castle ; anger swept

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My soul as mighty tempests sweep
Across the slumbering ocean-deep
And lash it into fury.

Grief

Succeeded anger, till relief
My spirit sought beneath the dome
Of spacious Heaven, and forth my home
I wandered o'er the lonesome heath ;
By good hap there I found beneath
A tree, my Uncle, Martin hight,
Wisest of apes, and well bedight,
As many a priest, with ghostly lore,
For, well ye wot, a plenteous store
Thereof he gathered, when he lay
Within the Palace of Cambray,
Nine years, as Bishop's Advocate.
At once, with voice compassionate
And kindly, quoth he : ' What sad cheer
Weighs down thy spirit, Nephew dear ?
I see plain writ across thy face
That some great trouble holdeth place
Within thine heart, and ever well
It is that man his grief should tell
To priest or friend : most wondrous aid
That wight shall find, who unafraid
Lays bare his inmost soul to one
With whom in perfect unison
His spirit feels ; oft-times the man
Who standeth by can better scan
How troublous questions may be solved
Than he whose interest is involved
Most closely ; many a time when woe
Deadens the heart, men act as though
They had their inwit lost.'

' Dear Eme,'

Replied I quickly, ' thou dost deem

The case most wisely ; I am brought
To this great heaviness by nought
Blameworthy in myself ; as friends
I ever treated those whose ends
And evil aims now seem to be
To wreck my life all utterly.

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fair.

“ So happed it that as yesterday
I sat before my door to say
My Matin prayers, the Coney passed :
“ Good-morrow,” quoth I, “ why so fast
Dear Lapreel ? ” “ Reynard,” he replied,
“ Have ye, by happy chance, inside
Your house a scrap of meat ? I seek
To gain the Court, but feel so weak
With hunger, that I scarce can go
Beyond thy threshold.”

“ Ye shall know,”

Cried I, “ the taste of manchet bread
And sweet new butter ere ye tread
Another step.”

I never eat

On Wednesday, wot ye well, flesh meat,
And rather had of hunger died,
Than break my fast as Whitsuntide
Drew near ; for whatso man will taste
The overest wisdom, must not waste
His life on earthly joys, but live
In ghostly habitude and give
Heed to the precepts of our Lord :
Each man who would thereto accord
His ways, must fast 'gainst festals high
Et vos estote parati : my
Most earnest longing 'tis to be
Prepared to meet eternity.

“ When Lapreel to his full had eaten

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Of butter sweet, and manchet wheaten
(As white as new-burst may-bloom), comes
My little Rosel, seeking crumbs
Which dropt around, for day and night
Have children keen-set appetite.
In peace the dear child munched the chips,
When, all at once, his tender lips
The Coney smote, broke his white teeth,
And stretched him swooning on the heath.
Soon as his brother Reynkyn saw
This wanton outrage on the law
That governs friendly greeting, he
Sprang forward so indignantly,
That in one moment Lapreel's fate
Had been decided, but I straight
Seized Reynkyn, just in time to save
The Coney's life, and thereon gave
My son reproof, with many a stroke,
Although, God knows, that wellnigh broke
My fond paternal heart. Lapreel,
Ye might suppose, unless of steel
His soul was forged, would show some sign
Of gratitude for my benign
And all too friendly deed. But nay—
Heedless of grace or thanks, away
He sped to where the King doth hold
His royal Court, and there, with bold
Unblushing lies, his friend traduced.
E'en then my tongue had not been loosed
Against him had ye not with kind
And sympathetic words my mind
Unlocked ; for well 'tis known that ne'er
My heart doth spite or malice bear.

“‘ The selfsame day came Corbant-Rook
In wretched plight, he sobbed, and shook
His plumes 'mid fits of wildest grief.

Quoth I, "What aileth? some relief
Perchance my rede may give." He said :
'Ah! woe! alas! my wife is dead!
See yonder on the heath a hare
Lies mouldering, and she, feasting there,
Replete with worms became; atwo
They bit her throat, and I must rue
Her loss for evermore."

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Then I
Asked how it happed, with will to try
Sweet comfort's balsam, but he flew
Straight off, and nothing more I knew,
Until with wonderment I heard
That this perverse ill-minded bird
Complained at Court that I had slain
His consort. What could be more vain?
For say thou straightly, dearest Eme,
Could any man with reason dream
That one whose race hath trod the earth
Since first creation gave it birth,
By any means could come anigh
A rook, whose nature 'tis to fly
Through Heaven's expanse?

An outcast hound
I better had been born, than bound
To endure such scorning, but, perchance
Wise Heaven sends suffering to enhance
Our bliss hereafter, and past sin
May thus full absolution win.
Ill oft breeds good, and therefore I
Will take my penance patiently.'

"The Ape replied: 'Dear Reynard, go
At once to Court, and bow thee low
Before the King and Lords.'

I cried :
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XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

'Dear Eme, no other thing beside
Would so much glad my heart, but this
Straight course is barred to me ywis.
The great Archdeacon hath declared
The Pope's dread curse on one who dared
Time past to counsel Isegrym,
That since he could in nowise trim
His life to monkish rule, 'twere well
That he should void his hated cell
At Eelmare, and the cowl forsake,
Rather than endless wailing make
About the straightness of the ways
That rule the Cloister.

Nights and days
Of reading, chanting, and much prayer,
Coupled with hard and scanty fare.

“ He plaining vowed, should he aby
The Convent longer, he must die
Ere summer came. As loving friend
I pitied him, and helped to end
The wretched state he scarce endured.
Alas! my kindness but ensured
His mortal hatred. Ever now
His study day and night is how
His benefactor may be hung.
I feel my nervous frame unstrung,
To think the Wolf hath understood
My kindness in such wise that good
Doth but engender ill. And so
Ye well may judge that scarce I know
Whither to turn for trusty friend
To give me counsel; at an end
Of all resource I seem to be;
But what most wears the heart of me
Is this—that I must leave my home,

And wife, and children, while at Rome
I seek for absolution. Great
Is my alarm to think what fate
May hap to them while I engage
In this long toilsome pilgrimage.

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

“ ‘From this dread curse absolved and free,
Well might I go undauntedly
Before the Court, and plead my cause
So clearly, that worst foes would pause
Ere they opposed me ; but I fear
That should I unassoiled draw near
To men uncursed, God’s direst plague
Might light upon me.’

‘ Let no vague
Blind terror seize thee,’ quoth the Ape :
‘ Put faith in me, and thou shalt ’scape
The Church’s censure ; well I know
The wiles of Rome, and thou shalt go
Through all unscathed, if thou but trust
To counsel vigorous, wise, and just.
Martin am I, the Bishop’s Clerk,
Well versed and skilled in every dark
And subtle method whereby folk
Gain free deliverance from the yoke
Of grossest crimes.

I first will cite
The Archdeacon, and deny his right
To hold thee ’neath the curse ; then next
Will I discover fair pretext
Why thou shouldst gain, despite his will,
Full absolution, and until
He grants it he shall know no peace,
Nor, that accomplished, will I cease
To aid thee. At the Pope’s Court dwells
My Uncle Simon, who foretells

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Unerringly how suits will hap
For those who shower within his lap
Abundant gifts : my trusty friends,
Wayscathe and Takeall know the ends,
Of those who salve their palms, to serve,
And order take that law shall swerve
To this side or to that, for those
Through whom their meed and profit grows.
Have courage, Nephew, when the West
The sun once more hath gained, no rest
My limbs shall find until my home
I reach within the walls of Rome :
And then forthwith my constant care
Shall be thy business : ye may fare,
Unhindered, straightway to the Court,
Devoid of fear lest ye the sport
Should be of plague or curse : I take
Thy sins on mine own head, and make
Ye clear as chrism child.

Whene'er

The Court ye come to, thou shalt there
Seek out my wife and sisters twain,
And children three, with all their train
Of kin and lineage. Then thy tale
Speak boldly forth ; my wife no frail
Unstable woman is, but one
Who knoweth all that may be done
In cases like to thine ; right glad
Is she to aid her friends, and sad
Shall be his doom who cannot find
Help at her hands. Keep this in mind,
That though with friends ye sometimes bicker,
Stick to them fast, for blood runs thicker
Than water flows.

But if beset

By fraudulent hindrance, ye can get

No judge who dare affirm your right ;
Delay not, but through day and night
Speed thou thy envoy unto Rome,
And let him seek me 'neath the dome
Of Holy Peter : make me know
By what contrivance matters go
Against thy suit, and I will wake
Such storm of thunder as shall shake
The land across from sea to sea :

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

“ Yea ! though thine enemy should be
The mightiest Queen or lordliest King,
My power is such that I can bring
Their realms beneath the Papal curse,
And if that fail, can send a worse
And bitterer banning ; straight my hand
Should cause to fall o'er all the land
An interdict, which doth surpass
All other woes ; the Holy Mass
Doth cease ; sweet singing of the psalter
Is heard no more ; before the altar
No lover's vows are pledged ; the child
Must die unchristened, and the wild
Lamenting wail that mourns the dead
Must rise o'er graves unhallowèd.
With these dread weapons will I fight
Should Courts withhold from thee due right.
The Pope is nought ; he waxeth old ;
And through the Cardinal of gold
Are all things ruled and governed. Young
Is he, and powerful friends among
The great ones hath ; his concubine
So closely doth his heart entwine
With love, that what she lusts to do
Is done, though Heaven and Earth should rue.
This powerful Dame I own for niece,

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Which kinship greatly doth increase
My masterdom at Court, and thus
It rarely haps that foes nonplus
A cause I father.

Seek the King
Forthwith, and doubt not he will bring
Thy quittance to effect, for he
Judgeth no man relentlessly.'

"Great Lord, my inmost soul was stirred
To laughter when this tale I heard,
And joy o'erspread my heart the while,
For Fortune deigned once more to smile
Around my life; then gladly came
I hither, that the unworthy, lame,
And garbled tales that some have told
To work me ill, I might unfold
In light of truth.

If any dare
In this assembly to declare
Real crimes against me, and can bring
Some witness forth, with colouring
Of honest fairness on his tongue,
Then shall I count it first among
My bounden duties that I make
Him full amends, or thereon stake
My life, if thou but set a day
And field of meeting for array
Of deadly combat—ever seen
My foeman be not one of mean
Or churlish birth, but like to me
In race, long lineage, and degree.

"Who best acquits him in the field
To him the palm of honour yield—
In truth and justice am I strong,
God save the right, and wreck the wrong

Then all the beasts, or rich or poor,
Who thronged the Court from throne to door,
Stood mute as senseless stones or stocks,
To hear with what stout words the Fox
Upheld his cause, while Corbant-Rook
And Lapreel Coney scarce dared look
Around for terror, but both fled
Forth to the fields, then trembling said
To one another : " Let us pray
That He whose might rules all things, may
On this fell murderous Fox bestow
Due guerdon : he alone doth know
Base falsehood so to hide and wrap
In clouding words, that not one scrap
Of crime he leaves unveiled, but true
His speech as gospel soundeth. Few
His falseness know like us, and how
Should witnesses be found enow
To overthrow his tale? To fly
Is safer than the field to try
Against this losel, for though five
We were and he but one, alive
No single man could 'scape, for he
Fights as he speaks, right craftily."

Both Isegrym and Bruin Bear
Felt sore abashed, and dire despair
Fell on their hearts when they this twain
Saw slink from Court, as they were fain
To escape the Fox's wrath.

The King
Then said : " Let whatso man will bring
Complaint against the Fox, appear,
That we, straightway, with equal ear,
May judgment give ; but yesterday
Against him stood a full array

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Of cruel foes, their eyes aglow,
Angry, full-voiced, and eager—now
Uncharged he stands before my throne—
What man is he will cast first stone ?”

“ My Lord,” quoth Reynard, “ many men
There be whose courage waxes when
They see no adversary nigh,
But should their foe dare make reply
Their courage shrinks ; e’en now the Rook
And Lapreel base advantage took
To speak when I was far, yet flee
With breathless haste whene’er my plea
Is laid before thee, knowing well
What fair plain truth my tongue doth tell.
Nathless, had these two shrews implored
Forgiveness, and hadst thou, great Lord,
Laid thy command on me to give
Them grace and pardon, they might live
Unharm’d (although their trespass great
Hath been towards me, and towards the state
O’er which thou rulest) ; for I love
Vengeance to leave to One above,
And to reclaim my foes will try
By mercy, love, and clemency.”

“ Reynard,” the King replied, “ ’twould seem
Thou art much changed ; but may I deem
With safety that within thine heart
This high-toned virtue hath such part
As thy soft floyting words express ?
All this new-found ingenuousness
Seems somewhat doubtful ; simple, fair,
And open sounds thy speech, but bear
I well in mind what deeds of late
Have stained thy guilty hands ; thy great

And grievous trespass I forgave
And thou didst formulate with grave
And solemn words, a vow that ye
On pilgrimage, far over sea,
Would wend your ways ; and did I not
Send staff and scrip to make thy lot
Of easier yoke ?

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

Ye then did send
By Bellyn Ram, thy dupe and friend,
The scrip again, and therein found
Was Cuwaert's head ; ye thus have crowned
Your former trespass by a crime
Till now unknown ; throughout all time,
What liege ere this hath ever sped
To any Lord his servant's head ?
A ghastly gift ! Deny it not !
For Bellyn on this selfsame spot
The deed confessed, and such reward
As he hath found must we accord
To thee likewise, or straight would be
End to all law and equity."

Then waxed the Fox so sore afraid
That speechless stood he ; disarrayed
Were all his wits ; he looked about
With piteous air among the rout
Of those who flocked around, and spied
Full many a well-known face, but died
The heart within him when none spake—
Alas ! no word of comfort brake
The ominous silence, nor was stirred
One hand or foot to help him.

Heard

Was then once more the King's stern voice,
High raised : " My duty knows no choice,
Thou subtle felon and false shrew,

XXIX. The
Fox speaks
fair.

But to pronounce the sentence due
To fraud and murder—now all dumb
Thou standest, what is then become
Of thy much vaunted wit?"

Great dread

Crept over Reynard, and his head
Swam round with fear, but blithe and gay
Were Wolf and Bear, assured that they
Would ride triumphant, while their foe
The bitterness of death should know.



·XXX· HOW· DAME· RU·
·KENAWE· ANSWERED·
·FOR· THE· FOX· TO· THE·
·KING· ❧ · ❧ · ❧ · ❧ ·

THE great She-Ape, Dame Rukenawe,
The Fox's Aunt, with anger saw
The turn things took : she with the Queen
Stood high in favour, and I ween
Her presence 'twas that helped the Fox
To steer his course among the rocks
And quicksands that beset him. Well
She knew all wisdom, and could spell
The subtle purpose of each cause
That came before her ; dubious laws
Could she expound with any man.
The pandects of Justinian
She knew by heart. Where'er she came
The suitor gladdened at her name,
Whose cause she held.

She rose and said :

" My Lord, all bias should be dead
Within your breast whene'er ye sit

In judgment : wrath doth not befit
Your noblesse : all the points of law
I know, and every learned saw,
Can far more skilfully set down
Than those who plead in fur-trimmed gown,
For not a few have learned of me
The law's deep art and mystery.

XXX. Dame
Rukenawe's
rede.

“ Within the palace-house at Woerden,
Where dwelt the Pope, I had for guerdon
A fresh-made bed of fragrant hay,
While other beasts who lodged there lay
Their limbs on bare unlittered ground.

“ Already was I so renowned
For perfect knowledge of the code,
And for my wealth of words that flowed
To loose each legal knot, that first
My voice the Court allowed, nor durst
Another interrupt my speech.

“ The famous Seneca doth teach
That 'tis the duty of a Lord,
Before aught else, that he afford
To every man his lawful right,
And suffer not that in despite
Of safeguard granted, he should be
Death-doomed, or sold to slavery.

“ Let every man who standeth here
Bethink him if his life be clear,
Through all its waves, of sin and crime,
Or if perchance in bygone time
His trespass hath not been as great
As Reynard's. Let kind pity wait

XXX. Dame
Rukenawe's
rede.

Upon his judgment. Then recall,
That he who standeth soon may fall,
And that the Gospel's words are these :

Estote misericordes

[A she-ape speaks, and lightly she
Must be excused false quantity],
Be ever merciful—and more—

It standeth writ since days of yore :

Nolite judicare, et

Non judicabimini, and yet,

Spite of this sentence, men oft deem
Their fellows as 'twould fairly seem
These blessed words they had forgot,
Or rashly dared to heed them not,
Yet in those holy words we see
'Judge not, that judgèd not ye be.'

"'Tis written how the Pharisees
Charged a poor woman, even as these
Charge Reynard, and with pitying eye
Our Lord judged her adultery,
And bid him cast first stone who could
Declare him faultless, pure, and good.
And which of these brave folk, I pray,
Who crowd and throng the Court this day,
With conscience clear could cast a stone
At Reynard, being such an one
As hath his life lived spotless, free
From stain, in white robed purity?

"Ofttimes a man will plain and sigh
Because within his neighbour's eye
He sees a mote, yet ne'er doth dream
That in his own eye lies a beam!
In very sooth, my Lord, I trow
That many a man here standing now,

Ready to judge the Fox, is worse
Than him he dares with lies to asperse.

XXX. Dame
Rukenawe's
rede.

“ Though one fall oft, yet if at last,
Repentant, he resolve to cast
From off his neck the yoke of sin,
Shall not he God's sweet mercy win?
Seeing his pity aye receives
The vilest sinner, and relieves
His shoulder of the load it bears.
With heavy heart dear Reynard wears
Sin's garment foul, and fain would he
Don the white robe of sanctity.
Have not his grandsire and his father
Been worthy friends to you, much rather
Than Isegrym and Bruin Bear,
Who now your love and favour share
(With all their ill-bred kin and race),
To his exclusion and disgrace?
Should I but draw comparison
Betwixt what that false crew have done
To give thee counselling and aid,
And the brave part that Reynard played
Oft and again within thy realm,
My speech would utterly o'erwhelm
That band with shame, for Reynard's rays
Of wisdom still illumine thy days.

