

The story of Reynard the Fox is the triumph of craft and hypocrisy: and, though mankind must naturally repine at finding themselves overcome by such weapons, they are content to take the only revenge that remains in their power, that of exposing and satirising the deceiver. Hence the evergreen popularity of this apologue through successive centuries an apologue which, though Grimm claimed it to be of German or Flemish origin, has been traced to that fertile source of fictitious story, the fables of the Persian Bidpai. Master Reynard made his bow to the English public among the earliest productions of Caxton, whose version was re-edited by Mr. Thorns for the Percy Society in 1844: and he retained his popularity under numberless modifications throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Metrical versions of the story were published by John Shurley in 1681, and by a nameless writer in 1706: others have appeared, written by D. W. Soltau, in 1826; by Mr. Naylor, in 1845; and by Mr. Holloway, in 1852. To both these last, and to the reprint by Mr. Thorns, interesting prefaces are attached, and the introduction to the present volume is still more complete as a bibliographical review of Reynardian literature. In the version by Goethe the story has arrived at a pitch of consummate perfection as a satire upon the world and its manners. Mr. Arnolds translation is fluent and easy: in its spirit, though not in its metre, Hudibrastic; and many of our quaintest modes of expression, and most idiomatic phraseologies and allusions, are neatly introduced, without coarseness or vulgarity. We would gladly give a specimen, but it is difficult to find a satisfactory one that would not exceed our space. The admirable designs by Mr. Wolf, which illustrate the volume, will alone insure its popularity. Among the most favourite objects of the Great Exhibition of 1851 were the stuffed animals from Wurtemberg, which were placed in such postures as at once to exhibit their natural characteristics, and to enact certain stories, sometimes in imitation of mankind. Among them were incidents from the tale of Reynard the Fox. A reminiscence of those figures will suggest what may be expected in the designs of Mr. Wolf. They combine a close study of nature with much fertility of invention. The animals in his hands mimic mankind to perfection, and in the true spirit of the story itself, which therefore they help to tell. "The Gentlemans Magazine and Historical Review, Vol. 198 [1855]

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