



# The History of Aesop's Fables

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## **A short-title list of some editions of Aesop's Fables - more or less intended for child readers, chronologically arranged**

In his *Classics in Short* No. 64, Brian Alderson discusses the history of Aesop's Fables. Given the necessary brevity imposed upon 'Classics in Short' articles with their back page location in the print magazine, it was clear that additional space was needed as Brian had much more to tell the readers of **BfK** about, as he put it, 'Fables and their gigantick history'. We are delighted that the **BfK** website allows us to present those of you interested in the history of children's books with the very special treat below: Brian Alderson's fascinating annotated list of important and curious editions of Aesop from 1483 onwards. **Ed.**

The list is designed to body out the backpage article in **BfK** 165 by supplying an overview of the progress of fable-publishing for children. Almost all editions listed draw upon the Aesopic tradition and co-temporary versions coming from such authors as John Gay or Jean de La Fontaine are excluded - likewise most works first published in Europe or North America. All editions are published in London except where otherwise specified. Comments to **BfK** on the list would be welcome.

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### **01.**

1483-4 *the book of the...Fables of Esope...//...translated and empynted by me William Caxton at Westmynstre in thabbey and fynysshed the xxvi daye of Marche the yere of our lord mccc lxxxiiii*

# briefly discussed in the backpage article. (Caxton liked to vary the spelling of his first name.) An admirable facsimile of the book with an introduction by Edward Hodnett was published for the Caxton quincentenary in 1976 by The Scholar Press.

### **02.**

1571 *The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian*

compylit in eloquent and ornate Scottis meter be M. Robert Henryson, Edinburgh. Imprinted att Edinburgh be me Robert Bassandyne, dwelland at the nether Bowe, Anno 1571

A Prolog and thirteen fables are set out in an extended series of 7-line stanzas with a Chaucerian freshness. See for instance the first stanza of "The Taill of the Cok and the Jasp" which is also furnished with a cranky woodcut:-

*Ane cok sum tyme with feddram fresch & gay,  
Richt cant and crous, albeit he was bot pure,  
Flew furth upon ane dunghill sone be day;  
To get his dennar set was al his cure...*

The book is also notable for its use of a French letter-form known as *lettres de civilité*. See *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson* ed. H. Harvey Wood. Second ed. Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1958.

### **03.**

1666 *Aesop's Fables...in English, French, and Latine...* illustrated ...by Francis Barlow...sold at his House [but actually by the booksellers Ann Seile and Edward Powell], 1665 [actually 1666]

# Here you must be troubled by a complicated story. The first major Aesop to follow Caxton ? and one which had child readers in mind ? was "paraphras'd in verse" by John Ogilby and published in quarto format in 1651. It was illustrated with etchings by the Danish artist Franz Cleyn, who drew upon a famous edition (mentioned in the backpage article) published in Bruges in 1567 and illustrated by Marcus Gheeraerts.

This was the first of four Aesops done by Ogilby, the second of which, a folio volume published in 1665, had more expansive etchings by Wenzel Hollar and Dirk Stoop who copied images either by Gheeraerts or by Cleyn.

Thus may be seen the arrival in Britain of Aesop illustration largely based upon the work of Gheeraerts, and the Aesop of Francis Barlow (above) ? the first great English illustrator ? also drew heavily on these predecessors but was marked by a singular, almost homely, skill that belonged to Barlow alone. His polyglot texts might be seen as having an educational function, although the pictures rather than the English couplets by Thomas Philipott would have exerted the most appeal on child readers.

Most of the stock of Barlow's first edition of 1666 was consumed in the Great Fire, but the plates were saved for a new edition printed in 1687 where the English verse text was replaced by brisk quatrains in verse with rhymed morals by Aphra Behn. Barlow's imagery in this book was to dominate subsequent fable illustration in Britain.