“ Methinketh wellnigh upside down
The Court is turned, when each base clown,
Unworthy flatterer, or false shrew,
Usurps thine ear, and good and true
Old counsellors are thrust aside,
Whose constant labour, aim, and pride
Hath been devoted to one thing
'Fore all—the honour of their King!

XXX. Dame
Rukenawe's
rede.

Deem'st thou the welfare of the land
'Neath losels, shrews, and churls can stand ?”

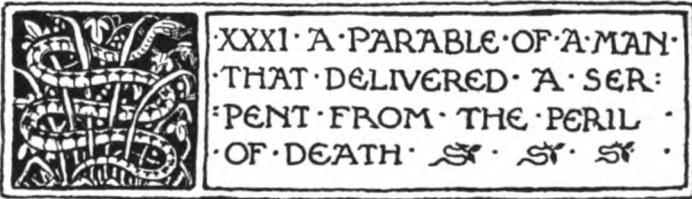
The King said : “ Dame, if thou hadst felt
Such direful strokes as have been dealt
To others by the Fox, I ween
That much less ardent thou hadst been
In his defence. If deadly hate,
Which nought can smother or abate,
Burn in my heart against him, why
Shouldst thou thereon look wonderingly?
My safeguard hath he set at nought,
And, steeped in theft and murder, brought
My realm in disrepute. If trust
Thou feel'st that all his ways are just,
Upright, and clear, 'twere well I deem
That thou, to prove in what esteem
Thou hold'st thy friend, shouldst forthwith set
Him o'er the altar, and there let
Him have thy worship as a Saint.
Thy tongue alone hath power to paint
His crimes as virtues. No one lives,
I trow, in all the world who gives
To Reynard Fox unstinted praise,
But thee alone, and with amaze
I list thy lauding : but beware
Lest in the end ye find some snare
Or crafty trap prepared to take
Thee unawares ; he doth awake
No love responsive in the breast
Of kin or friend ; than this no test
In all the world can surer be
Of a life lived unworthily.

“ I marvel much that thou shouldst own
For comrade one whose deeds have shown

Such evil record. Never yet
 In all my life days have I met
 One man, save thou, who fellowship
 Held with the Fox, across whose lip
 A word of good or thanks did pass
 Concerning him, for ever 'twas
 His custom with his tail to strike
 His friend—thy fate 'twill be belike.”

XXX. Dame
 Rukenawe's
 rede.

“ My Lord,” the She-Ape quick replied,
 “ I love the Fox, and none beside
 Esteem of equal worth. I know
 A tale wherein he once did show
 So much of well-poised careful wit,
 Within your Court, that ye to it
 Gave highest praise. Alack the while!
 That now thy face no more doth smile
 On his deserving : yet shall weight
 Of worth bring down the scale, though fate
 Seem fickle for a time. No day
 A man should praise until away
 'Tis worn toward eventide : good rede
 Is lost if men be slack to heed.



“ TWO years are fled since hither came
 A Man and Serpent : each laid claim
 To have the judgment of the Court
 For his behoof. So strange and thwart
 The question loomed, that held in doubt

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

Were you and yours, nor could thereout
The issue be divined. The case
Thus stood betwixt them.

At a place
Not distant far from this, it happed
The Serpent, by ill chance, was trapped
In gliding through a hedge : the snare
So tightly gripped his neck, that there
He must have perished, but the Man
Passed near the place, and speeding ran,
Responsive to the Serpent's cry,
Who made his prayer most earnestly
For aid ere yet the little breath
Wherewith he spoke were snatched by death.
The Man with kindly pity gave
The needful help ; ' But if I save
Thy life,' quoth he, ' wilt thou make oath
To harm me not? I else were loth
To set thee free.'

The Serpent swore
A binding curse that nevermore,
Whate'er might hap or chance until
His death-day broke, would he or spill
His venom 'gainst him or devise
His hurt or harm in any wise.

" This well agreed, the man set free
The captive snake, and peaceably
The new-found friends together fared
O'er mountain, plain, and stream, and shared
Whate'er of good or ill betid,
Until the pangs of hunger bid
The Serpent seek whereby he might
Appease his ravenous appetite.

" The Man, as nearest food at hand,

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

Awhile with murderous eyes he scanned,
Then at him darted, as he would
Make now that friend to serve for food,
Whose act had been the cause why he
Felt hunger's tooth so cruelly.
The man in terror started back,
Crying, 'How now? wilt thou attack
The friend who saved thy life? Thine oath
Rings in mine ear, and I am loth
To think so soon thou hast forgot
The debt thou ows't me; didst thou not
Swear lifelong friendship?'

Quoth the snake,

'Tis true that I did lately make
A solemn oath that I would ne'er
Do harm or scathe to thee, but fair
It is at need to cast aside
Rash oaths; as well might I have died
Within the snare as now to lose
My life by hunger, and must choose
'Twixt death and breach of oath.'

The man

Replied: 'O knave! at least ye can
Some respite give me, till we light
On those who know to judge aright
In such deep questions.'

Unto this

The Snake agreed, for nought amiss
He found the plea, and met they soon
Tyselin the Raven, with that loon
His son Slyndpere, to whom they told
The case at full: the Raven rolled
His cunning eyes with joy, then said:
'Tis clear the Serpent soon were dead
Should he forbear the man to slay;
Is it not therefore plain, I pray,

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

That famine frees him from his oath?
The man must die, and surely both
My son and I the feast may share.'

"Cried then the Serpent: 'Do ye dare,
O Man, to question now my right
To eat you?'

Quoth the wretched wight:
'How should a robber, who vile meed
Would gain in judging, give good heed
To righteous judgment? All alone
Doth Tyselin stand, too, and 'tis known
Past doubt that two or three at least
Should form a Court, for thus, increased
Is hope of justice, and the law
Should deemsters know, devoid of flaw.
When two give sentence, I agree
Thou then shalt work thy will on me
Despite thine oath.'

Forth then they fare
To seek new judgment, and the Bear
And Wolf they met ere long, to whom
They told their tale, demanding doom.

"They ruled forthwith the Snake might slay
The man to quench his need: 'Always
Doth hunger break an oath,' they said.
Great horror seized the Man, for led
By famine came his foe to cast
His venom at him.

'Not so fast,'
He shrieked, as with a spring he leapt
Aside, while o'er his heart there crept
A sickly terror, 'would ye kill
The friend who saved you from the ill
That flesh most fears?'

‘How now?’ replied

The Serpent: ‘still unsatisfied
Art thou, although the case hath been
Twice fairly judged? Full well I ween
This is enough!’

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

‘Yea,’ quoth the Man,
‘Robbers and murderers know to plan
Such things betwixt them. I appeal
From them to one in whom all feel
Most perfect trust. Our gracious King
Shall judge the cause, and whatso thing
His will award ’twixt thee and me
Both shall abide by, finally.’
The Serpent, Bear, and Wolf concurred
To have the case at full referred
To thy great wisdom; vainly thought
These shrews, that if they jointly sought
Thy favour, they perchance might bend
Thy noble soul to serve their end.

“I trow that ye remember well,
Great Lord, how this same thing befell,
Yet pardon me if I, in short
And simple words, tell how the Court
They filled with crowds of kith and kin,
And how they boldly brought therein
The Wolf’s two sons (cry void of wool),
Called Empty-Belly and Never-Full,
Hoping these brats might get some share,
If so it happed thy judgment were
Against the Man: as creatures mad
For hunger howled they, till ye bade
The pair to void your Court.

The Man
Stood in great dread, for now his span
Of life on thy award did hang.

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

Then through the Court his accents rang,
As he appealed your grace, and told
How the base Serpent claimed to hold
The oath for nought 'gainst him who saved
His life, and eloquently craved
Impartial sentence.

Then replied
The Serpent, saying : ' I had died,
'Tis true, within the snare, but how
Hath this Man saved my life if now
I starve for hunger? Thus my claim
Is just, great King, and nought of shame
Lies on me if I break my oath.'

" Then ye, my Lord, were sorely loth
To say on which side lay the right :
For, if the Man must die, despite
The Serpent's oath, although he'd shown
Such kindness as is rarely known
'Twixt man and beast, 'twould seem unjust,
But yet 'twas clear the Serpent must
Have food to save his life. Command
Then gave ye, that the skilful hand
And brain of learned Reynard should
Thereto be set, for wise and good
Was he in those old days esteemed,
And sound and true his judgment deemed
Before all other ; and ye said :
' Now be we all by Reynard led,
For dowered is he with wit profound,
And wotteth all the root and ground
Of legal doubts.'

Then Reynard spoke,
And in few words did he uncloak
And clear the case.

' My Lord,' he cried,

“ By no just mean can ye decide
From what these witnesses declare ;
By one mode only can a fair
Award be made : first let the Snake
And Man forthwith themselves betake
To that same spot where first they met,
And when within the snare or net
The former once again doth stand
In equal peril whence the hand
Of kindly pity set him free,
Then, should the man again agree
To loose his bonds, nor show him loth
To trust once more the Serpent's oath,
Who should gainsay ? But if he will
To leave the Serpent bounden still,
No man hath right to say that he
Therein hath acted blamefully.’

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

“ ’Twas thus that Reynard's wit evolved
Clearness from chaos, and resolved
This knotty case, which had defied
The brains of all thy Court beside.

“ My Lord, that judgment deemed ye good,
And all the Counsellors who stood
Around deep looks of envy wore,
To see that thing, which had before
His coming puzzled sore their wit,
Made patent, and the Man go quit
From death—’twas thus he wisely kept
Thine honour, proving him adept
In legal lore : this paradox
None solved, till sought ye Reynard Fox.

“ When have the Wolf and Bear e'er done
To thee like service since the sun

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

First lit your life? To howl and brag
They know right well, nor do they flag
In plunder or dishonest work ;
And where fat morsels are, they lurk
In wait to seize them, and to fill
Therewith their paunches. Ever still
Foremost are they to scourge small thieves
Of hens and chickens, but fat beeves,
Milch cows, and horses will they steal,
Without a blush, and though they deal
Sharp justice towards some petty knave,
Yet reckon they as nought their grave
Outrageous robberies, whereof quit
Too oft they go, and even sit
On high as Lords of great estate,
And void of doubt or scruple, rate
Themselves with learned Avicene,
Counting their little wit I ween
To equal that of Solomon
Or Aristotle.

Every one
Of this base crew would fain be thought
A hero, yet should each be sought,
Not in the van, prepared to face
All dangers, but in some snug place,
Secure from harm.

These be not wise,
Great Lord, who seek but to devise
Their own advantage : tower and town,
Lord, land, and people may go down
To wrack and ruin, yet their souls
Grieve nought thereof. If at the coals
They may but warm them, they care not
Whose house 'tis burns, one single jot.
Self benefit alone they seek.

“ But if thou sufferest me to speak
Of Reynard’s numerous kin and friends
I fain would show how each one bends
His native wit to serve thee well.
It needs not my poor tongue to tell
How wisdom ranks above mere boast,
Or call to memory that a host
Of subtle counsellors is thine
In Reynard Fox : no other nine
Can equal him, yet scant and small
The meed and thanks are that befall
The never dying love he feels
For thee ; but as the morning steals
With still sure foot, and driveth night
Across the hills, e’en so shall spite
And envy fail before the ray
Of love, and thou in truth’s broad day
Shalt thank the Fox, whose faithful care
Hath saved thy life from secret snare.

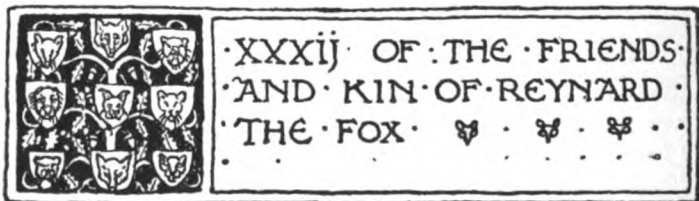
XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

“ My Lord, of late I heard thee say
That Reynard’s kindred fall away
From backing him because they fear
His falseness : trow I that right dear
Such words had cost another man
Than thee, great King, for short his span
Of joy would be ere on his head
Such wrack and vengeance fell, that dead
He well might wish him. Thou art free
To speak thy pleasure, for to thee
We humbly bend ; though should some dare
To scheme thy hurt, let them beware,
For soon the whole Fox kin would show
Such deeds in thy defence as grow
From true and valiant men alone.

XXXI.
Strange ser-
pent snare.

“ In fiercest fight 'tis freely known
They lead the van ; no dastard heart
Hath with our lineage lot or part.
I will, with your most gracious leave,
So far as memory serves, achieve
The tale of Reynard's kith and kin,
Who all with one consentment pin
Their faith to what the Fox doth say,
And, recking nought, would cast away
Both life and goods to serve him. I
With cheerful heart would gladly die
For his dear sake : although a wife
And mother, yet should I my life
Account well lost ; my children three,
Well waxen and most dear to me,
Would I adventure for his love,
Which my true heart doth set above
All else men prize.

Great Lord, I pray
That wisdom guide your wit this day.



“ **M**Y first child Bitelives hath for name :
Much cherished is he for the game
And sport he makes, wherefore to eat
He hath fat trenchers and good meat
In such great plenty, that the crumbs
His brother Fulrompe feed, who comes
Next him in birth. My youngest child

A daughter is, by nature wild
And tameless ; she is called Hatenet,
Because from birth she never yet
Was known by trammel to be held
Against her will. None ever excelled
These three in love to one another,
And all three love I as a Mother
Should love her offspring.”

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

Then the three
She beckoned towards her smilingly,
And bade them all that they should stand
By cousin Reynard ; next with bland
Soft voice, she cried : “ Come ye who own
Kinship with me and Reynard ; none
Need blush therefore ; ’tis ours to pray
The King that he forthwith doth stay
Process of law against our good
Red kinsman.”

Then from those who stood
Thickly around came forth anon
A worthy heap. The black Martron,
The Fitchew, and the Musehont grey,
The Bonsing, and the Ferret : they
All love the poultry yard as well
As Reynard, and are scarce less fell
Amongst its denizens ; Beavers brown
From out their well-built island town
Appeared ; the Otter and his wife
(These and the Beavers were at strife
With Reynard, but durst not gainsay
Dame Rukenawe, who would fain display
The fullest strength of Reynard’s kin),
The Water-rat, and those atwin,
The Genet, Squirrel, and Ostrole
(Now known no more), the velvet Mole,
The Hedgehog, clad in armour pointed,

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

The Ermine, who to Kings anointed
Doth furnish decking, and a score
Of others, making somewhat more
Than forty, issued forth to stand
By Reynard's side, and formed a band
That no man need despise.

Then cried
Dame Rukenawe : " Can it be denied
That Reynard hath, most gracious King,
A great and goodly following ?
Here in one posse may ye view
The most devoted, loyal and true
Of all your subjects, who at need
Would spend their goods, or freely bleed
In thy defence. Although of might
Ye be in counsel, as in fight,
Yet should the mightiest King be fain
Alliance such as ours to gain.

" Let Reynard ponder in his mind
Crimes laid against him ; if he find
No way thereout by sound excuse,
Then on his head may ye let loose
The terrors of the Law ; bedight
Thou justice, and God save the right !"

Then spake the Queen : " But yesterday,
With honeyed words, I strove to lay
These very things before the King,
Which thou, great Dame, with force dost bring
Again within his ken, but he
Then took my reasoning angrily,
And scorned to bend thereto his ear."

Spake too Sir Fyrapeel : "'Tis clear,
Great Sire, that as the ancients give

Their verdict, so must Reynard live
Or die. For shouldest thou decide,
Merely by force of mightful pride
And wayward will, but scanty praise
Would be thy due : keep thou the ways
Of perfect justice ; duly hear
Each side in turn, and void of fear
Or favour, ever by the best
And wisest counsel act."

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

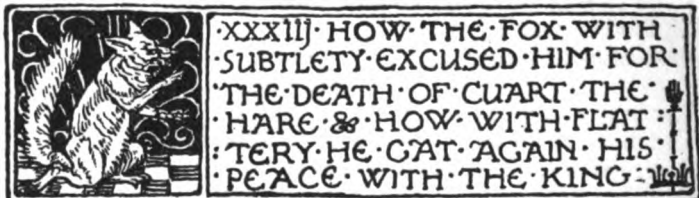
" Confessed
These words must be for just and true,"
The King exclaimed, " but was not due
Swift censure when the tale I heard
Of Cuwaert's death? Too rashly stirred
Perchance I was to wrath, but dead
To reason felt when Cuwaert's head
By Bellyn I received—yet now,
On calm reflection, will allow
That over hasty was my speech :
Slowly doth sad experience teach.

" Once more do we consent to list
Reynard's reply, and if I wist
The exculpation good and sound,
Then would my heart with joy rebound
To set him free, and quell the fear
Of those who hold their kinsman dear."

These words made Reynard's heart right glad :
" Thank God ! " thought he, " Mine Aunt hath clad
Her speech in such fair guise that doom
Is overpast—she maketh bloom
Anew the lineage of the Fox,
Unhurt by Fortune's cruel shocks.
Once more my nimble foot shall tread
The merry dance of life ; my head

XXXII.
The droll
Fox breed.

Once more shall scheme such glorious lies
As well might startle and surprise
The sire of leasings. Thus, the King
Once more deceived, I'll safely bring
My bark through raging storms to port,
And laugh to scorn my foes at Court."



