

OLD SAWS WITH NEW TEETH

by

AMBROSE BIERCE

*FROM THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
AMBROSE BIERCE, VOLUME VI*



NEW YORK & WASHINGTON
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
1911

Rosings Digital Publications



2013

CERTAIN ANCIENT FABLES APPLIED TO THE LIFE OF OUR TIMES

WOLF AND CRANE

A Rich Man wanted to tell a certain lie, but the lie was of such monstrous size that it stuck in his throat; so he employed an Editor to write it out and publish it in his paper as an editorial. But when the Editor presented his bill the Rich Man said:

“Be content—is it nothing that I refrained from advising you about investments?”

LION AND MOUSE

A Judge was awakened by the noise of a lawyer prosecuting a Thief. Rising in wrath he was about to sentence the Thief to life imprisonment when the latter said:

“I beg that you will set me free, and I will some day requite your kindness.”

Pleased and flattered to be bribed, although by nothing but an empty promise, the Judge let him go. Soon afterward he found that it was more than an empty promise, for having become a Thief he was himself set free by the other, who had become a Judge.

HARE AND FROGS

The Members of a Legislature being told that they were the meanest thieves in the world resolved to kill themselves. So they bought shrouds and laying them in a convenient place prepared to cut their throats. While they were grinding their razors some Tramps passing that way stole the shrouds.

“Let us live, my friends,” said one of the Legislators; “the world is better than we thought. It contains meaner thieves than we.”

BELLY AND MEMBERS

Some Workingmen employed in a shoe factory went on a strike, saying: “Why should we continue to work to feed and clothe our employer when we have none too much to eat and wear ourselves?”

The Manufacturer, seeing that he could get no labor for a long time and finding the times pretty hard anyhow, burned down his shoe factory for the insurance and when the strikers wanted to resume work there was no work to resume. So they boycotted a tanner.

THE PIPING FISHERMAN

An Editor who was always vaunting the purity, enterprise and fearlessness of his paper was

pained to observe that he got no subscribers. One day it occurred to him to stop saying that his paper was pure and enterprising and fearless, and make it so. "If these are not good qualities," he reasoned, "it is folly to claim them."

Under the new policy he got so many subscribers that his rivals endeavored to discover the secret of his prosperity, but he kept it, and when he died it died with him.

ANTS AND GRASSHOPPER

Some Members of a Legislature were making schedules of their wealth at the end of the session, when an Honest Miner came along and asked them to divide with him. The members of the Legislature inquired:

"Why did you not acquire property of your own?"

"Because," replied the Honest Miner, "I was so busy digging out gold that I had no leisure to lay up something worth while."

Then the Members of the Legislature derided him, saying:

"If you waste your time in profitless amusement you cannot, of course, expect to share the rewards of industry."

THE DOG AND HIS REFLECTION

A State Official carrying off the dome of the capitol met the Ghost of his predecessor, who had come out of his political grave to warn him that God saw him. As the place of meeting was lonely and the time midnight, the State Official set down the dome of the capitol and commanded the supposed traveler to throw up his hands. The Ghost replied that he had not eaten them, and while he was explaining the situation another State Official silently added the dome to his own collection.

LION, BEAR AND FOX

Two Thieves having stolen a piano and being unable to divide it fairly without a remainder went to law about it and continued the contest as long as either one had a dollar to bribe the Judge. When they could give no more an Honest Man came along and by a single small payment obtained a judgment and took the piano home, where his daughter used it to develop her biceps muscles, becoming a famous *pugiliste*.

WOLF AND LION

An Indian who had been driven out of a fertile valley by a White Settler, said:

"Now that you have robbed me of my land there is nothing for me to do but issue invitations to a war-dance."

"I don't so much mind your dancing," said the White Settler, putting a fresh cartridge into his rifle, "but if you attempt to make me dance you will become a good Indian lamented by all who didn't know you. How did you get this land, anyhow?"

The Indian's claim was compromised for a silk hat and a tin horn.

THE ASS IN THE LION'S SKIN

A member of the State Militia stood at a street corner, scowling stormily, and the people passing that way went a long way around him, thinking of the horrors of war. But presently, in order to terrify them still more, he strode toward them, when, his sword entangling his legs, he fell upon the field of glory and the people passed over him singing their sweetest songs.

ASS AND GRASSHOPPERS

A Statesman heard some Laborers singing at their work and wishing to be happy too asked them what made them so.

“Honesty,” replied the Laborers.

So the Statesman resolved that he too would be honest and the result was that he died of want.

HARE AND TORTOISE

Of two writers one was brilliant but indolent; the other, though dull, industrious. They set out for the goal of fame with equal opportunities. Before they died the brilliant one was detected in seventy languages as the author of only two or three books of fiction and poetry, while the other was honored in the Bureau of Statistics of his native land as the compiler of sixteen volumes of tabulated information relating to the domestic hog.

KING LOG AND KING STORK

The people being dissatisfied with a Democratic Legislature, which stole no more than they had, elected a Republican one, which not only stole all they had but exacted a promissory note for the balance due, secured by a mortgage upon their hope of death.

MILKMAID AND BUCKET

A Senator fell to musing as follows: “With the money which I shall get for my vote in favor of the bill to subsidize cat-ranches I can buy a kit of burglar's tools and open a bank. The profit of that enterprise will enable me to obtain a long, low, black schooner, raise a death's-head flag and engage in commerce on the high seas. From my gains in that business I can pay for the Presidency, which at \$50,000 a year will give me in four years—” but it took him so long to make the calculation that the bill to subsidize cat-ranches passed without his vote and he was compelled to return to his constituents an honest man tormented with a clean conscience.

THE WOLF WHO WOULD BE A LION

A Foolish fellow who had been told that he was a great man believed it and got himself appointed a Commissioner to the Interasylum Exposition of Preserved Idiots. At the first meeting of the Board he was mistaken for one of the exhibits and the janitor was ordered to remove him to his appropriate glass case.

“Alas!” he exclaimed as he was carried out, “why was I not content to remain where the cut of my forehead is so common that it is known as the Pacific Slope?”

MONKEY AND NUTS

A certain city desiring to purchase a site for a public Deformatory procured an appropriation from the Government of the country. Deeming this insufficient for purchase of the site and payment of reasonable commissions to themselves, the Men in Charge of the Matter asked for a larger sum, which was readily promised. Believing that the fountain could not be dipped dry, they applied for still more, and more yet. Wearied at last by their importunities the Government said it would be damned if it gave anything at all. So it gave nothing and was damned all the harder.

BOYS AND FROGS

Some Editors of newspapers were engaged in diffusing general intelligence and elevating the moral sentiment of the public. They had been doing this for some time, when an Eminent Statesman stuck his head out of the pool of politics and speaking for the members of his profession said:

“My friends, I beg you will desist. I know you make a great deal of money by this kind of thing, but consider the damage you inflict upon the business of others!”