# See Edward Hodnett *Francis Barlow; first master of English book illustration*. Scolar Press, 1978

#### 04.

1699 *Fables of Aesop and Other Eminent Mythologists: with morals and reflrxions*. By Sir Roger L'Estrange, Kt. 2 ptt. the first for R.Sare and others, 1699, the second for Sare alone also 1699

# Although the two parts, with their alphabetical tables, add up to some 738 pages with no illustrations beyond two frontispieces, it is evident from L'Estrange's excellent Preface that the volume was compiled very much with children in mind. His prose is crisp both in the storytelling and the brief morals, and even his longer Reflexions would have had some appeal to readers who would have been perhaps more persevering than those of the present.

#### 05.

1703 *Aesop's Fables in English and Latin Interlineary* [by John Locke]. A. & J. Churchill, 1703

In his influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) Locke made a case for an edition of Aesop through which a child might come to an introductory understanding of Latin, especially if the way was eased with pictures. That is the substance of the above work, with the pictures arranged in a grid formation on the page linked by numbers to the relevant fable. Locke's involvement in the editing of the book, along with one William Grigg is elucidated in an article by Robert H. Horwitz and Judith B. Finn "Locke's Aesop's Fables" in *The Locke Newsletter* no.6 (Summer, 1975) pp.71-89

#### 06.

c.1730 *Fables and Other Short English Poems, collected from the most celebrated English authors*. The whole curiously engrav'd for the practice and amusement of young gentlemen and ladies in the art of writing. By Jno. Bickham. Vol. I [II + III]. Printed and sold by Thos. Cobb (who married the widow of Mr Jno.Cluer) at the Printing Office in Bow Church-Yard, London. Where may be had Copy-Books with Round-hand Copies...engrav'd by G. Bickham n.d. c.1730

The leaves engraved on one side throughout. The fables in each of the three volumes are printed below a handsome engraved illustration (mostly after Barlow) interspersed with the poems and then followed by supplementary material as practical examples of the engraver's art: Vol.I a selection of alphabets; II "a curious Drawing-Book, by G.Bickham Junr."; III "Tables, useful in receiving and paying monies"

**07.**

1722 *Fables of Aesop and Others...* By Samuel Croxall. J. & R. Tonson, 1722

Croxall spends some three and a half pages of his Preface calumniating L'Estrange's edition of the fables (03 above) as much for the fact of him being "a Tool and Hireling of the Popish Faction" as for the voluminous bulk and the exorbitant price of his edition. However, Croxall has none of the literary felicity of his predecessor and both his fable retellings and his "Applications" are long-winded. Nonetheless his version was to be reprinted for over a hundred years, a popularity for which its illustrations were surely responsible. These were engravings on soft metal by Elisha Kirkall, who succeeded in conveying to a popular readership finely-made but much-reduced copies of the Gheeraerts - Cleyn - Barlow images.

**08.**

1740 *Aesop's Fables with Instructive Morals and Reflections...adapted to all capacities...* [by Samuel Richardson]  
Printed for J.Osborn, Jnr. 1740

Richardson, novelist and printer, is rather the editor than the composer of these fables. His Preface clearly indicates that children are foremost among all the capacities that he is addressing and he dwells on the differences between the versions by Lestrange and Croxall, noted above. Arguing the toss between them he wisely selects the former as the basis of his book and even tabulates the ways in which he has adapted his chosen texts. He also emphasizes the value of illustrations and, somewhat like Locke, uses a grid system incorporating little pictures (probably based on Barlow via Kirkall) ten to a page.

# See David Whitley "Samuel Richardson's Aesop" in Mary Hilton et al. *Opening the Nursery Door* Routledge, 1997 pp. 65-79

**09.**

1741 *Aesop's Fables with their Morals: in prose and verse...* newly and exactly translated out of the original Greek.  
Printed for J.Hodges, 1741

A little-known edition containing 203 fables. There is no indication that it was published for children, but its text, with the prose version duplicated by one in verse, and its metalcuts for each fable (done with an almost medieval simplicity) would not preclude it finding juvenile readers.