WITH well-feigned wonder Reynard gazed
Around the Court, as one amazed
At all he heard, then gently said :
"My Lord, what say ye? Is then dead
My good friend Cuwaert? Twice have ye
Thereof made mention, yet to me
'Tis strange and new, shall I no more
Behold dear Cuwaert? And wherefore
Speakest thou thus of Bellyn Ram,
For whose safe coming here I am
Pledged to the hilt? Did he not bring
Three jewels? One for thee, dear King,
And two for our most gracious Queen?"

The King replied : "We nought have seen,
By Bellyn brought, save Cuwaert's head
A ghastly sight! and as he said,
That of the letters, which the scrip
Contained, with you in fellowship
He was joint author, therefore quick
The shafts of vengeance fell, and thick
As woes on Job in bygone day."

' Alas ! " quoth Reynard, " do ye say
This thing for very truth ? Ah woe !
That ever I was born, for lo !
Within that scrip three jewels rare
I sent to thee : past all compare
Are they for beauty, craft and worth ;
Cursed be the day that gave me birth
If they be lost ! no longer life
Hath joy or savour ; when my wife
Doth learn this loss her heart will break,
For in those jewels did she take
Such pride that grievously I fear
To lose her love."

 " My nephew dear,"
The She-Ape said, " ye nought can gain
By such deep sorrow ; weak and vain
Is this lament ; cast grief aside,
For what availeth that ye chide
With puling words ?—stand forth and say
What form these jewels bore : if they
Are still existing on the earth,
And treasures are of such great worth,
We peradventure yet may find
Sure means to speed on every wind
The story of their priceless cost :
We'll rack the world ere they be lost !
The learned Master Akeryn,
Shall books indite thereof, and spin
Their fame through earth's remotest ways,
Telling their likeness, worth, and praise.
If even thus they be not found,
Then every altar shall resound
The Church's curse on those who dare
To hold them hidden."

 " Untold care,
Dear aunt, thou liftest from my mind,"

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Quoth Reynard, " for my heart doth find
Your cheering words give wondrous ease,
Yet doubt if even the mighty keys
St. Peter wieldeth will induce
The shrews who stole those gems to loose
Their hold thereon ; the universe
Knoweth no King whose treasure-purse
Contains such precious things as those
I mourn the loss of : pains and woes,
Most cruel, shall I count as nought,
Until, not only have I sought,
But found those jewels, which excel
Aught eye hath seen, aught tongue can tell."

Then in a false dissimuled tone
The Fox cried : " Hear me, every one
Of you my well-loved friends and kin,
And blame my speech unless it win
Your heartfelt sympathy in this
Most bitter loss, which threats, ywis,
To darken all my life. Know ye
The jewels that are lost, all three
Hold virtues heretofore unknown.

" The first a ring was, which alone
Excelled a Monarch's ransom, gold,
Free from alloy as are the cold
Bright ice-born streams, 'twas formed of: writ
Inside the circle, which doth sit
Close to the finger, was a trine
Of letters which, enamelled, shine
With azure, bright as noonday sky,
And sable, whence there seemed to fly
Sparkles of light. These letters were
Three Hebrew names ; alas ! I ne'er
Could spell that holy tongue, but then

I knew that marvel among men
Hight Master Abrion of Trier,
Than whom no other, far or near,
Hath greater learning, well he knows
All manner languages, and trows
The virtues of all herbs ; no beast
Doth live, so wild, but at the least
Of words from him it will obey
All his behests from that first day
It comes before him ; precious stones,
Sought out from earth's most distant zones,
He calls by name, and knows to tell
Each good effect or evil spell
They cause to man, and yet a Jew
He lives, and doth despise the true
Sound faith of Holy Church. I showed
To him this ring, and eager glowed
His eyes with fire, the while he read
The mystic words, then whispering said :
' These are the names which holy Seth
Brought out of Paradise, when death
Drew near to Adam, and he sought
For him the oil of mercy. Nought
Need he who bears these holy names
Fear witchcraft, thunder, or the flames
Of scorching lightning ; though sin tempt
His spirit, yet shall he exempt
Be kept from stain, and though he lie
Long nights afieid, he shall aby
Unharm'd the storms of winter frore.
Such virtues and a thousand more
These names aye bear to those who on
Their power rely—trust Abrion.'

" Withoutforth of the ring, a stone,
Of three most wondrous colours, shone ;

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

The one part showed like crystal—red,
Bright sparkling, as live fire it bred
Within its substance, in such wise,
That where 'tis borne the darkness dies,
Though round doth reign profoundest night
For those who lack its inborn light,
While those who know to use its ray
Walk sure as though 'twere broad noonday.

“The second part was fair and clear,
As though some skilful burnisher
Had worked its surface ; whoso dole
Of body feeleth, may be whole
Of all disease, or pain or ache,
Or falling sickness, if he take
This stone and gently strike it o'er
The part that suffereth ; nevermore
Shall sickness touch him till he fall
By that last stroke which comes to all.
Or should it chance that evil meat
Or venom causeth fever's heat
To fire his blood, or rheum's sharp pain
Should rack his limbs, a man may gain
Relief therefrom if he but steep
That stone in water, and a deep
Long draught drink fasting.

Furthermore

This dear-worth stone within it bore
Another colour, purest green
Much like to glass, but yet were seen
Therein some purple sprinkles : who
Bare this, the master said for true,
That never in his life need he
Fear wound-stroke from an enemy.
And though most mighty were his foe
And strong and hardy, he alow

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Should quickly lay him, whether day
Or night beheld the weapon-play.
But needeth well, whoso would reap
These precious boons, must surely keep
A holy fast the day before.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

“ To these great wonders yet may more
Be added : wheresoe'er he goes,
Who holds this ring, his deadliest foes,
Who erstwhile hated him above
All others, shall with kindly love
Embrace him ; soon as in men's sight
He comes, each one shall feel delight
To greet his hand with kindly grip
Of warm and welcome fellowship.
Moreover, though he naked stood
Within a field against a brood
Of mailed foes, a hundred strong,
Yet should he cast adown that throng
Unaided, winning stintless praise
And plenteous love. But herein plays
The wearer's birth momentous part,
For not alone of noble heart
Must he himself be, but his kin
Must boast good lineage would he win
Behoof and service through this stone,
For unto such an one alone
Its mystic powers respond, no churl
Would vantage gain from this fair pearl
Of peerless price.

And then I thought
Within my heart most surely ought
This precious gem to be in care
Of one more worthy than I dare
Esteem myself. To thee therefore,
Great King, 'twas sent, for no man more

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Is fit to wear it, or should be
Guarded and kept more sovereignly
Than thou (who art our very breath)
From dread, from need, ill-luck, or death.

“ This precious talisman was found
Deep-dolven 'neath the darksome ground
Among my father's treasure hoard.
But list thou further, dearest Lord,
What other wonders had new birth
From that great storehouse of the earth.

“ Thence 'twas with tremulous hands I won
Two other glorious things, which none
E'er matched or equalled yet : a glass
And fair made comb, which overpass
All else beside that eye hath seen,
And therefore 'twas my lady Queen
Should have them, though in truth my wife
So loved the twain that no small strife
Was bred betwixt us.

Weak and small
I feel my speech when I recall
The passing wonders of this comb
And all its virtues, for the dome
Of spacious Heaven shields not the wight
Who knows to chaunt its praise aright.
'Tis made and fashioned of the bone
Supplied by one rare beast alone
In all the world, which hight Panthera
(No fabled creature or chimera),
Who 'neath the fragrant groves of spice
'Twixt Ind and the Earthly Paradise
Pastures him ever ; lusty, fair,
And strong is he, and with all rare
And varied hues his fell is dyed

Of rainbow beauty. And beside
All this, a savour sweet bears he
That healeth sickness wondrously.
This wot the other beasts right well,
And, for that pleasant savoured smell
To heal them of their ailments, they
Follow Panthera night and day.
From out that bone whereof is made
This jewel, fragrance doth not fade
E'en when Panthera dies ; 'tis thin
And broad and hard, and ever in
One piece remaineth, though 'twere smitten
On Vulcan's anvil, or were bitten
By great Leviathan's jaw ; 'twill not
Consume in Hell's fierce fire, or rot
E'en in the flood of Styx ; though tight
And hard of texture, 'tis more light
Than down from Cupid's wings. So sweet
Its fragrance is, that if it greet
The nostrils once of any man,
He loves it so that never can
He henceforth follow any lust
Or joy beside, yet ever must
He be thereby of jocund heart,
Free from misease, till death's quick dart
Recalls him home. The comb is white
As snow 'neath moonbeams, and as bright
As burnished silver doth it shine.
On the hither side, betwixt its nine
Greater and smaller teeth, is left
A field or space, whereon with deft
And cunning skill are carven out
Fair picturings, set all about
With choice enamelling and gold,
Such as no eye could e'er behold
Unraptured. Then the field is checked

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

With sable curiously bedecked
With little golden suns. Unrolled
A legend is thereon of old
Mysterious days, when Wisdom, Might,
And Love each claimed unquestioned right
To Beauty's palm. Hear thou the tale
How Love did o'er all else prevail,
And since that time hath ever ruled
The world, by wit and might unschooled,
Befooling ever, and befooled.

"The story tells of days long past,
When Paris must his judgment cast
'Twixt three great dames of passing beauty,
Who, each to draw him from the duty
Which on him lay of justly deeming,
Proffered rare gifts of such fair seeming
As well might, though of justice fain
As Rhadamanthus, turn his brain
To partial sentence.

Thus the three
Were named who strove for mastery :

"Juno, bright spouse of mighty Jove,
Venus, the Queen of soft-eyed Love,
And Pallas, whose exhaustless store
Of wisdom grasps all worldly lore.
In turn each claimed the first to be
For perfect form and symmetry ;
And each her beauty's wealth revealed,
From folds diaphanous unsealed,
Demanding that the untutored eyes
Of Paris should adjudge the prize
(An apple fair of ruddy gold)
To her whom all the world might hold

Henceforth as fairest among fair,
Past doubt, or question, or compare.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

“ The untaught Paris was a young
And simple herdsman, who among
Green Ida's rocks and thickets wild
Had dwelt, sweet nature's heart-free child.
But now three Goddesses confess
Him arbiter of loveliness.

“ First, Juno all her witcheries tried
To warp his judgment to her side,
With glorious promise she would dower
Him and his line with unchecked power
To rule the world.

Fair Pallas cried :

‘ Paris, wouldst thou in triumph ride
Above thy fellows, thou mayst learn
From me such wisdom as may turn
Thy name from low estate, to live
In deathless fame : and I will give
To thee, moreover, power to wield
Thine arms unconquered in the field
Throughout thy days, until they close,
Peaceful and sweet, in death's repose :
Nay, even though dead, thy name shall ring
Through time, of wit and arms a King.’

“ Then Venus spoke : ‘ How hast thou need
Of power or riches, or indeed
Of wit or might in arms ? Is not
Priam thy father, who, God wot,
Hath Asia 'neath his rule ? Own brother
Art thou to Hector, whom none other
Could ever vanquish or destroy ;
And own ye not the high-walled Troy

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Among ye ?

 If thou wilt bestow
On me the apple, thou shalt know
A joy surpassing wealth or power,
Or wit or conquest : I will dower
Thine heart with that which soars above
All these—the gift of woman's love !
And to thy fond arms will I give
The fairest woman that doth live
On earth's wide round—than whom was ne'er
One born more sweet and debonair.
With this great treasure shalt thou be
Richer than rich, for verily
A gracious woman, fair and wise,
Will be to thee far higher prize
Than wealth, or learning, or success
In warlike deeds. Let gentleness,
With love and peace thy life control
Through one good woman, and thy soul
Shall need no other thing than this
To bring thee joy and perfect bliss.'

“ With eager longing Paris heard
The welcome promise which the word
Of Venus gave him, and he cried :
' Say then, how name ye the sweet bride
That hath such worth and goodlihead ?
Where shall I seek her ? ' Venus said :
' 'Tis Helen, far surpassing Queen
Of sunlit Greece, whose beauty's sheen
Shall bless thine arms, and as thy wife
Shed light and joyance o'er thy life.'

“ To Venus straightway Paris gave
The golden apple, for she drave
With these fair words from out his mind

All thought but how forthwith to find
His promised good.

How he was made
Queen Helen's spouse by Venus' aid,
And how he brought her home to Troy,
And how their life sped by in joy
And merry sport, is carved within
The field in such wise as to win
The praise of all men : and the story
Stands writ beneath in fullest glory
Of perfect pencraft :—mastering love
Thus lastly proved to be above
The power of riches, arms, or wit,
And rode triumphant over it.

“ Such was the comb, but thence I pass
To tell the story of the glass
Or magic mirror, wherein lies
Such wondrous virtue as defies
All wealth of words to speak its praise.

“ Who knows aright therein to gaze,
May ken of whatsoe'er is done
A mile or more around ; each one
Of men or beasts who moves a hand
To work his need, or gives command
To others, may be plainly seen
Within its depths : ye well may ween
Therefrom its worth—but more—besides
This marvel, further it provides
Witting of all that men would know
Of deepest lore : great good will grow
Moreover from a glance therein,
To folk who guerison would win
For eyes that suffer prick or smart,
And motes and pearls will thence depart

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XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

As though by weird. What wonder then
If wrath and sorrow move me when
Such loss is mine.

The frame of wood,
Wherein this precious mirror stood
Was light yet hard, and hight Cetyne :
For aye will it endure, I ween,
Seeing in water ne'er 'twill rot,
And noxious worms will pierce it not ;
And therefore wise King Solomon,
The sacred psalmist's glorious son,
God's holy Temple caused to be
Lined through with wood of Cetyne tree.
Men prized it dear as finest gold,
And counted it in days of old
Of equal worth with ebony :
Whereof King Crompart bade should be
(For love he bore that peerless lass,
Daughter of King Morcadigas)
A horse constructed, and so made
Within, that he who unafraid
Bestrode it, might in one short hour
Travel a hundred miles : the power
To work this marvel soon was proved
By Prince Cleomedes, who, moved
To show his prowess, cried : 'How now !
'Twere well to test this tale I trow.'
Sturdy and young was he, and hardy,
And ne'er in deeds of daring tardy,
For much he loved to hear men own
His chivalry and fair renown.

" Across the steed he lightly leapt—
Quickly King Crompart forward stept,
And turned within its well-wrought breast
A pin, when straight, with towering crest,

The wondrous beast rose high in air,
And, while all watched with awestruck stare,
Sped through the window of the hall,
Far out of sight, beyond recall,
A many miles, before that they
Could one short *Paternoster* say.
Cleomedes waxed sore afeard,
When now those distant hills he neared,
Whose pale blue outline well he knew
From far, and great his terror grew
Lest ne'er his steed should turn again,
But ever riding, he his bane
Should meet in unknown lands;—how far
He sped, e'er yet his lucky star
Decreed him knowledge of the law
That ruled the pin—what sights he saw
Ere thus he learned the magic horse
To govern in his headlong course,
And what great joyance filled his heart,
When once he knew the mastering art
By which to wheel his steed about,
And with what loud triumphant shout
His loving friends received him back,
I leave untold since time doth lack.

“ Beyond the glass the frame stood out
A half-foot broad, all carved about
With histories wondrous to behold,
Dight various wise—with sunny gold,
With moonbeam silver, sapphire blue,
Rich cinnabar's vermilion hue,
Bright yellow and darkest sable. Nought
Was ever yet more rarely wrought
Than those six colours ; then beneath
Each several carving was a wreath,
Whereon in sharp-cut letters ye

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Might read each gladsome history
Enamelled. Subtle was the skill
Of him who dight it, nought could fill
Man's mind with more profound delight—
Woe worth the day ! now lost to sight.

“ Moreover round the framework's border
Were deftly carved, in daintiest order,
Three serried rows. Of beast and bird
Were first and second formed, the third
Was tricked with every fragrant flower
That blooms in garden, mead, or bower.
In untaught hands these works would be
Marvels of man's dexterity ;
For o'er each flower and bird and beast,
The craftsman's skill hath framed such feast
Of cunning handiwork, that rife
Seems petal, hair, and plume with life.
But when thou once hadst learned from me
The trick-work of their enginery,
Then, ever freely at thy will
These wondrous carvings had proved still
More wondrous, for thy magic words
Should in a moment to the birds
Give being ; sudden, as things alive
Should they in emulation strive,
With carolling of sweetest sound,
Filling all heaven with newly found,
Undreamed-of joyance ; every throat
Chanting its native wilding note.
Another magic word, and all
The storm of harmony should fall
Silent ; and quickly pass away,
Broken the spell—their little day.

“ So with the beasts ; whene'er thou wilt

Rouse them to life, the cross-barred hilt
Of thy dread sword should smite the frame
Lightly, and thou a mystic name
Shouldst speak, and instantly 'twould make
Their dead inanimate forms to take
Quick life, and sense, and ready will
To do thee service and fulfil
All thy behests : then fair-carved wood
Become once more, when thou saw'st good.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

“ The flowers likewise, whene'er their tips
Were touched or breathed on by the lips
Of thy fair Queen, would straight assume
Bright hues, and fragrant rich perfume
Exhale, as though within one's sight
From out a garden's warm sunlight
All freshly culled ; but when her will
It were that they no more distill
Sweet fragrance, but to carven wood
Return, she then with hardihood
Should cast them on the brands to burn,
And they by magic would return
To lifeless beauty as before—
Their bright hues past, their fragrance o'er.

“ Ne'er yet in my poor judgment were
Such wondrous, beauteous, costly, rare
And precious jewels seen, as these,
Which on my soul's low bended knees
I sent by Bellyn to my Lord,
And now my heart, as with a sword,
Is riven to deem such treasures gone
For aye, to cold oblivion.

“ Among the pleasant stories told
Within the frame was one of old

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Dim days of earth, when freely ran
The Horse, unchecked or curbed of man.

“ He, lusty grown, well knit and strong,
Envied the Hart, who sped along
With foot that seemed to chase the wind,
While he though swift, must lag behind.
Till scheming in his mind how he
Might o'er the Hart gain mastery,
Thus to a passing herdsman spake :

‘ If, helped by thee, my foot o'ertake
And put to death this light-foot deer,
For guerdon thou shalt have to cheer
Thy heart, his flesh, bones, horns and skin,
To deal with as thou wilt, and win
Thereby great good, the while I sate
My wounded pride and envious hate
Which every day doth aggravate.’

“ ‘ But,’ quoth the Herdsman, ‘ how may I
Come near a beast that doth defy
Thy swiftness ?’

Said the Horse : ‘ Astride
My back leap thou, 'twill be my pride
To bear thy weight, pursuing so
The deer, until in mortal throe
He fall out-jaded.’

Swiftly sprang
The Herd across the Horse, and rang
The wildwood loud with echoing cries :
But ever the light-foot Hart defies
Both Horse and huntsman till the chase
Lagged ; then the steed cried : ‘ This wild race
Hath wearied me, and I would fain
Dismiss my burden, and again

Roam as aforetime, wild and free ;
No longer have I need of thee.'

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

“ ‘Have need of me !’ the Herdsman cried,
‘ That may be, but whate’er betide,
No more wilt thou thy freedom gain,
But henceforth must the guiding rein
Obey at will, and on thine head
Suffer a bridle, and be sped
Therewith through time, the while my heels
Carry the spur which ne’er appeals
To tender flanks in vain. Thy master
Thou now hast found, and either faster
Or slower shalt thou go, as he
Hath pleasure or necessity.’

“ My Lord, see how the Horse thus brought
Himself in thraldom, while he sought
Another’s ill. Thus doth it hap
Full oft that he who plans a trap
To mar his neighbour is beset
And snared within his proper net.

“ Among the sculpturings, too, was found
This tale about the Ass and Hound.

“ A Man who owned a fertile stead
Loved a small Hound, which shared his bed,
Fed daily, from his well-filled plate,
On morsels rare and delicate,
Sported around with many a trick,
And in his loving play would lick
His master’s mouth.

When daily care
Gave place to ease, and in his chair
The Man reposed, the dog would lie

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Upon his knees asleep, or try
With merry gambols to beguile
The hours of rest.

But when awhile
Baldwin, the patient Ass, had seen
How fared the Hound, quoth he : ' I ween
'Tis strange what joy my master takes
In this foul cur, while nought he makes
Of one who patiently hath worked
For his behoof, nor ever shirked
The dreariest toil : for me no bed
Is e'er prepared, nor am I fed
With dainty fare, but e'en must lie
On cold damp earth, and nought but dry
Hard thistles fall to me for food,
The while this useless Hound hath good
And savoury trenchers given at will.
With patience have I suffered ill,
Nor e'er complained, but now no more
Will brook this slight, as heretofore,
But lay some careful well-schemed plan
Whereby with fair-built hope I can
Expect my lord's regard and love,
Which now he shows this tike above
All else around.'

Just then came by
His master, and with will to try
To gain his grace, the Ass upreared
His hoofs against his head, and peered
Straight in his face, with hideous bray,
Then kissed his cheek in self-same way
As woned to do the little Hound.
Back stepped the master with a bound,
And cried : ' Help ! help ! the Ass is mad !'
Then forth rushed many a serving lad,
And beat his hide till he was fain

To seek his shed, and once again
Crop thistles rough, rank weeds, and grass,
Content to live as lives an Ass.

“ In suchlike wise may'st thou requite
Those men, dear Lord, whose rancorous spite
Is shot against their fellows. Where
Asses gain lordship, wondrous rare
It is to find good rule. Small heed
Have such of aught, except to speed
Their own advancement, and the state
Fares ill when losels rule its fate—
May God such woe from us forefend.

“ Hearken again how once did wend
My sire with Tybert Cat. They swore
That good or ill should never more
Dispart their friendship, and whate'er
They won between them, each should share
In equal parts.

While yet was young
Their compact, came a rushing throng
Of hounds and huntsmen : thenceward leapt
The twain, and close together crept
Aside for shelter.

‘ Whither now,
Dear Tybert ? ’ cried my sire, ‘ and how
Were 't best to flee ? We're well espied
And round about on every side
The hunters close us in.’

(Full trust
My Father had in Tybert's just
And true fulfilment of the oath
Whose solemn curse had bound them both
To mutual aid.)

He cheerly said,
‘ Divest thy mind of doubt and dread,

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

For well my sack is stuffed with wiles,
The poorest one of which beguiles
The keenest hunter.'

Tybert sighed
And said : ' Dear friend, ye may confide
Well in your wiles, no doubt ; the Cat,
Alas ! hath only one.' With that
Aloft he sprang, high up a tree
Thick grown with leaves, where none might see
Or harm him.

Thus my sire was left
In jeopardy of his life, bereft
Of Tybert's aid, while many a hound
And hunter rushed close by 'mid sound
Of horns, and hideous cries.

With mocks
And sneers the Cat cried : ' Reynard Fox,
My dearest cousin, pray unbind
Thy sack of wiles, which ye would find
Most helpful—now in time of need !'

" This cruel scoff, and gibing rede,
My father had to bear from one
He trusted, and for whom he'd done
A thousand friendly acts, and nigh
He came to end his life days by
This treacherous trick of Tybert Cat.
Long on his belly lay he flat,
While hounds and huntsmen near him passed,
Then swiftly sped, until at last
He gained a cave, and therein crept :
Judge then, dear Lord, in what way kept
The Cat his pledge !

Alas ! e'en now,
Full many a traitor lives, I trow,
Who heedeth troth but little more

Than this false friend : and should, therefore,
A deep and deadly spleen possess
My heart towards Tybert, 'twere much less
Than his desert, but need not tell
That ever I love my soul too well
Malice to bear. Yet should it hap
That ruin like a thunder-clap
Befell his life and goods, my heart
Would scarcely break thereat. No part
Within my breast hath envious hate,
But trust the Cat will expiate
His past misdeeds by worthier life.

The flesh doth wage most grievous strife
Against the spirit when I think
How nearly to destruction's brink
The Cat hath brought me, but forgive
His falseness though its memory live.
For love of God, I seek to be
With direst foes in charity.

“ Within that frame, too, men may read
How from the Wolf a friendly deed
Gained scanty thanks.

It happed one day,
On yonder heath a carcass lay
Which once had been a horse : all bare
Of flesh 'twas stript, and none would dare,
Except a ravening Wolf, to try
And make a banquet off such dry
Hard fare. But Isegrym so great
Desire for food felt, that he ate
Three, four or five large bones, nor stayed
To bite or break them, as afraid
To lose his meal, and thus one stack
Across his throat, and neither back

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Nor forward would it move ; great pain
Thereof he found, and sought in vain
Some skilful leech to give him ease,
Assuring goodly gifts and fees
To whosoe'er would take away
The offending bone, and thereby stay
The hand of Death.

At last the Crane
He sought the aid of : ' I were fain,'
Quoth he, ' to give thee rich reward
And lasting love, shouldst thou afford
Some potent remedy, whereby
To save my life.'

' Most gladly I,'
Replied the Crane, ' will try my skill.'
And speaking thus, he thrust his bill
Far down the Wolf's voracious throat,
And in less time than one could note,
Pulled forth the bone.

The Wolf aside
In dudgeon started, as he cried,
With wrathful voice, in feigned alarm :
' How now ! Thou dost me grievous harm !
Yet I forgive thee, but no more
Try tricks on me, or thou wilt sore
Repent it.'

Quoth the Crane : ' Thy whim
Is surely now, Sir Isegrym,
To jest : I prithee, kindly give
Thy promised guerdon.'

' As I live,'
Cried Isegrym, ' but this is good !
'Tis I who suffered, and ye would
Demand reward ! 'Tis thou who might
Thank me, that I forbore to bite
Thy head off, when thou didst insert

Thy bill far down my throat and hurt
Me past all measure. If indeed
One of us two deserveth meed,
'Tis I, who kindly spared to close
My teeth upon thee.'

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Often those
Who gather greatest good, repay
That good with ill. In this our day
When false and subtle traitors rise
To power and profit, they despise
Men of fair worship and estate,
Who salved their woes when need was great,
Yet find excuse to take offence,
Claiming amends on false pretence
Of wrongful deeds.

My Lord, 'twere well
If those same men, so keen and fell
On others' faults, themselves were free
From trespass and obliquity.

"All this and more that hath escaped
From out my memory's scroll, was shaped
With cunning hand around the glass.
He who devised it did surpass
All compeers in his power to frame
Fair subtle marvels, and high blame
Had been my due, if I had sought
To hold such gems, but duly thought
That thou and thy dear Queen, alone
In all the world, could rightly own
These kingly treasures.

Men are now
So niggard grown, that few, I trow,
Of servitors in these days live
Who to their Lords have grace to give
Such precious gifts.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Past all belief

And measure was the o'erwhelming grief
That smote my children, when I sent
To you that glass, for oft they spent
Long hours before it : their delight
It was therein to gaze, bedight
In fairest holiday array :
How little dreamed I on the day
I gave to Cuwaert Hare in trust
These jewels, that so soon the dust
Would be his doom. Alas ! I knew,
Within the world, no other two
In whom I safely could confide,
Casting all doubt and fear aside,
But him and Bellyn, they my best
And dearest friends were. Now opprest
With deepest grief am I to think
That these dear comrades had to drink
Death's bitter cup through me.

I cry

For vengeance most exemplary
On Cuwaert's murderer : and although
Around the wide world I must go
To seek him, I will take no rest
Till he be found, even though the quest
Should be my life's bane.

Well 'tis said

'Murder will out,' and though with dread
I speak the word, yet who shall say
But what some man stands here to-day
Who had a hand in Cuwaert's death ?
Alas ! the worst shrews oft draw breath
In comradeship with honest men.

"Most strange it sounded to me when
Just now I heard thee, dearest King,

Declare that never a worthy thing
My father wrought for thine : so great
And heavy fall the cares of state
That little wonder 'tis if ye
Let fall from out your memory
Some matters fitting to be kept
In sweet embalmment.

Strangely crept
Oblivion o'er ye when ye spake
Thus of my sire. Dost thou then take
No count of how (when yet ye were
A youngling, and your father bare
The sceptre) from Montpelier came
My sire, endowed with wealth and fame,
And by all men allowed to be
In surgeon's skill and pharmacy
Unrivalled ?

Perfectwise he knew
Of herbs the value, and their true
And full significance, and if
Viscose they were, or laxatif.
Of right he therefore claimed to wear
A robe of silk, and girdle fair
Of purple richly wrought with gold
About his waist, which clearly told,
In words unwritten, his degree
In leechcraft's lore and surgery.

" Returning home to court, he found
His sovereign sick, and seeming bound
For speedy death : thereat his heart
Was struck as though a cruel dart
Had pierced it through, for ardent love
Possessed him for your sire above
All other lords, who when he knew
Of Reynard's coming, cried : ' All you

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Who stand around may hither walk,
While I with learned Reynard talk
Of life and death ;' then feebly said,
With languid voice and drooping head :
' Dear Reynard, sorely sick am I,
And daily worsen, prithee try
Thy leechcraft on me.' He replied :
' Dear Lord, since thou dost so confide
And trust in me, be thou assured
That all thy sickness shall be cured
Ere long : within this voiding glass
'Tis firstly needful that thou pass
Thy water—soon as I have seen
Its aspect, I at once shall ween
Thy bodily ill.'

Thy father did,
Forthwith, what Reynard's wisdom bid,
For fullest trust therein he placed.
(Too well I know that he disgraced
His later life through evil rede
Of wicked beasts, which oft will lead
Good men astray.) At once my sire
Exclaimed : ' Dear Lord, it doth require,
To heal thy sickness, that thou eat
The liver plucked, while yet doth beat
The heart, from out a wolf whose age
Is seven—this done, my life I wage
To cure thee quickly—else, to die
Must be thy fate.'

The Wolf stood by
But uttered never a word. To him
The King cried out : ' Sir Isegrym,
Ye heard but now what Reynard said,
Wilt thou then see thy King lie dead,
Or freely yield thyself, and give
Thy liver, that thy Lord may live

Long years in health?’

‘Nay! nay! not so,’
Exclaimed the Wolf, ‘for well ye know
My years exceed not five.’

‘Away
With him forthwith and I will say,’
My father cried, ‘if it suffice;’
Haled to the kitchen, in a trice
The Wolf was opened, and the King
Ate of the liver : straight, new spring
Beamed on his life, and strict command
He gave that, all throughout the land,
The title of Master Reynard should
Be his in token of the good
His wit had worked.

Henceforth the King
Approved my sire in everything
He said or did, and forthward he
Rode by his side in dignity,
While by the royal hands his head
With roses fair was garlanded.

“Alas! the worthy works he wrought
Are clean forgotten, or as nought
Accounted, while base ravenous shrews
Usurp the high-seat, and abuse
The posts their arts have gained : all wise
And honest men do they despise
And push unblushingly aback,
Whereby it comes, true lords oft lack
Of right, for men of lowly birth
(Set up as great ones of the earth)
Are void of pity, and will vend
Justice for guerdon : thus they spend
Luxurious lives, on nought intent
But avarice and aggrandisement.

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

These base men flatter, fawn and play
A thousand tricks in hope that they
May thereby please their prince, and gain
Their vile behoof through good men's pain.
But if they see their prince have need
Of their superfluous good, small heed
Or care will give to his distress
From out their own great plenteousness :
E'en so the churlish Wolf stood by
Your sire's sick couch unmoved, his eye
Tearless, refusing to afford
That which alone might save his Lord
From death.

Far different had it been
With me : to save my King or Queen
A score of Wolves I fain would see
Perish, and grieve but sparingly.
These things my father did, befell
When thou wert young ; their memory well
May fade from thee, or be forgot
Outright—new friends old friendships blot.

“ I well bethink me of a time
When thou, dear Lord, wert still in prime
Of youthful joyance. One spring day
With Isegrym I took my way
Across the fields : a well-fed swine
We caught betwixt us : such a whine
And howl he made that soon to death
We bit the noisy beast : the breath
Was scarce from out his body when,
All suddenly, within our ken,
Thou, with our gracious Queen, appeared
From out a grove, and when we neared,
In courteous friendly manner spake,
And bade us welcome. Ye would slake

Your hunger, which ye said was great,
And prayed that we would separate
Our winning equally. 'Pray seat
Your Royal selves, and share our meat,'
I cried with pleasant cheer and humble
Obedient bow ; a muffled grumble
Of discontent made Isegrym ;
But I, without regard of him,
Exclaimed : ' Dear Lord, take all ye will ;
To serve thy needs doth but fulfil
Our bounden duty.'

Selfish care

Took Isegrym, in partial share
To deal the spoil : he barely gave
To thee a quarter, but with grave
And bold assurance quickly ate
The rest, while I was left to sate,
Through Isegrym's voracious greed,
With half the lungs, my hunger's need.

" To God I humbly make my prayer,
That he will leave to Satan's care
The Wolf for that most evil deed,
Nought is he but a worthless weed,
Of meanest lineage basely sprung.

" Ere one a credo could have sung
Your share was vanished, and ye fain
Had eaten half as much again
As he had dealt you—scarce a pause
It gave your hunger—then because
No more he proffered, up ye lift
Your dexter paw, and gave him swift
And well-earned blows betwixt his ears
(Which from his eyes drew floods of tears),
And tare the skin down o'er his sight.
Bleeding and howling took he flight,

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Like cowering cur ; and then ye cried :
'Back ! back ! thou caitiff hound, provide
Thy King with kindlier hand, haste thou
To bring more meat, or worse, I trow,
Will be thy fate.' Then straightway I
Said : 'Suffer me, dear Lord, to try
If I may help the Wolf obtain
More meat wherewith to make ye fain.'

Ere long returned we with a calf,
Whereat ye graciously did laugh
With merry joyous heart, well pleased
To know thy lack would be appeased
With such fair feast, then kindly said :
'Reynard, thy hunting well hath sped !
St. Julian ! nobly dost thou prove
By this fair gift, thy faithful love.
This calf, so sleek and fat, no one
Shall deal but thy safe hand alone.'
'My Lord,' cried I, 'with right good will !
The one half may suffice to kill
Thy pangs of hunger, and I ween
The second half our gracious Queen
Hath clearest right to ;—then apart
I set the liver, lungs, and heart
To feed thy children ; bones and head
I gave to Isegrym, and fed
Myself with nought but shins and feet.
Then said ye, 'Reynard, I entreat
Thee tell me who instructed ye
To carve so well and courteously ?'

“‘My Lord,' cried I, 'tis this same priest
Whose selfish serving of a feast
Hath justly on his head brought down
Thine anger, and with blood-stained crown
Now sits apart.

In these last days
A many wolves there live, who raise
Their heads against good men and true,
Recking no wise what thing they do
To gain and hold the overhand.
Woe! woe! to that ill-ordered land
Where such things hap. Most grievous fear
Was mine (when I did lately hear
Thee speak) that thou hadst clean forgot
This tale as it had happened not.
But would ye closely oversee
The tables of your memory,
Then doubt I not that ye would frame
Your speech to give me praise—and blame
Award the Wolf.

Have I not seen
The day when no great work hath been
Wrought in this Court until my word
As first and foremost had been heard?