**10.**

1742 *The Child's New Play-Thing...designed for the use of schools and for children before they go to school.* Printed for T.Cooper, 1742

While not a fable book, this item is included to indicate how fables come to be incorporated into reading compendia designed for children. The 1740s were a time when children's book publishing was taking off as a regular element in the trade and in this early example of new ways of editing material we find four fables interspersed among alphabets, syllabaries, Bible tales, and fairy stories. No further reference will be made to the many other examples of such use that occurred from that date to the present.

**11.**

1757 *Fables in Verse for the Improvement of the Young and the Old.* By Abraham Aesop, Esq....Printed for the Booksellers of All Nations, and sold at the Bible and Sun in St Paul's Church-Yard, 1757

One of John Newbery's happiest productions, whose life down to 1783 is charted by S.Roscoe in his bibliography *John Newbery and his Successors* (Wormley: Five Owls Press, 1973). Its history did not finish there though for in 1792 the 38 woodcut blocks for the book were sold to William Darton who published modified editions under his own imprint at the start of the nineteenth century (see Lawrence Darton *The Dartons; a check-list...*The British Library, 2004 pp. xx-xxi and items G312-3)

**12.**

1761 *Select fables of Esope and Other Fabulists. In three books.* Birmingham: printed by John Baskerville for R. & J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, 1761

Distinguished though it be, printed by England's foremost printer, decorated with etchings by J. Whale after C. Grignion, and sporting tiny illustrations for each fable in the "grid" manner ? twelve per page ? "Dodsley's Fables" nonetheless claims "to select such Fables as would make the strongest and most useful impressions on the mind of youth". The first two books contain respectively fifty-four and fifty-three traditional fables; the third has fifty-two "Original Fables". Unusually the Morals, by W. Shenstone, have been separated out and appear as an "Index" at the end.

The book underwent some odd metamorphoses, being reprinted for J. Dodsley in 1794 with individual, framed and beswagged metalcut blocks for each fable, pirated with recut copies of these blocks by Mozley of Gainsboro', and eventually put out in "A New Edition" by S. Fisher of Clerkenwell in a roughly printed little 12mo with the plates lumped together at the front.

## THOMAS BEWICK

Bewick's role as master wood engraver cannot be strongly enough emphasised in any account of fable illustration. He brought to the cutting of wood a degree of delicacy that enabled his blocks to compete in terms of detail and composition with engravings on metal (in relief or in intaglio) and the work undertaken by his shop in Newcastle upon Tyne was to influence the whole course of nineteenth-century book illustration of every kind. He was a great lover of the fable as a literary form and was involved in editions of fables for much of his professional life and it therefore seems sensible to break the chronological sequence at this point in order to list fable-books in which he was involved. My notes have been kept to a minimum, dependent as they are on S. Roscoe's work (see below), and we are promised a fuller study of the books when Nigel Tattersfield's Thomas Bewick bibliography ? currently in the press ? is published.

### 13.

1772 ??? *The Ladder to Learning, Step the First [...Second...Third]: being a collection of select fables with original morals, on a new plan...* [First advertised by Francis Newbery at the corner of St Paul's Church-Yard in 1772 apparently in three separately published parts with the text moving up from one to two to three syllables per volume.]

Dearth of evidence leaves the origins of what was to become a very popular book shrouded in mystery. Very few eighteenth-century copies of the three parts have survived but by the time that John Harris took over the publication "revised and corrected by Mrs Trimmer [?]" it was being more widely dispersed and it continued in print in varied forms for many years. (See, for instance, a larger format edition of 1827 with the 24 + 35 + 29 fables of the three parts each illustrated with hand coloured wood engraving grouped three to a page with page references to their subjects.) The early editions were "adorned" with simple but attractive wood engravings in square frames at the head of each fable and although the work is not mentioned by Roscoe as being by TB he is thought to have been responsible for many of the cuts.

# see the notes at item 916 in Marjorie Moon's *John Harris's Books for Youth 1801-1843* rev. and enlarged ed. Folkestone: Dawson Publishing, 1992, and see item 41 below.

### 14.

1774 *Youth's Instructive and Entertaining Story-Teller.* Newcastle: T. Saint, 1774

Blocks, including fable cuts, done in TB's final year as an apprentice when he may also have worked on the following very rare volume:-

### 15.

1775 *Moral Instructions of a Father to his Son...and select fables...* The third edition. Newcastle: printed by and for T. Saint, 1775

### 16.

1776 *Select Fables in Three Parts. Part I, after the manner of Dodsley's ...*Newcastle: printed by T.Saint, 1776

Another exceptionally rare volume, defended against certain critics by Roscoe who writes of the "exquisite beauty" of some of the cuts in Part III.

**17.**

1779 *Fables by the late Mr Gay...*Newcastle: printed by T.Saint et al, 1779

Gay is here included to retain the sequence of TB's fable work, but two points can also be noted: (i) that a different edition of this title, which proved extremely popular, was published by a conger in London and was illustrated by TB's brother John, and (ii) that around this time TB was awarded a premium for some of his fable cuts by the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts ? early recognition of his skills.

# see TB's *Memoir*, ed. Iain Bain (Oxford U.P., 1975) and *John Bewick; engraver on wood 1760-1795* by Nigel Tattersfield (The British Library, 2001)

**18.**

1784 *Select Fables in Three Parts...*Newcastle: printed by and for T.Saint, 1784

Includes cuts that were also used in earlier editions. An unsatisfactory reprint edited by Edwin Pearson was published in London in 1871.

**19.**

1818 *The Fables of Aesop and Others*, with designs on wood by Thomas Bewick. Newcastle: printed by E.Walker, for T.Bewick and Son...1818

The culmination of TB's encounter with fables and a book which owes much in both illustrative and textual terms to editions by Croxall, and hence, so far as the images are concerned to Barlow etc. (see nos. 05 and 02 above). A full analysis, including a description of the ms of the text is given in Roscoe.

# S. Roscoe *Thomas Bewick; a bibliograohy raisonné..*Oxford U.P., 1953

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**20.**

1783 *Fables in Monosyllables and Morals to a Set of Fables*. By Mrs Teachwell [ie. Ellenor Fenn]. printed for John Marshall n.d. [?1783]

Fables and morals in simplified texts cast as dialogues between mother and child, with fancy beswagged engravings with the fable titles. A facsimile was published for the Osborne Collection in Toronto by the Johnson Reprint Corporation in 1970.

**21.**

1804? *Fables in Prose and Verse. For children*.Printed for the assigns of J. Newberry [sic] and T.Carnan, and sold by Darton and Harvey, n.d. [copies known with 1801 and 1804 watermarks]

Although published at the same time as Darton's reissue of the Newbery Aesop (no. 09 above) this is a different book, with a text and 20 oval woodcuts which owe much to Bewick's *Select Fables* of 1784. The cover states that the volume is Part I but no Part II is known.

**22.**

1805 *Fables Ancient and Modern...*By Edward Baldwin, Esq. [ie. William Godwin]. 2 vols. Printed for Thomas Hodgkins [ie. Mary & William Godwin], 1805

An ingenious edition the background to which (with illustrations) is given in Darton pp. 194-7. The copper engraved illustrations, probably by William Mulready, appear as headpieces to each fable, but in a later "cheap edition" in one volume the same images are reduced to tiny pictures appearing in "grid-form" twelve to a page.

## VERSIFICATIONS

There are precedents before this period for fables to be turned into a vaguely poetic form, but at the start of the nineteenth century there emerged a fashion for presenting them to children in versified versions and the following examples are here treated as a discrete group with its own chronology:-

### 23.

1807 *Old Friends in a New Dress; or, select fables of Aesop in verse*. Part I [II]. [By Richard Scrafton Sharpe] . Printed by and for Darton and Harvey, 1807

Sharpe is said to have been a grocer, but his use of varied verse-forms here and his neat conclusions to the fables show him to be a competent versifier as well. (And it was he who is assumed to have produced the limericks in *The Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* that inspired Edward Lear.) This set of fable adaptations proved popular and an edition of 1837 from Smith, Elder & Co. (Thackeray's publishers) was "enlarged, corrected, and now embellished with eighty-two cuts" ? and is perhaps the best-known example of his work.