“Beware! though now befalls a time
When base men charge my life with crime
And evil doing, yet it may
So hap that words I speak this day
Men will account for true and right
'Fore those of others, when the light
Reveals all clearly. I desire
Nought else but justice, and require,
Alone, that those who charge my soul
With hateful deeds and trespass foul,
Shall good unbiassed witness bring
To prove their words, or else, great King,
If my accusers fail to show
Sound proof against me, then I throw
Their accusation back, and claim
A verdict: ‘Void of guilt or blame,’

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

By rule of this impartial Court."

"Reynard," the King said, "thy retort
Hath reason backed with soundest sense ;
'Tis true, this murderous, rank offence
Against thee charged, of Cuwaert's death,
Was whispered only by the breath
Of dark suspicion ; true, I know
Thereof no more than that dread show
Which Bellyn made of Cuwaert's head
Drawn from his wallet, all bebled.
No witness ventures to declare
That in his death thy hand had share—
Go therefore free—of murder quit."

"Dear King," the Fox cried, "well doth fit
Thy word with justice, may just God
Give ye good thank, that ye have trod
Herein the path of righteousness.
Alas ! such grief and sore distress
Is mine for Cuwaert's loss, that now
Fit speech I lack to tell you how
When he and dearest Bellyn went
From out my house, so torn and rent
My heart was, that I straightway fell
In deathlike swoon : now may it well
Be seen that this was token clear
Of anguish deep : Oh heavy cheer !
That thus with woe my soul is cleft,
Of friends deprived, of gifts bereft !"

The most of those who stood and heard
The grief and bitterness which stirred,
Or seemed to stir, the Fox's heart,
And noted how his face bore part
With all the inward pangs he felt,

Were touched with pity, and did melt
To gentle tears, for all believed
That he in very truth was grieved
Past power of words to speak. The King
Said : " Reynard, suffer not the sting
Of woe to wound thy heart." The Queen
Exclaimed : " Dear Reynard, thou hast been
Most sorely tried, and much it grieves
Thy friends to see how Sorrow weaves
Her web about thee. Cast aside
Thy trouble now, and search the wide
Far spreading world, until ye find
These precious jewels."

So did blind
The Fox's guile both King and Queen,
With praise of treasures never seen
By mortal eye, that fierce desire
And will to have the gems did fire
Their covetous hearts, which well might wot
The vaunted goods existed not
Except in Reynard's fertile brain,
But avarice roused gives folly rein.

The crafty Fox well understood
Their thoughts, and wondrous little good
His heart felt towards them. Masking that,
With head bowed down he tearful sat
As one immersed in grief, then said :
" May God reward your goodlihead
And kindly words in this my woe.
No rest by night or day shall know
My foot, for through the world I'll wend
North, south, east, west, from end to end,
And throughly search. Though all my life
Were spent in travel, toil and strife,
Still would I seek, and lastly know

XXXIII.
Reynard's
romance.

Where lie those gems—nor slack nor slow
Shall be my steps. Should that man dare
Who holds them to despise my prayer,
Scorn my request, and spurn my might,
Then I entreat that thou wilt dight
Thy power to aid me ; seen, the prize
Is yours by gift, and little wise
Is he who hugs it. Thine it is
Murder and theft to avenge ywis.”

“Reynard,” the King made answer, “say
Where bides the hoard, and not a day
Shall pass ere I unsheathe my sword.”

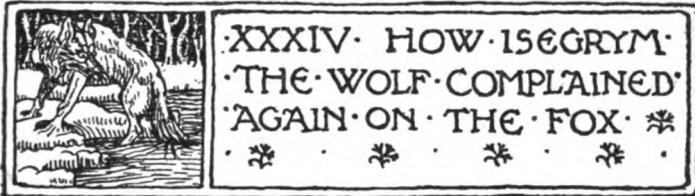
The Fox replied : “Oh ! dearest Lord,
Thy freehand friendship is too great,
Would God that I could emulate
Thy generous goodness, and requite
With worthy deed thy helpful might.”

Now hath the Fox all fast and fair
His matter, and in hand doth bear
The King so safe and sure as he
Scarce dared to hope the case might be.
Such specious leasings hath he made
That now he goes of none afraid,
Save only Isegrym, who spurned
His fluting phrase, and boldly turned
Him towards the King, then proudly said :

“O noble Lord, art thou so dead
To sense as like a child to take
This false shrew's word for truth? Awake
From drivelling dreams, nor suffer lies
To guile thine heart and blind thine eyes.
Long will it be ere snared or trapped
Am I, by one whose life is wrapped

In murderous treason, and such crime
 As doth the Fox's life begrime.
 He dares to beard thee to thy face
 With mocking gibes, which bring disgrace
 On thee, and grieve each true man's ear ;
 Yet leaps my heart to see him here,
 For now will I set forth a tale
 Whereat his craven heart must quail,
 And be thou judge if I or he
 Speak fairly, well, and truthfully."

XXXIII.
 Reynard's
 romance.



“LIST now, my Lord, with careful heed
 How this false knave with dastard deed
 My dear wife's trustful heart betrayed.

“Winter his stern white hand had laid
 On land and mere, when forth she went
 On journey, and her pathway bent,
 Faring with Reynard, o'er a lake ;
 When quoth he : ‘ Ersewyn, would ye take
 Some goodly fish from out the mere ?
 Say'st yea ? Then sit thee quickly here,
 Where, broken through the ice, we see
 A fair round hole, wherein may ye
 Let fall your tail, thereon will bite
 The fish, and when the hairs stick tight
 Betwixt their teeth, 'tis yours to whisk
 Them forth beside you, free from risk,
 While I secure them, on the ice ;

XXXIV.
The Wolf
new cries.

Thus lightly winning in a trice
A wholesome meal, enough for three.'

"Quoth then mine innocent wife: 'To thee
I trust for counsel,' and she set
Her tail deep down, in hope to get
The spoil he promised: but ere long
She found, alas! that in the strong
Hard ice 'twas frozen. He the while
Sat by and watched, until a smile
Broke o'er his face—one second after
Burst from his lips unseemly laughter,
And cried he: 'Dame, why move ye not?
Perchance in some more favoured spot
The fish have keener appetite:
How now! your tail seems frozen tight
Within the ice.'

She tugged and strained
All bootlessly, her tail remained
As strongly set and firmly held
As iron bonds a smith doth weld
At clear white heat with sturdy stroke.
No word malicious Reynard spoke,
But (she fast fixed with tail for tether)
Caught from the ice a stray goose feather,
And tickled therewith her eyes and face,
With mocking grin and foul grimace.
And then his unclean paw he claps
Athwart her cheeks with stinging slaps,
Crying: 'How like you fishing, pray?
Hast thou thy fill thereof to-day?'

"Just then I chanced to reach the bank,
And looking down beheld the rank
And foul offence, which into fits
Of anger drove me, till my wits

I wellnigh lost. Soon as anear
He saw me draw, in dastard fear
The wretch slunk off, and death's dark night
Escaped by craven-hearted flight.

XXXIV.
The Wolf
new cries.

“ My utmost strength would scarce suffice
To pull from out the hard-ribbed ice
My dear wife's tail, and grievous pain
She suffered ere she could regain
Full freedom ; yea, so hard and fast
'Twas fixed and frozen, that at last
A gobbet still remained behind,
Whereat she howled like one whose mind
Was reft of reason, till the cry
Roused from the hamlet built hard by
A host of men, with bills and staves,
Pitchforks and flails, and rusty glaives,
And wives with distaffs armed, a crowd
Of half-mad peasants, crying loud :
'Slay ! slay ! destroy and kill outright
The Wolves ; and but for friendly night,
One long-legged angry knave, who bore
A pike wherewith he pricked us sore,
Had surely slain us. Many a quean
Pursued our flying steps, with keen
And angry vengeance, shrieking out
That we the culprits were past doubt,
Who, in the winter nights, when sleep
Had slacked their vigil, stole the sheep.
They raged, and swore with many a curse
To wreck our lives, but nothing worse
Befell us ; for our threatened doom
We 'scaped by hiding where thick broom
And bramble bushes grew, until
The storm swept by, and all was still.

XXXIV.
The Wolf
new cries.

“ Note well, my Lord, that through this black
And treacherous business nought doth lack
Of cruel wrong and foul offence
Against all law. To mark thy sense
Of right and wrong, strike such a blow
Against the Fox, that all may know,
Throughout the wide and spreading land,
Thy rule for just—for strong thine hand.”

Cried Reynard : “ Sire, if this were true,
With reason fair the Wolf might sue
For justice 'gainst me, for 'twould smutch
My name with infamy, and touch
My honour's core ; but God forbid
That any grain of truth amid
His lying words be found. No spark
Of conscience binds him. Do but mark
How fair and plain a tale I tell ;
'Tis true I taught Dame Ersewyn well
And deftly how to capture fish,
Pricked on thereto by well-meant wish
To do a friendly act of kindness,
But she, with greed and eager blindness,
Which lacked all judgment, forward ran,
Rashly neglectful of the plan
By me advised, and thrust her tail
Beneath the ice ; nor did she fail
E'en so to catch of fish good store,
But longing hungrily for more
Than well sufficed—stock still she stayed
Some hours—her avarice was apaid
By being frozen fast and tight ;
With tender care, yet strenuous might,
I strove my best to set her free :
When all at once came suddenly
Fierce Isegrym, with grinning teeth

And angry snarl, across the heath.
Beyond all doubt, his envious eyes
Were dazed by hate, and thus the lies
Given forth by him of what he saw
Are due to error, yet no law
He set upon his lips, but spake
Such words as caused mine ears to ache
With shame and horror ; far away
Forthwith I sped, lest he should slay
Or maim me, blind with wrath. Plain truth
Are these few words, nought else forsooth
Shall ever by my mouth be told,
E'en though ten thousand marks of gold
Were falsehood's guerdon.

Time long past
The Fox's lineage hath held fast
The sacred cause of truth. Now prays
Thy servant respite of eight days
With view to seek advice and bring
Such witness forward, that nor King
Nor Queen shall henceforth doubtful be
Of his good faith and honesty.

“What with this Wolf have I to do?
Alas! it sends a shudder through
My frame to think a wretch so vile
And caitiff ever dared to style
Himself my friend, as he hath done
In days now worn : but here stands one—
His wife to wit—whose tongue may soon
Convince your minds (if she but tune
Its sound aright) how fair and true
Is every word I offer you.”

Then, high voiced, shrieked forth Ersewyn :
“Ah! villain Fox, wouldst then spin

XXXIV.
The Wolf
new cries.

Once more a web of floyting speech
To catch my simple soul, and reach
The King's high favour? Well thou know'st
Leasings to utter and to boast
Thy faith and honour in one breath,
Yet shalt thou lastly die the death
That God's good providence doth send
To traitors—ware thou well the end.
List thou, dear Lord, while I relate
One deed of this vile reprobate.

“ Within the confines of the town
Is seen a well, where up and down
Two buckets work with pulleys, so
That when one towards the top doth go,
The other sinketh dark and deep.
Passing, I heard one sigh and weep,
And peering down saw thou didst sit,
Base Fox, alone within the pit,
Consumed with mortal fear and dread.
I asked what ailed thee, and ye said
That thou (with greediness accurst)
Had eaten fish till nigh to burst,
And thus within the well wert caught.
I proffered help, and ye besought
That in the bucket I would spring
Which hangs above, and so might bring
Thee timely aid. I scarce need tell
That, leaping in, forthwith I fell
Down to the bottom, while ye rose
Atop as swift as pennon goes
Up to the masthead. Then ye sprang
With light foot on the sward, and rang
Loud laughter from ye, while ye cried :
' Dear Aunt, 'tis thus it doth betide
Throughout the world, one man doth go

On high, his fellow falls below.
With this base gibe, away ye went
And basely left me all day pent,
Hungry and cold, in that dark pit."

XXXIV.
The Wolf
new cries.

Exclaimed the Fox : "'Twere far more fit
That thou shouldst suffer thus than I,
My dearest Aunt, for verily
On one of two the stroke must fall.
Pardon me, pray, if I recall
The fact that herein much of good
I taught thee : namely, that one should
Take heed that ne'er in haste he trust
His fellow man, for few are just
To brother, cousin, eme or friend,
But rather seek some selfish end.
All Adam's sons who be not blind
Strive ever, day and night, to find
Their own advantage, and a fool
Alone forgets this golden rule
Of life, whenso it haps that he
Sees life or goods in jeopardy."



·XXXV· A ·FAIR· FABLE·
·OF· THE ·FOX· AND· THE·
·WOLF· ५६ · ५६ · ५६ ·

"MY Lord," Dame Ersewyn cried, "I pray
That well ye mark the specious way
This thief doth talk, and how he knows
To shift, with every wind that blows,
His crafty speech, and seem so fair
That e'en the wisest men scarce dare
To contradict him. Thus hath he

XXXV.
The Ape's
pleasance.

Done many a hurt and scathe to me."

The Wolf exclaimed : " He once betrayed
Me basely to an Ape, and made
Me lose thereby one half mine ear.
I leave the Fox to give a clear
Succinct account of what befell."
" Yea," Reynard cried, " I that can tell
Without a stammer, blink, or fault,
Or need to hesitate or halt
One single moment.

Through the wood
Came Isegrym, and said that food
He sorely lacked—but sooth to say
I never yet have known the day,
Howe'er well fed the Wolf might be
But what he hungered ravenously
For more and more. Where goes the meat
This all-devouring beast doth eat
Surpasses thought.—See now! a grin
Of eager hunger doth begin
To wrinkle up his face.—

When he
Complained and whined thus bitterly,
I, too, for pity, feigned great lack
Of food to suffer ; so, to track
Some prey, we wandered far and wide
Long weary hours, but nought espied.
Most sorely then he wept and whined,
And sware no longer had he mind
To scour the woods. Just then I saw
A huge hole, 'neath a spreading haw,
Set thick with brambles, and a sound
Rushed thence that seemed to shake the ground.
' Dear Isegrym,' quoth I, ' go in
And try if something ye can win

From out this cavern ; well I wot
There may be food therein.'

'Nay! not
For twenty marks,' quoth he, 'I'd creep,
Risking my life, within that deep
And dread abyss, unless I knew
What thing it holds. 'Twere well that you
Should enter first, while I abide
Beneath this tree till ye have tried
How lies the land : far more than me
Can ye deal well and subtilly.
Danger he thrust me on, poor wight !
E'en as a dastard in the fight
Sets one before him. He, though stout
And hale and strong, abode without,
Watchful of what might next betide,
Nought recked he though his friend had died.

"Within this loathly cave such pain
Oppressed my soul as ne'er again
Would I, for wealth untold, endure.
I entered boldly, and with sure,
Firm, hardy foot advanced along
A straight dark passage, till a strong
Bright light burst on me from the side,
And turning thither I descried
A roomy vault, wherein there sat
A gruesome beast—a great Mercatte,
Baboon, or other monstrous ape,
I trow not which, of hideous shape
And giant form, with huge round eyes
That glimmed like fire ; of monstrous size
Her mouth was, set with long sharp teeth,
Which like dread daggers bare of sheath
Shone forth whene'er she spake ! like flails
Her shag arms seemed, and such long nails

XXXV.
The Ape's
pleasance.

Her hands were furnished with, as strake
Fear to my heart, and made it quake,
Dismayed and horrified. Ne'er yet
In all my life-days have I set
Mine eyes on beast so foul. There lay
Three children near to her, and they
Were hideous as their dam. Such fear
Crept o'er me when they came anear
That nothing durst I speak but good,
Else had they, past all likelihood,
Rushed on me rudely, four to one,
When shortly had I been fordone
And killed outright.

Quoth I: 'Dear Aunt,
It doth past words my soul enchant
To wish you all good luck this day:
And are these lovely children, pray,
Your own? my cousins? I will gage
That never finer of their age
Were seen on earth: Lord God! how fair
Each one doth look, as he were heir
To some great King. We ought of right
To con ye thanks, who thus have dight
Our lineage with such fair increase:
No sooner heard I from your niece
That thou with yet a babe wert blest,
Than irksome to me seemed all rest
Till I had paid the cradle call.'

"Quoth she: 'Dear Nephew, good befall
To thee and thine: well is thy name
Renowned for rectitude: thy fame
For truth doth ever cause thy kin
Great worship and high praise to win
Where'er they go. Pray wouldst thou teach
My children three, that they may reach

To virtue fair as thine?' Right pleased
 Was I to hear these words, which eased
 My heart of fears. A goodly thought
 It was to call her 'Aunt,' though nought
 Of sib or kin she was to me :
 My Aunt by consanguinity
 And right, is good Dame Rukenawe ;
 Yet quoth I : 'Aunt, as binding law
 Thy wish doth count : at thy command
 Is all I have of goods or land,
 And ready is my heart to show
 Thy children all the Fox doth know
 Of wisdom's deep and subtle ways.'

XXXV.
 The Ape's
 pleasure.

" Quoth she : 'Thy kind consent betrays
 Thy noble gentleness of heart.
 But think not, nephew, to depart
 Till thou hast eaten. An ye did
 My heart would fear some ill betid
 Betwixt us twain.'

 Therewith she rose
 And led me where hung bucks and does,
 Fat pheasants, partridges, and hares,
 And meats befitting one who fares
 In sumptuous fashion every day.

" Awhile I stared at this array
 With wondering eyes, then took my fill
 Of choicest food with right good will.
 Quoth then the Ape : 'Take this fat hind
 To cheer thy wife, with my most kind
 And hearty love :' she lastly bade
 I should not let our friendship fade
 To nothingness, but soon again
 Return.

 Judge well that I was fain
 239

XXXV.
The Ape's
pleasance.

To make my exit thus well sped.
On passing forth, I found, half dead
And groaning sorely, Isegrym,
And asking how it fared with him,
He moaned : ' Ah ! wonder 'tis I live.
Dear nephew, can your hand not give
Some nouriture, or must I die
For hunger ? ' Then most readily
I gave him every scrap I had
And saved his life. Therefore most sad
It makes me now to note how he
Demands my ruin constantly.

" Quickly he swallowed down the hind,
Then quoth he : ' Reynard, did ye find
Nought else of food within that hole ?
For, as fierce fire well fed with coal
Burns ever fiercer, so my teeth
But sharpness gain from what beneath
Their edge has fallen.'

I quick replied,
' Dear Eme, I prithee haste inside
That yawning gap : of goodly stuff
Thou there wilt see stored up enough
E'en thy huge appetite to daunt.
There dwells an Ape, whom called I Aunt
To win her grace. If thou wilt spare
To tell the truth, and speak her fair,
So may'st thou have thy full desire
Of meat till such time as ye tire
Your jaws with eating. Nought but lies
Will please her fancy ; he who tries
Aught else will speedily repent
His folly.'

Thus, my Lord, he went
Inside the hole well-warned, but rude

Ill-mannered beasts are always crude
And rough of speech, with little mind
To understand how well-refined
And subtle words will work.

XXXV.
The Ape's
pleasance.

He said :

' Fear not, the Mercatte shall be fed
With such fair leasings as ne'er yet
Men heard.' But he no sooner met
The evil favoured beast inside,
And scanned her children, than he cried :
' Avaunt ! ye foul-faced imps of Hell !
What devil's spawn are these ? 'Twere well
To drown them out of hand, their sight
Causeth mine hair to stand upright.'

“ ‘ Sir Isegrym,' exclaimed their dam,
' These are my children, and I am
Proud of my offspring. One hath been
But lately here, who nought hath seen
But fairness in them, and I trow
Far worthier judge was he than thou :
For he could boast our kith and kin,
And plainly vowed that cherubin
Were they for beauty.'

Answered he :

' Well, let that stand as that may be,
But say, afford ye any meat ?
For I am starving, and would eat
Gladly some food ; thereto my right
Is far beyond each ghastly wight
Thou call'st thine offspring.'

Loud cried she :

' Vile Wolf, is here no meat for thee.'

“ ‘ Thou liest,' he said, ' behold enough
For any ten,' therewith the rough

XXXV.
The Ape's
pleasance.

Discourteous beast essayed to make
His way towards the food and take
His fill thereof; but straight the four
Attacked him tooth and nail, and tore
His head and ears, till o'er his eyes
The blood streamed down. With fearful cries
And hideous howls he rent the air,
But, like a dastard, did not dare
To make defence, but basely ran
In terror wild until he wan
The light of day; his coat to-torn
His visage furrowed, and half beshorn
His dexter ear. About his head
The skin hung down, and stark bebled
Was all his body. Loud he groaned,
And, wailing piteously, bemoaned
His grievous plight.

Quoth I to him :

' Did ye well lie, dear Isegrym ?'

Quoth he : ' As I beheld, I spoke.

Dost thou suppose that such foul folk

From me should win fair words ?'

' Dear Eme,'

Quoth I, ' thus have ye, as 'twould seem,
Reaped just reward. Ye should have said :

' Fair niece, what glorious goodlihead

Have thy sweet children ; radiant grace

Shines forth in each sweet comely face :

In faith it makes my heart feel proud

To think that I may be allowed

To call them cousins ; would that I

Could boast so fair a family.'

He answered : ' Liever would I hang

Than kinship claim with such a gang

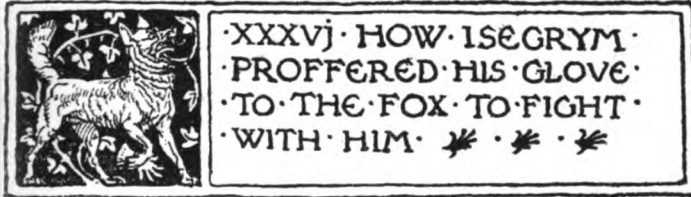
Of misformed Apes.'

' Ye must deceive

Such folk with cozenage, or receive,
 Quoth I, 'such payment as I see
 By thine estate hath happed to thee ;
 More fitting 'tis at times, forsooth,
 To deal with lies, than speak plain truth,
 For many a man the world hath seen
 (Richer and wiser far, I ween,
 Than we poor wights) who thus hath done.'

XXXV
 The Ape's
 pleasance.

"Dear Lord and King, the Wolf thus won
 His ruddy coif. Here now he stands
 With innocent mien, as though his hands
 Knew nought of harm. Demand, I pray,
 If he can this plain tale gainsay."



THE Wolf said : " I with scorn forbear
 Thy mocking japes, and have small care
 Of that most foul and venomous speech
 With which thou darest to impeach
 My faith and honour. Ah ! strong thief !
 Deem'st thou the King will give belief
 To thy waste words ? Ye falsely said
 That when anhungered and nigh dead
 Thou saw'st me, thou didst help my need ;
 But well ye wot thy selfish greed
 Nought gave me but a bare-stripped bone,
 Whence every scrap of flesh was gone
 Down thy fell throat. With churlish mock
 Ye strive to make a laughing-stock

XXXVI.
The Wolf
defies.

Of me, as here I stand, and say
That o'er my countenance doth play
A hungry grin : that charge doth touch
My worship closely ; and too much
Didst thou presume when, prompt by spite,
Thou saidst that I and Bruin dight
Some fearful plots, whereof none know
(With hoardings hid at Hulsterlo),
Against our Sovereign Lord the King.

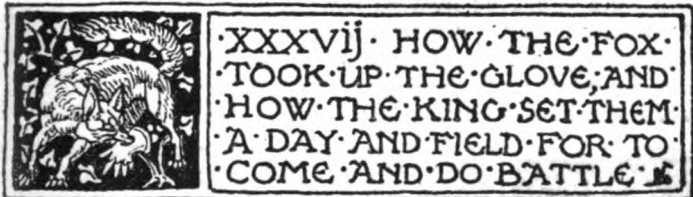
“ Yet more : ye basely dared to bring
My well-loved wife to depth of shame,
And hast on her fair spotless fame
Cast venomous slander. Did I not
Avenge on thy foul head the blot
Thus cast upon my scutcheon, I
Should merit good men's contumely.
I have forborne thee long, but now
One of us twain the knee must bow
As vanquished ; thou shalt not escape
My vengeance longer ; Hell doth gape
With ready mouth to gulp thee in,
Thou faggot, wrought of guilt and sin.

“ Before my Lord, and all men here
In conclave met, a murderer
And traitor false do I proclaim
The Fox, and gage to prove the same
'Mid fair-set lists in open field,
Body to body ; thereby sealed
Shall be our strife, fought out to end ;
I cast my glove, and God defend
That man who hath the right ! ”

Then took
The Fox the glove up, but he shook
With abject terror, for he thought :

“ My cunning now will count for nought
Against the Wolf in open war.
Already in mine ear the roar
Of victory soundeth when at last
He triumphs—but the die is cast.”

XXXVI.
The Wolf
defies.



“ BUT,” thought the Fox, “ I yet may gain
Advantage o’er the Wolf, sharp pain
He still must suffer, for his paws
Are scarcely healed wherefrom the claws
Were lately reft, when he with rude
Brute force was ruthlessly unshoed
At my behest.” And then aloud,
He vaunting cried : “ If any proud
Bold man dare rashly to aver
The Fox a thief and murderer,
Or traitor towards his Sovereign Lord,
I say he lies ! and will accord
For combat place and time to him ;
And thou, ’fore all, O Isegrym,
Shalt at my hand sure vengeance taste :
With what fierce joyance shall I haste
To meet thee in the lists : my pledge
See here ; and all thou dost allege
Against me will I prove to be
Falsehood and basest perfidy.”

Then did the King from each receive
His plight, and gave his gracious leave

XXXVII.
The Fox
must fight.

To set the battle—day and place—
Where the two foemen, face to face,
Should join in mortal strife, and both
Gave borrows as a pledge of troth
That on the morn should they appear,
And, void of craven-hearted fear,
Do deadly battle. Borrows were
For Isegrym, the Cat, and Bear ;
And Reynard ne'er good surety lacks
While Bitelives breathes, and Grymbert Dachs.



·XXXVIIj· HOW· DAME· RUKEN·
·AWE· THE· SHE· APE· COUNSEL·
·LED· THE· FOX· OF· THE· WAY· HE·
·SHOULD· BEHAVE· HIM· IN· THE·
·FIELD· AGAINST· THE· WOLF· J·

THE She-Ape said : “ Dear Reynard, see
That on the battle-day ye be
Cool, calm, and wise. Thine eme once taught
To me a prayer which each man ought
To know who arms him to the fight.
A learned clerk it was who dight
The precious words, long years ago,
Lord Abbot hight of Baudelo :
He said that whoso prayed this prayer
Fasting, need feel nor dread nor care
Of any foe he met that day ;
Let not the Wolf, therefore, affray
Thine heart ; to-morrow will I teach
These words to thee ; let fear not bleach
Thy cheek in doubt to hold thine own.”

“ Dear aunt, the kindness thou hast shown,”
Replied the Fox, “ doth fire my heart

With newborn strength to play my part.
My quarrel 'gainst the Wolf is just,
And therefore feel assured I must
Have good success."

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

Then through the day
The Fox-kin sought to while away
The time with song and merry jest,
While Reynard's aunt her wit addressed
To seek how further she could serve
Her nephew, and his spirit nerve
To meet his foeman.

First, with care
Past praise, she shaved all clean the hair
From off his body, which with oil
She then anointed, that his toil
The Wolf might lose if he should try
To hold a foe as slippery
And smooth as any pike or eel.
Moreover said she : " Would ye deal
In cunning wise to foil your foe,
List well my counsel, while I show
The means thereto. Your thick brush tail,
Well steeped in eisel, never fail
To strike the Wolf with, o'er the eyes,
Whene'er ye may, but otherwise,
Your brush keep 'neath you, lest he try
To catch and hold it, and thereby
Obtain the vantage ; let your ears
So flat lie down that nought appears
His claws can seize on : at the first
Pretend to flee, as though ye durst
Not stand before him ; let him run
And spring about till nigh fordone :
Then to the windward haste ye quick,
And with your forefeet raise a thick
Dark cloud of dust, to leeward blown

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

'Twill blind his eyes, as thickly sown
As winter snow-drift : while his sight
He strives to clear, thou well may'st bite
And wound him past thy heart's desire :
And then while rage his soul doth fire,
Again, and yet again, thy tail
Strike in his visage like a flail,
And thereby cause his eyes such woe,
That driven to madness will he go
Round, round, and round, yet fail to find
Your footsteps, being wellnigh blind.
So let him run till he be spent
And wearied out, his reason rent
With savage wrath.

Behold my rede
Good nephew mine, God give you speed ;
Yet one word more : to gain success,
Prefer thou ever craftiness
To rude brute strength, and therefore set
Yourself to think how ye may get
Advantage by ingenious ruse,
The while the Wolf doth madly use
And spend his vital force.

Now list
The holy spell, which doth consist
Of six most precious words, and these
Must thou say fasting, on thy knees :
'BLAERDE . SHEHAY . ALPHEINO,
KASBUE . CORSONS . ALBUFRIO.'
Nephew, be sure, this charm well said,
Kind Heaven will watch and guard thine head ;
Further my counsel is, 'twere best
That thou shouldst gain some peaceful rest,
For shortly hence will break the morn,
And 'twere not well your strength were worn
With vigil ere fierce war ye wage

With Isegrym ; I will engage
To break thy rest betimes."

" Dear aunt,"

The Fox exclaimed, " My Matin chant
Shall be deep fervent thanks to thee
For thy most sweet benignity.
Alas ! One thing alone doth wear
My mind, which is, that I can ne'er
Have power to recompense or pay
Such love until my dying day.
Assured within my heart I feel
That safer guard than hauberk's steel
Are those most holy words to charm
My life, and ward each deadly harm."

Then in a pleasant grass-grown bent,
He stretched him 'neath a bush, and spent
With all his labours, found such deep,
Untroubled, and refreshing sleep
As those enjoy who have a sense
Of pure unblemished innocence,
Or those who, steeped in whelming crime,
Reckless of all, but bide their time.

No longer lay he, than till white
Thin eastern streaks proclaimed that night
Waxed old, for then the Otter came,
Crying : " Dear cousin, it were shame
Longer to lie this summer morn,
And trow I well ye scarce will scorn
With this young duck to break thy fast ;
To win it for thee have I past
Through many a danger."

Reynard cried :

" Well might ye count me quite beside
My wits if this good hanel were

XXXVIII.
Dame
Rukenawe's
shield.

By me disdained, such dainty fare
Is more than welcome : warmest thanks
Be thine, dear friend : no creature ranks
Kind deeds more highly than the Fox,
And should my life escape the rocks,
And shoals that now appear ahead,
Fair guerdon shall on thee be shed
For this kind gift."

The duck he ate
With appetite that would not wait
For bread or condiment, then went
With stout heart batteward, while rent
The air with many an echoing shout,
His kin and friends, in revel rout.



THE King beheld with wondering eyes
The oiled and shaven Fox ; surprise
Gave way to laughter, and he said :
" Eh ! Fox, now swear I by mine head,
That well thou knowest thyself to dight
When thou wouldst foil a foe in fight,
Yet verily is thine aspect foul."

The Fox returned nor smile nor scowl,
Nor spake one word, but lowly kneeled
To King and Queen, 'fore all the field,
And then addressed him to his place.
The Wolf, with grinning, angry face,
Spake many a proud and vaunting word,

Which all unmoved his foeman heard.
The Leopard and the Losse, who kept
The lists between them, forward stept
With book in hand, and thereon sware
The Wolf, who pledged his oath to tear
The mask from off the Fox, and prove
On his fell body, that nor love
Nor fear had he for King or Queen,
But ever through his life had been
With murder stained, and treason high
Had plotted 'gainst his Majesty.

XXXIX.
The Fox
well dight.

The Fox made oath the Wolf had lied
Most falsely in his throat, and cried :
“ Believe, no man, this knave and thief!
To me 'tis verily a grief
To enter lists with one so vile,
But trust that gracious Heaven will smile
On my emprise, and grant me might
To cast him down to Hell's dark night.”

This done, the lords who ruled the fray
Called on the combatants to stay
All further speech, and boldly stand
Forth to do battle, hand to hand.

Then all folk roomed the field except
Dame Rukenawe, who closely kept
Beside her nephew, and with care
Bade him hold fast in mind the fair
Good rede she learned him.”

“ Well I know,”

Quoth she, “ how ye had wit to go,
When ye but seven years were of age,
Unlit by lantern, and engage
On darkest nights, devoid of moon,
To gather good, or win some boon

XXXIX.
The Fox
well dight.

Your household needed. Thus your name
For craft is honoured. Now new fame
And worship will to thee arise
If thou in battle bear the prize."

"My dearest aunt, in hour of need,"
Replied the Fox, "ye far exceed
All other redemen, and I hope
By memory of thy love to cope
In combat with my cruel foe
In such good wise that Fame may blow
The Fox's glory far and wide."

"Dear nephew," quoth she, "'tis my pride
To hear thee speak such words, and trust
In Heaven to aid the true and just.



XL HOW THE WOLF &
THE FOX FOUGHT TO
GETHER † · † · † ·

THEREWITH from out the field she went.
Each combatant stept back, intent
To see whence first the stroke might come.
From out the crowd arose a hum
As Isegrym trod forth and oped
His long fore legs, 'twixt which he hoped
To catch the Fox, but he aside
Sprang lightly, and with nimble glide,
Went straight between his legs: then next
Round went the Wolf, most sorely vext
Thus to have missed his mark, and chased
His foe with rapid strides who faced

Him ne'er about, and though he oft
O'ertook the Fox, and raised aloft
His foot to strike him, he with swift
And skilful movement would uplift
His tail, and therewith deftly smite
The Wolf across the eyes, till, sight
Obscured by grievous pain and smart,
Hither and thither would he dart,
And strive meanwhile to clear his eyes :
This Reynard sees, and quickly flies
To windward, where the sandy dust
In clouds he raises, and each gust
Straight blows it in his foeman's face,
Who finds no single moment's grace
To wash his eyes, and clear his sight ;
Then, ere that he can see aright
The Fox leaps on him from behind,
And cries : " Ah ! thief ! art thou now blind ? "
Then next, inspired by wrathful spite,
He hastes three grievous holes to bite
Between his ears, then loudly screams,
" How fares it with you now ? meseems
Thou hast been wounded on the head :
Rest thankful that ye be not dead,
As yet may hap. How many a lamb
Have ye destroyed ? and Bellyn Ram ?
Did ye not eat him ? Falsely thou
Hast here appealed me, but I trow
Most bitterly for this shalt pay ;
Ordered and pre-ordained to-day
Am I to be thy bane—no more
Will God permit thee, as of yore,
To ravin, pillage, rob and lie,
But hath appointed graciously
(For safety of thine eternal soul)
Me to assoil thy sins, and toll

XL. Fought
is the field.

Thy passing bell : prepare to die !
Fierce Hell shall be thy purgatory !
But stay—within my mercy lies
Thy life, and if that life ye prize,
Kneel down and beg that I forgive
Thy many crimes, and let thee live :
Avow thy mighty strength o'ercome,
And I will show to thee that some
Of pity's sweetness doth remain
Within my heart, for loth to stain
My hands am I with blood—God wot ! ”

These mocks made Isegrim wax hot
With wrath wellnigh to bursting : ne'er
Could he have deemed the Fox would dare
To speak such words ; and when at last
His scattered thoughts came back, he cast
About within his mind how yet
He might once more the mastery get.