### 24.

1810 *The Amusing Moralist, containing a collection of fables from Aesop transposed into easy verse*. By a Lady. Printed for and sold by Crosby & co. 1810

Eighteen versified fables each of which has a wood engraved headpiece modelled on images taken from earlier works. A copy is known with the artist's "Original Sketches" mounted on leaves and bound in to a copy of the book after the printed text.

### 25.

1812 *The Mother's Fables in verse. Designed, through the medium of amusement, to correct some of the faults and follies of children* [By E.L.Aveline, probably revised for publication by Ann and Jane Taylor]. Printed for Darton, Harvey, and Darton, 1812

Rather a long way from Aesop. Each fable is preceded by a verse anecdote which leads the eponymous mother to relate an appropriate moral tale. For a note on the Taylor sisters' involvement in the book, which probably improved it no end, see the entry G916 in Lawrence Darton's *The Dartons* (The British Library, 2004).

### 26.

*Fables in Verse: by Aesop, La Fontaine, and others*. By Mary Anne Davis. Second ed. enlarged by several additional fables and a few moral tales. Printed for G. and W.B.Whittaker, 1819

Jog-trot renditions (illustrated only with an engraved frontispiece) each preceded by a single-line moral indicating the point of the story that follows.

### 27.

1820 *Aesop in Rhyme, with some originals* By Jefferys Taylor...Printed for Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1820

The liveliest of all the children's editions in verse ? which is unsurprising coming from one of the siblings in the family of "the Taylors of Ongar". (Jefferys was younger brother to Ann and Jane.) Here's part of the mouse debate over belling the cat:-

*Dr Nibble-cheese rose, and said "I would propose  
To this cat that we fasten a bell;  
He who likes what I've said, now will hold up his head;  
He who does not may hold up his tail.*

In her *Analytical Bio-Bibliography* of the Taylor family (NY: Garland Publishing, 1975) Christina Duff Stewart suggests that the frontispiece and the seventy copper engravings to the 58 fables and 13 "originals" may have been the work of Jefferys himself (entry A30).

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**28.**

ca.1815 *A Collection of Fables for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Masters and Misses*. Adorned wit cuts. York: Printed by J.Kendrew, Colliergate.

One of Kendrew's so-called chapbooks, advertised by him as Penny Books, of which he published some 21 titles. An account of the sources for the fables and cuts in this example is given in Roger Davis's *Kendrew of York and his Chapbooks for Children; with a checklist*. Wetherby: The Elmete Press, 1988.

**29.**

1828 *One Hundred Fables, Original and Selected*. By James Northcote, R.A. embellished with two hundred and eighty engravings on wood. Geo. Lawford...printed by J.Johnson, 1828.

This very superior volume, issued on large and small paper and dedicated to the King [William IV], was hardly intended for children. It is included partly as an example of the use of Fable as subject for a de luxe product and partly for its status as a majestic example of the artistic capacity of wood engraving. The illustrations were designed by the painter Northcote for his own choice (and composition) of the texts. They were then drawn on to the wood blocks by William Harvey, who had been an apprentice of Bewick and who independently designed the historiated initials for each fable. They were then engraved by a (named) team of engravers and printed with studied care by Johnson's Apollo Press. After Northcote's death a second volume with 101 fables was prepared in a similar manner and published by John Murray in 1833. This was probably not a commercial success since the sheets were reissued as *The Artist's Book of Fables* by Henry G. Bohn, a remainder merchant, in 1845.

The story does not quite end there though, for the wood blocks eventually found their way to the children's book publisher Dean & Son who in 1854 published *The Fables of James Northcote R.A. &c.* "re-edited by Miss Corner and the illustrations embellished by Alfred Crowquill". The lady was a sort of house editor for Dean's, noted for "Corner's Accurate Histories for School and Family Reading"; Crowquill (ie. Alfred Forrester) was a comic artist who here supplied ornate decorative surrounds, engraved by Lee to the Harvey designs, now cut down to an oval rather than rectangular shape.