With one vast effort then he broke
From 'neath the Fox, to whom a stroke
He gave, like axe-blow on the head :
Down dropped his foe, and lay as dead
One moment ; now most surely thought
The Wolf that lastly he had caught
The wily Fox in death's embrace,
But up he leapt, and once more chase
He gave him o'er the field, and then
Again they battled as two men
Who war for death ; ten times the Fox
Was caught, and e'en as one who locks
His arms around his love or friend,
Isegrim grasped him, but the end
Was ever that his well-oiled skin
Enabled him again to win

Escape and freedom. Oh! so snell
The Fox was, that when weened right well
The Wolf to hold him, sudden start
He gave, and arrow-like would dart
Betwixt his legs ; and then a cuff
Would deftly deal him with his rough
Well-eiselled tail across the eyes,
And ere from out his dazed surprise
He woke, a second stroke would fall,
And then a third, and after all
These buffets, he would run and raise
The dust in clouds, and therewith craze
And blind the Wolf ; but yet his strength
Exceeded Reynard's, till with length
Of warring was the Fox nigh done.

XL. Fought
is the field.

Sore anger'd was the Wolf, that one
He so despised should thus outlast
His force of arms, and thought, " One cast
Will I attempt," so lay in wait,
Till Reynard rushed upon his fate,
And one great blow, that caught his head,
Caused him to drop benumbed, as dead,
And Isegrym, like lightning, bound
His arms in firm-locked grip around
The Fox's body, and then lay
So heavily on him, that no way
Could he get free, but life and breath
Were nigh pressed out, and grimly death
Glared in his face.

Then sore afraid
Waxed Reynard's soul, and heavy weighed
The hearts of all his friends ; but glad,
Yea, overjoyed were those who had
Fixed faith in Isegrym.

With fierce
255

**XL. Fought
is the field.**

And venomous snaps did Reynard pierce
The Wolf's tough hide, but tooth and nail,
Though sharply worked, could not avail
To loose his foeman's grip; his teeth
Fain would the Wolf use, but beneath
Him so far lay his small made foe,
He scarce could reach him.

Then did grow
Death-horror in the Fox's mind,
Till, in despair, he made a blind
Last effort and with both his paws
Reached Isegrym, and then, his claws
Fixed firmly in his head, he tare
Across his brows the skin and hair,
Scratching his eyes till one hung out,
Whereat he bellowed forth a shout
Of rage and pain, then howled and wept,
While all adown his visage swept
Full streams of blood in stintless tide,
Till earth's green sward was crimson dyed;
And round that spot nought else there grew,
Long years, but flowers of roseate hue.



·XLI· HOW· THE· FOX· BE·
·ING· UNDER· THE· WOLF· X
·SO· GLOZED· HIM· THAT· X
·HE· CAME· ABOVE· AGAIN·

TO clear his ken the Wolf must lift
His feet, and thus was forced to shift
His grip of Reynard, whom a beam
Of fair hope cheered like sunlit gleam
Through clouds, for while his injured sight
His foeman cleared he sprang with light

Quick leap from 'neath him :

“Nay! not so

Shalt thou thus save thyself, and go
Free of my vengeance,” Isegrym
Exclaimed, and starting after him—
Though bled he sore the while—he caught
Him once more 'twixt his arms, and sought
His soul from out its house to press ;
And past all doubt in sore distress
The Fox now lay, for as beneath
The Wolf he fell, atwixt his teeth
His foe secured his paw, then cried :
“Despite all arts that thou hast tried,
Now is thy life within my power,
And thou no more shalt on me shower
Vile sand and dust ; thine eiselled tail
No more shall 'gainst mine eyes avail,
Nor evermore shalt thou beguile
Mine ear with specious words, no wile
Can aid thee further. Times gone by
Most gross and grievous injury
Thine hands have done me ; nay! e'en now
Mine eye hast thou destroyed, and trow
I well that many a grievous wound
My body bears. Though thou entuned
Thy floyting speech to charm mine ear,
'Tis all too late, nor love nor fear
Shall give me pause again.”

Now stood

The Fox in gloomiest fear ; for good
Or evil ending must he choose,
Whether without more words to lose
His life forthwith, or subtly try
Once more smooth-tongued cajolery.
Short space it took him to decide
That useless 'twere to mock or chide

XLI. The
Fox nigh lost.

The bitter foe, whose fury held
His life in scale, and therefore quelled
All japes within his breast, and fair
And softly spake, as though he were
The Wolf's best friend. Quoth he :

“ Dear eme,

All past misdeeds will I redeem
Without reserve, and be your man,
To serve you through what little span
May yet remain to me of life.
All evil dealings towards thy wife
With heartfelt sorrow I repent.
Would God my dregs of life were spent
In wending towards the Holy Grave
Pardon to gain for thee, and crave
From shrines throughout the Holy Land
Rich gifts, which I with generous hand
Would give thy cloister—profit rare
Souls thence derive, and thine shall share
(Yea, and thy father's too) the boon.
I trow that ne'er since sun and moon
First shone, such offer hath been made
To any King ; and thou obeyed
Shalt be as though the Pope ye were,
Our Holy Father. Whatsoe'er
I have henceforward will I hold
Of thee, and 'neath thy flag enrolled
Shall be my lineage, kith, and kin ;
Thus shalt thou foremost honour win,
Lord above Lords : what King should then
Dare to withstand thee, seeing my men
Increase thy forces? Furthermore,
I promise whatsoever store
I take of poultry, wild or tame,
Or fish or flesh, or woodland game,
Thou and thy children shall have choice

Ere I partake thereof ; thy voice
Shall be my law whatso betide.
As trusty guardian, near thy side
Will I keep ward, that never scathe
May touch thine head, for late and rathe
Shall be my watch.

XLI. The
Fox nigh lost.

Bold, stout, and strong
Art thou, while I, through all the throng
Of men and beasts, am formed for wile,
So with thy strength, and my fertile
And subtle brain, could none withstand
Emprise whereto we set joint hand.
Besides, so close we be of kin,
That past all doubt 'twere deadly sin
If 'twixt us cruel war had place.
Nay, could I but have found a case
For good excuse, I had not fought
This field against thee ; thou 'twas sought
The quarrel first ; so little will
Had I to injure thee that still
While fighting have I striven to show
Fair courteous bearing towards thee, though
A mighty difference had men seen
If so it happed that I had been
Pitted against a stranger. Thou
My dear eme art, and well I trow
A nephew's duty. When I might
Have seized a time perchance to smite,
I stayed mine hand, or thou hadst not
Escaped with such slight wounds, I wot,
In this encounter. True your eye
Hath somewhat suffered, and a sigh
Escapes my bosom when I think
That thou, dear eme, hast had to drink
That draught of woe : oh ! would that it
Had fallen on me, for much more fit

XLI. The
Fox nigh lost.

It were that I should suffer, but
It bears advantage—most men shut
Two windows when they sleep—while one
Thou wilt but need to close.

Well done
It were, 'fore all men, shouldst thou deem
These words well spoken, dearest eme ;
With heartfelt gratitude my wife
And children would for thy dear life
Make instant prayer, and falling down
Before thy feet, beg Heaven to crown
Thy days with joy.

I here confess
The trespass, lies and naughtiness
That I 'gainst thee and thine have wrought ;
But say, could any Lord have aught
More noble than I proffer now
With meek submission, as I bow
My soul for mercy. Well I wot
That thou my life may'st lightly blot
This moment, but, and if thou didst,
Consider how thou dwell'st amidst
My friends and lineage, who would take
Vengeance on thee for kinship's sake.

“ That man may well be counted wise
Who doth not let his anger rise
Against his own advantage. Some
There be who suffer wrath to come
Betwixt them and their own behoof ;
Such action clearly ranks as proof
That 'tis not wisdom's sceptre rules
Their lives, for needs must they be fools
Who suffer passion to o'erride
Their wit, what thing soe'er betide.
Dear eme, 'tis surely little gain

To any victor that he stain
His laurel crown with foeman's blood,
Sweet mercy oft breeds brotherhood.
Much better should a man have peace
And rest, and honour, than increase
Of foes who ever lie in wait
To seek his hurt. My wretched fate
I reck no whit, and do but give
Good rede, how thou may'st glorious live."

"Ay, thief!" the Wolf said, "thou wouldst fain
Be once more free, that yet again
Thou mightest scathe me. Wot I well
That wert thou loosed, the broken shell
Of one frail egg thou wouldst not reck
Of me or mine, but now in check
I have thy life. Though thou didst hold
In fee a world of ruddy gold,
Piled high as yon grey mountains old,
I would not spare thy life for gift
Thereof, too well I wot the drift
Of thy fair speaking. Nought I set
By all thy kin, and should not fret
To call them foes. Ere thou wast born
I knew to choose 'twixt chaff and corn.

"Thy glozing speech thou might'st have said
To one who knew thee not, and bred
Therewith repute for love of truth
And honest ways. But since thy youth
Thy devious way of life have I
Known to be vile and dastardly.
Yea! with good reason might ye mock
With gibing laugh should I unlock
Mine arms at thy request, and free
My deadly foe through—courtesy!

XLI. The
Fox nigh lost.

Thou hast, O noisome knave, declared
That out of pity ye had spared
To do me hurt—see then mine head
All torn and cruelly bebled,
And was it thy sweet mercy pray
Caused thee to pluck mine eye away
From out its socket? Worse than fool
Were I to hearken now ye pule
And cry for mercy.

But beyond
All other injuries, my fond
And loving heart it most doth touch,
To think how thou hast dared besmutch
And slander my beloved wife,
Whom count I dearer far than life,
Or fame or goods: therefore my hate
Nor time nor season can abate.”

While Isegrym in wrath thus spake,
The Fox but schemed some means to make
Escape from death.

The Wolf's red tongue,
Wearied and parched with speaking, hung
Outside his mouth; this Reynard saw—
With one great jerk he freed his paw,
Thrust up his head from underneath,
Seized fast the tongue betwixt his teeth
And hung thereto until the red
Bright blood streamed down; then straightway fled
All thought of Reynard, as forth rang
Isegrym's scream of anguish. Sprang
The Fox from 'neath him, and on high
Raised pæans shrill of “Victory!”



XLII · HOW · ISEGRYM · & ·
· WAS · OVERCOME · BY · THE ·
· FOX · AND · HOW · THE · FOX ·
· HAD · THE · WORSHIP · &

ALTHOUGH to lose one eye sharp pain
Had caused the Wolf, yet would he fain
Have lost the second ere his tongue
Had thus been bitten, for it wrung
His frame with such sore agony, that
Down fell he, prostrate, prone and flat,
As one falls dead.

Then forward leapt
The Fox, and on his body stept,
Shrieked with delight, and shouted loud,
Seized the Wolf's legs, and through the crowd
Dragged him along for all to see,
And stack and smote him lustily.

Ah! then what wrath and grief did wring
The Wolf's befrienders, and the King
Besought they, tearful-eyed, to stay
All further combat.

Quick yeasay
Was thereto given; forthwith the Losse
And Leopard nimbly stept across
The lists and said: "We charge ye both
To stay your hands; the King is loth
That further battle should be done,
And straight commandment gives each one
To cease the strife, for both have gained
Honour and glory, and sustained
Right well their worship. But the prize,"

XLII. Reynard
victorious.

Quoth they, "O Fox, most clearly lies
With thee, that King and Court award
Who watched the strife."

"Whate'er our Lord
The King commands," the Fox replied ;
"I own for law, and give beside
My heartfelt thanks to all around,
By whose fair judgment I am found
Victor. With humble heart I pray
My friends and counsellors to say
What next they judge 'tis mine to do."

Not lukewarm now were friends, or few,
To honour Reynard ; soon they came
In tribes and troops ; I will but name
Some who in earliest order hap.
First Grymbert Dachs and Dame Sleepcap
His faithful wife ; Dame Rukenawe,
To whose good counsel and wise saw
The Fox owed much, her hopeful sons,
Bitelives and Fulrompe—wily ones—
Hatenet her daughter ; then the house
Of Weaseldom, the Flittermouse,
And twenty more, who, if it so
Had happed for Fate's dark hand to go
Against the Fox in open field,
Much tardier then had been to yield
To him their homage : thus it is
Through all the world's long tale, ywis,
That who by good success doth raise
His head on high shall win great praise
And fair renown ; but if in strife
A man gets worsted, then in life
Small laud he finds, and nought can save
His worthy deeds from Lethe's wave.
Yea, some of those grasped Reynard's hand

Who hitherto had care to stand
Aloof, but now did they appear
With friendly countenance, and cheer
Most sweet and pleasant, as though nought
But love had crossed their inmost thought.

What pen can write, what tongue can tell
The merry feasts that now befell
In Reynard's honour? Trumpets blew
His fame abroad; and shawms with new
And pleasant pipings, joined to song,
Told how the Fox had right, and wrong
Lay all with vanquished Isegrym.

Quoth Reynard: "Truly to the brim,
Dear friends, my cup of joy is full,
And honours lie on me as wool
Bears down a sheep near shearing days."
Then passed they through the praising ways
In long procession towards the King,
While sweet-voiced boys and maidens sing,
With tuneful rhythm, songs of glee
And other joyous minstrelsy.
And as the revel rolled along
Thus sounded somewhat of their song:

"All hail to Reynard! trumpet tongued
His gallant deeds proclaim,
His glory shines with golden glow
Triumphant, while the Wolf alow
Is cast, fulfilled of shame.
Let loud acclaiming rend the sky
For Reynard's well-won victory.

"The Bear, the Cat, the Wolf, each strove
The Fox's power to fall,
But he in counsel, court, and field,

XLII. Rey-
nard vic-
torious.

Hath forced each one in turn to yield,
Uncrowned—yet Lord of all.
Then let glad pæans rend the air,
His friends great Reynard's glory share.

“Sing merrily forth our Master's praise,
His name let all men bless,
What though he win by fraud and guile,
The world well loves lie, craft, and wile,
Its watchword is success!
Out-ringing peals to Heaven then fling
For Reynard, and our Lord the King.”

With song and shout the royal throne
They reached, where Reynard falling prone,
The King exclaimed :

“I prithee stand,
Dear Reynard ; by thine own right hand
Thou hast most worshipfully kept
Thy day : a warrior more adept
Ne'er hath it been my luck to see ;
Take full discharge, and go forth free
To roam and pass whereso ye will.
The matter now must rest until
With counsellors and noble men
The cause hath been discussed, and then
When Isegrym of pain and dole
Is eased, and once again made whole,
My messengers shall bid you come,
And I with wise men's aid will sum
Up all the points, and straightway give
Fair judgment how ye both may live
As loving friends in full accord,
And liegemen true, to serve your Lord.”



XLIIJ · AN · ENSAMPLE · OF
THAT · THE · FOX · TOLD · &
TO · THE · KING · AFTER · HE ·
HAD · WON · THE · BATTLE ·

“**M**OST noble sire and gracious king,
As one athirst doth hail a spring
Of clear fresh water,” Reynard cried,
“I hail thy words. When to abide
Thy sentence first to Court I came,
Some envious beasts desired my shame
Who ne’er had hurt or scathe from me,
Yet ne’ertheless did cruelly
(As envious of my fair renown)
Strive to oppress and hunt me down,
Egged on by foolish men who deemed
That on the Wolf thy favour beamed
More brightly than it glanced on me.
Dear Lord, how little subtlety
These men possessed! or they had known
That only by the end is shown
Which men be happy.

Much are they
Like certain hounds I saw one day
Stand all aheap before a gate
Where dwelt a wealthy lord; in wait
They stood until a churl should bring
Their daily platter;—issuing
From out the kitchen came a hound
Who to his seeming good had found
Means to purloin a rib of beef.
The sharp-eyed cook espied the thief,
And running quickly with a bowl

XLIII. Gain
at sore cost.

Of boiling water, cast the whole
Athwart his hips ; the skin and hair
Were scalded off, and showed all bare
The naked flesh ; he nathless leapt
Far out of reach and safely kept
The stolen good so dearly won.
His fellows saw him quickly run
Forth to the meadow, holding still
The rib, and then did envy fill
Their foolish minds, and loud they cried :
' Well doth thy friend the cook provide
For thee, in giving such a bone
Garnished with plenteous meat thereon.'
' Ah ! little,' quoth the thief, ' ye know
The inward truth from outward show,
Ye praise what lies in front, but blind
Are ye to that which lurks behind.
See then my injured flesh and say
What profit rests with me.'

When they
Beheld his sodden scalded hips,
Wherefrom the hair and skin in strips
Hung down, a ghastly fearsome sight,
They fled, and left the unhappy wight—
The envied winner of the bone—
To mourn his wretched state alone.

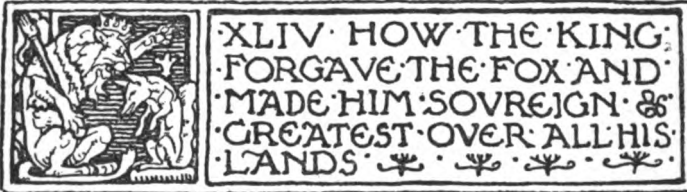
" And so these fulsome beasts who crowd
Round thee, dear Lord, and strive aloud
To gain thy grace and favour ; when
They rise above their fellow men
To place and power, forthwith they pill
And rob the people ; soon their fill
They take like lean forhungered hounds,
And for a while their praise resounds
From all men's mouths, and none dare say

One word against them, while their day
Of glory lasts ; nay, some will aid
Their evil deeds, that they apaid
May be by sharing part and lot
In evil-gotten gains, yet wot
I well, dear Lord, when comes the end
Towards which unrighteous actions tend,
Then grief and shame on them must fall,
And wormwood, bitterness, and gall
Shall be their portion : skin and hair
Shall they be shorn of, and all bare
Shall they go forth, as did that hound ;
That is, all those false friends they found
Shall fall away from them, nor more
Fawn at their feet as heretofore.
Dear Lord, I earnestly beseech
That thou wilt let this history teach
Thee somewhat of the world's dark ways ;
Well wot ye that in these last days
Cruel extortioners oppress,
With new-made modes of wickedness,
Poor helpless people, whom they get
By craft entangled in their net.
They're worse than that poor hound who bore
The bone away by stealth ; with sore
Facing and bracing bear they down
Poor folk in countryside and town ;
Freedom and privilege they sell
And drive poor wights to very hell,
For pelf and profit. Surely God
Will lastly scourge them with the rod
Of shame, and whosoe'er they be,
Will deal his judgments righteously.
But, Heaven be thanked ! the Fox ne'er wrought
In such vile wise, but ever taught
His fellows to avoid the crimes

XLIII. Gain
at sore cost.

Which run so rife in these ill times,
That clear and pure his name might show
From smutch, as fair new-fallen snow.
The Fox shall aye the Fox remain—
The good man's friend, the bad man's bane.

Dear King, towards thee my heart doth burn
With ardent love, nor will I turn
That love from thee, whate'er betide,
But to the utterest day will bide
Thy faithful liegeman—otherwise,
I doubt, some men have striven with lies
Your Highness to persuade, but I
Am true—or if I live or die.”



THE King said : “ Reynard, thou dost owe
To me due homage—be not slow
To do thy fealty, and command
Shall then go forth throughout the land
That thou be held in high estate
As chiefest judge and magistrate.
See well that ye no more misdo
Or trespass, but deal honest, true,
And righteous judgment all around
With fearless conscience. Most profound
We count thy wisdom, tact, and wit,
And therefore give due heed to it.
Well ponder all thy tongue hath said,
Nor let thy dooming be misled

From virtue's path. 'Tis mine intent
To let our sovereign will be bent
Henceforth to work by thy advice ;
And should foul jealousy entice
Some envious churl to do thee ill
In word or deeds, by Heaven, I will
Shower down such vengeance on his head,
Ere yet a second day be sped,
That he shall curse the unhappy morn
When Clotho cried " O man be born ;"
Bailiff and warden of the realm,
Thy hand alone must guide the helm."

XLIV. Reynard's state
glorious.

Quoth Reynard : " How can I express
Dear Lord, my heartfelt thankfulness ?"
And all his friends and kindred said
That each would answer, head by head,
For Reynard's faith.

Dame Rukenawe

Exclaimed : " Dear King, should Reynard draw
His foot from strictest rectitude,
Thereafter would a deadly feud
Be ever set betwixt us twain."

Then forth spake Reynard once again
And said : " A feeling doth oppress
My heart of deep unworthiness
Now thou so graciously hath dealt,
Dear Lord, with me and mine. Ne'er felt
A man more grateful than do I
That thus ye let bygones go by."

Now hearken ye how Isegrym,
With bleeding wounds, and sore of limb,
Lay stretched all helpless on the field.
At first men deemed the fight had sealed

XLIV. Rey-
nard's state
glorious.

His fate for aye : but Ersewyn,
With loving help from lupine kin
(The Panther, Losse, and Bruin Bear),
Raised him from off the ground with care,
And made of sweet and fragrant hay
A warm soft bed, whereon they lay
His wounded body. Then with lint
His hurts, when washed, were dressed ; no stint
Of surgeons, wise and learned, came
To tend his health, and men of fame
From far and wide gave willing aid
With subtlest leechcraft. Heavy weighed
His wounded head, and when his eye
They did but touch, with bitter cry
He waked from out his swoon, and made
Such fierce ado, that well afraid
His kin and friends were lest his wits
Were lost for ever ; but his fits
Of madness passed when, drinking deep
Of soothing draughts, he sank to sleep :
And kindly words of comfort gave
The learned masters, that though grave
And deep his wounds, he would begin
Ere long to mend. Dame Ersewyn
With tears of joy gave hearty thanks
To Heaven, and people of all ranks
Rejoiced that they once more would see
The Wolf all whole. Then speedily
The Court broke up, and every beast
Went home—for thus was closed the feast.



XLV·HOW·THE·FOX·WITH·
HIS·FRIENDS·DEPARTED·
NOBLY·FROM·THE·KING·
AND·WENT·TO·HIS·CASTLE·
OF·MALPERDY·§·§·§

WHEN Reynard took his final leave
Of King and Queen, quoth they: "We grieve,
Dear Reynard, that ye hence must go
With speedy foot, but be not slow
To come and glad our hearts again."

Replied he: "Nay, then, who more fain
Than I to visit you at need,
With wit, or body-help to speed
All things that lie within my power?
Ever the Fox doth, in the hour
Of stress and storm, most freely give
His aid to friends—long may ye live
In great estate, and when ye die,
Sweet-savoured be your memory."

Then fared he forth 'mid merry rout
Of loving friends, with joyous shout
And loud triumphant songs of glee,
Till reached they Castle Malperdy, /
Where he with fair and courteous speech
Said: "Dearest friends, I do beseech
Ye one and all, that if ye need
My help or counsel, ye but speed
Hither at once; ye soon shall prove
How faithful stands the Fox's love."

Then to his tender loving wife

XLV. He
lives in scorn
of folk cen-
sorious.

He told the tale, how near his life
To forfeit came, no single word
Did he forego.

When now they heard
His hairbreadth 'scapes, most wondrous fain
His children were that once again,
Unscathed, their father was restored
To wealth, in honour with his Lord,
And clear of charge. At Malperdy
Henceforth he lived right jollily.

NOW well I wot, that who should set
Himself in Reynard's craft might get,
By lies and flattery, equal praise
With him ; for crooked devious ways
Are loved of Lords who haunt the Court,
Whether they be of ghostly sort
Or temporal state. The Fox hath left
Behind him scholars who his heft
May fit with blade and mighty wax,
By threading those sly tortuous tracks
That he so skilfully hath trod.
But weary steps dull fools must plod
Who know not well the Fox's wiles :
On them the world but faintly smiles
For crafty wit it is that brings
Success to men in Courts of Kings
And Popes, and Emperors, and each
But striveth how to best o'erreach
His fellow man, by simony,
Brute force, deceit, or flattery.

Within the Court one thing alone
Hath power unerring to atone

For all misdeeds—bright glittering gold !
Whoso within his power doth hold
This talisman shall ever be
Received with joyous courtesy,
Alike by highborn dames and lords.

XLV. He
lives in scorn
of folk cen-
sorious.

Money to murder carles affords
Protection. Money bringeth shame
On purest souls. By money came
Falsehood and lies. By money love
Is bought and sold, which should above
All price be counted. Money makes
The foul seem fairest, and awakes
Men's vilest lusts.

I sorely fear,
From all I see around and hear
Of murder, cruel deeds, and theft,
And shameless vaunting of the deft
And bold-eyed way in which the law
Is set at naught, like some old saw
Arust with age, that surely God,
E'en though his wrath may seem to nod
And slumber for a while, will bring
Fierce vengeance on our misdoing.

Therefore with humble heart I pray
All folk who read these words to stay
From evil courses and amend
While life still lasts, for soon the end
Must come upon us, nor will spare
This man or that, but each must bear
The burden he himself hath cast
Across his back.—Oh! turn ye fast
Ere God's great day of grace be past.

EPILOGUE.

NOW whosoever more or less hath said
About the Fox, or deeds his hand hath done,
Than what may be within this volume read,
Regard it not for sooth—the snares he spun,
And pranks he played, this story doth record,
His subtle shifts, and lastly his reward.

And he who giveth not belief at full
To all he finds set down within this book,
Him should I hold to be a man of dull
Small wit, and one who hath, alas! forsook
The true belief that every wight should hold
Concerning that which Reynard wrought of old.

Nay, some there be, who, though their eyes had seen
All that which happed, would nathless doubt thereof,
Yet many marvels in this world, I ween,
Have come to pass and left small room for scoff.
And even as scenes in mysteries and plays
(Which be but tropes) oft prove in diverse ways

Example good for folk who fain would use
And follow virtue's paths, so in this tale,
The man who virtue loves, and vice eschews,
Shall find great help and wondrous good avail
In time of need, although in jest or jape
It doth from time to time its wisdom shape.

Within its page no good man hath been blamed,
Nor are its arrows sped at that or this,
But if or here or there men find them shamed,
Then let them change their way of life, ywis,
And for those folk whose footsteps have gone straight,
I pray God keep them in that fair estate.

·SUMMA

IF THOU HEREIN HAST AUGHT DISCERNED WRIT,
O READER, THAT OF GUILT CONVICTS THY HEART,
MAKE QUICK AMENDS : OR HAST THOU CONSCIENCE QUIT
OF ALL OFFENCE, GOD GRANT THOU NE'ER DEPART
FROM WISDOM'S PLEASANT PATHS ; BUT SHOULDST THOU START
AT AUGHT THAT TASTE OR FINE-WROUGHT FEELING SHOCKS,
SPARE THOU THE AUTHOR ; BLAME ALONE

THE FOX



GLOSSARIAL NOTES ON SOME PERSONS, PLACES, AND
 THINGS MENTIONED IN THE FOREGOING HISTORY,
 AND ON SOME WORDS USED BY REYNARD AND HIS
 FRIENDS WHICH HAVE FALLEN OUT OF OUR-DAY
 SPEECH.

- ABRION, *n.*, The works of Master Abrion
 p. 197, l. 2. No modern eyes have looked upon.
 'Twould seem that wondrous paradox,
 The fertile brain of Reynard Fox,
 Bred him, that he in ages later
 Might vex the studious commentator.
- ACON, *n.*, Aix-la-chapelle, as Acon known
 p. 76, l. 9. Was to our sires, but since has grown
 Strange to our ears with hard short A,
 And Aachen written 'tis to-day.
- AKERYN, *n.*, The learned Master Akeryn
 p. 195, l. 26. To us is but a shadow thin.
 If e'er he wrote, his works are tost
 Into the limbo of books lost.
 Perhaps he, too, is a creation
 Of Reynard's brain, for our vexation.
- AVICENE, *n.*, Than the great Arab Avicene,
 p. 188, l. 17. None wiser e'er was born, I ween.
 About the year ten-twelve he wrote
 The "Canon Medicinæ." Note
 And fame to him were given therefor
 While five long hundred years rolled o'er.
- BENYM, *v.*, Although this word to ancient times
 p. 102, l. 33. Belongs, yet scanty are the rhymes

In "im ;" and so, though scholars treat
Its use as past and obsolete,
Wherefore should not poor rhymesters wake
Its slumbers? It but means to take.

BEWIMPLE, *v.*, A head-gear formed with many a crimple,
p. 157, l. 17. In Reynard's days was called a wimple,
So, to bewimple meant to say,
To hide and cover from the day.

BONSING, *n.*, This word as "Boussyng" may you see
p. 191, l. 21. In the great Oxford N. E. D.
Caxton's turned "n" misplaced it there.
This name, in Dutch, do Polecats bear.

BORROWS, *n.*, Borrows were hostages or bail,
p. 246, l. 7. Whose goods were forfeit should they fail
To bring the champions to the field,
There to abide what fate should yield.

BURGEONING, To burgeon, most men wot, I trow,
ppl., p. 3, l. 8. Is but to bud, burst forth, and grow.

BYDWONGEN, This word dragged straightway from the Dutch,
a., p. 116, l. 34. You'll say cannot be needed much,
For centuries have left it lonely,
Lurking in Caxton's writings only.
It means enforced, constrained, compelled,
By force kept backwards or withheld.

DACHS, *n.*, A badger, Caxton calls a Dachs,
passim. Ta'en from the Dutch; it strangely lacks
In English word-books, yet the sound
Is quite familiar of Dachs-hound.

DAYED, *v.*, In ancient times a man was dayed
p. 36, l. 8. When accusation had been made
Of crime against him; then must he
By oath and witness prove him free
Of guilt, or boldly, hand to hand,
Against his foe in combat stand
On day declared and given out
By trumpet clang and herald's shout.

- DEUCE-ACE, *c.n.*, p. 109,
l. 12. That which is likened to deuce-ace
Hath in esteem the lowest place ;
For when a dicer makes his cast,
Deuce-ace is reckoned least and last.
- EISEL, *n.*,
p. 247, l. 21. For this one needs not to seek far,
All the world knows 'tis vinegar.
- EME, *n.*,
passim. Though Eme for uncle may be dead
In southern speech, it keeps its head
Above oblivion in the north ;
Nor hath it e'er been driven forth
From poet's diction. 'Tis from "Ohm"
Of Germans, or the Dutchmen's "Oom."
- ERMANRIC.
p. 74, l. 24. Great Ermanric was, in the fourth
Of Christian centuries, the King
And ruler of the stormy North :
His feast-hall heard famed Widsith sing
The earliest strain of English song ;
Far travelled gleeman he, and guest
Right welcome, when he sang the strong
And glorious deeds by which long rest
The King gave Northern lands, and rose
Victorious o'er his Vandal foes.
- FLOCKS, *n.*,
p. 133, l. 27. The charge to "stufte the sleve with flocks,"
Made by the King against the Fox,
At first reads like some ancient joke
Wherewith he would false Reynard poke,
And hence the phrase doth owe insertion,
Nigh wholemeal dragged from Caxton's version ;
Now fear I 'tis a mistranslation,
At least, that's Logeman's explanation.
- FLOYT, *v.*,
p. 257, l. 25. If illustration you require
Of this word, turn to Chaucer's Squire.
To floyt doth mean to speak with soft,
Alluring phrase, as knaves use oft.
- GELYS, *n.*,
p. 105, l. 32. As Chaucer of "mine author Lollius" tells
In Troilus, whom no man ever found,
So one suspects that Master Gelys dwells
Alone in Reynard's pages : through the round

- Of names of learned priests whose works abound
 On penitence and penance may one pore,
 Yet Master Gelys founden is no more.
- GRYN, *n.***, p. 28, l. 11. In Psalm one-forty may you see
 (The fifth verse) "they set grins for me."
 But our new versioners have reft
 The "r" alas! and "gins" 'tis left,
 Yet "grins," a true old English word,
 To mangled French should be preferred.
- GRYSE, *n.***, p. 157, l. 27. Gryse in old speech did grey fur mean,
 On robes of office oft-times seen.
- JAPE, *v.***, *passim*. To jape was but to gibe or joke,
 Or at one's neighbour fun to poke.
- LEASINGS, *n.***, p. 66, l. 25. He who our new-turned Bible tries
 For this good word, will now find "lies,"
 Psalm v., verse 6, or else "falsehood,"
 Psalm iv., verse 2, where "leasing" stood.
- MUSEHONT, *n.***, p. 191, l. 20. Musehont for Weasel still survives
 In the eastern counties, where their lives
 Lived out the Dutchmen, driven o'er sea
 By Alva's dread ferocity.
- OSTROLE, *n.***, p. 191, l. 32. This cryptogamic beast all search
 Eludes, and leaves us in the lurch.
 To naturalists he is unknown,
 And etymologists him disown;
 Muller hath tracked him all he can,
 Yet baffles he him and Logeman.
- PALSTER, *n.***, p. 107, l. 18. A palster carried in his hand
 Each pilgrim to the holy land.
 'Tis a Dutch word, that's why, I weet,
 'Tis not in Bradley nor in Skeat.
 (Right well I know "weet" should be "wot")
 And so it would if Skeat were Scott.)
 It was a staff five feet in length,
 And of good sturdiness and strength.
- RATHE, *adj.***, p. 111, l. 15. That rathe means early, each man knows
 Who's read of Milton's "rathe primrose."

- REDE, *v.*,
passim. Rede doth advice or counsel mean,
Oft scouted when 'tis good, I ween.
- ROOM, *v.*,
p. 162, l. 28. The good old phrase "to room," of late
Hath been supplanted by "vacate."
- SHREW, *n.*,
passim. Though now a shrew but means a scold
Or woman termagant, of old
'Twas said of those of either sex
Whose ill life other folk might vex.
- ST. MARTIN'S
BIRD, *n.*,
p. 38, l. 2. Good Randle Cotgrave 'tis alone
Who to the searcher maketh known
Hen Harrier as St. Martin's bird ;
Vainly one seeks elsewhere the word.
- SIB, *n.*,
p. 123, l. 9. A sib hath every man who lives,
Unless he lack all relatives.
- SLONK, *v.*,
p. 131, l. 23. This outland word hath fared but badly,
Finding no place in Stratmann-Bradley.
The reason is not hard to follow,
'Tis Caxton's Anglo-Dutch for swallow.
- SNELL, *a.*,
p. 255, l. 1. It scarcely needs to say that snell
Means quick, for that the sense doth tell.
- SPENCE, *n.*,
p. 52, l. 19. The old-time spence we now call larder,
Wherefrom, as need might be, the warder
Dis-spenced good things ; some rash man thence
Might etymologize dispense.
- STEAD, *n.*,
p. 211, l. 23. A farm in old speech was a stead,
And to the stead-man's name oft wed.
- STOUNDMELE, *adv.*, p. 87,
l. 16. This looks at first a strange word verily,
It means no more than momentarily.
- SWINK, *v.*,
p. 24, l. 16. Within this old word, "swink," doth lurk
The meaning of our phrase, hard work

WENTLING, *v.*, To wentle was to roll or tumble,
p. 34, l. 33. Or awkwardly along to stumble.

WONDERLY, The learned grammar-men who live
adj., p. 148, In these last days no adjective
l. 21. Count "wonderly," but were I taxed on
The use of it, good Father Caxton
Should be my panoply and shield,
For thus doth he the example yield :
"Thaventure of the world," quoth he,
(Cap. twenty-seven) "is wonderly."

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