**30.**

1832 *Flowers of Fable; culled from Epictetus, Croxall...with original translations from La Fontaine...the whole selected for the instruction of youth and pruned of all objectionable matter*. Embellished with one hundred and fifty engravings on wood. Vizetelly, Branston & co. 1832

Undoubtedly influenced by the fashion for fancy annuals this volume is got up in elaborately decorated paper boards with fancy engine-ruled blue endpapers and with engravings that may well have been influenced by the style of Northcote (above). The preface makes a big point of the "grossness" of many traditional fables, noting that it is "matter of surprise, that those who have been intrusted with the education of youth, could so long have been insensible to their glaring improprieties...". Such respect for youth has at least persuaded the editors to severely reduce the moral applications.

**31.**

1833 *Fifty-One Original Fables with Morals and Ethical Index*. Written by [complex monogram = "Job Crithannah" ie.

Jonathan Birch] embellished with eighty-five original designs by R. Cruickshank [sic]: engraved on wood by Slader, D.Dodd, S.Williams, Bonner, and others...Printed for Hamilton, Adams and Co. 1833

As with no.29, we have here a prestige volume (also dedicated to William IV), the somewhat portentous fables owing little to Aesop or to expectations of a child readership. It is included here on the strength of its showing of Robert Cruickshank's illustrations and tailpieces.

### 32.

ca.1835 *Select Fables for Children*. Derby: Thomas Richardson, n.d. [ca.1835]

A typical example of an unpretentious, 48-page provincial children's book, decently produced with plenty of pictures and a nice hand-coloured title-page and frontispiece.

### 33.

1839 *Little Fables for little Folks; selected for their moral tendency, and re-written in familiar words not one of which exceeds two syllables*. Designed as reading lessons to amuse and instruct. Second edition. John van Voorst, 1839

A small book, carrying a burdensome title. But the fifty fables are plainly and simply retold, being followed by a paragraph or so of earnest "instruction". Attractive engravings on wood, which may well come from another source.

### 34.

1844 *The Fables of Aesop; with instructive applications*. By Samuel Croxall, D.D.. Illustrated with one hundred engravings. Halifax: printed and published by William Milner, 1844

Milner was a famous reprinter of the classics in chunky, small-format editions for a popular market. This is a typical job, albeit with a nice fold-out frontispiece. The cuts are a long way after the Kirkall originals. Nor was this the last of them, for the volume was later reprinted in London and published (undated) by Allman & Sons. A copy was given as a prize, or present, to a child in 1862.

### 35.

1848 *Aesop's Fables; a new version from original sources*. By Thomas James M.A. with more than one hundred illustrations designed by John Tenniel. John Murray, 1848

Not a very auspicious first appearance of Tenniel as illustrator of a whole book ? "as bad as bad could be" he later wrote of his draughtsmanship at this time. Ten years later he recast a number of the designs for a new edition.

### 36.

1857 *The Fables of Aesop and Others translated into human nature*. By Charles Bennett. Kent & co. n.d. [1857]

At last, amid so much serious endeavour on behalf of an unregenerate public, an artist arrives who can latch on to the customary phrasing for the title of his volume but then turn the contents into joyous satire. The texts may appear to abide by tradition, but they are sufficiently adjusted to bring home the point of the brilliant illustrations in which aspects of contemporary society are lampooned by the animals decked out as human participants. As has been noted before, the frontispiece of Man in the dock before the beasts was used by Tenniel as a model for the trial scene in *Alice*. Early printings were issued plain or finely hand-coloured; later an edition as printed in colour.

### 37.

1860 *The Children's Picture Fable-Book*. Containing one hundred and sixty fables with sixty illustrations by Harrison Weir. Sampson Low, Son & co., 1860

Clearly influenced by books designed by the publisher Joseph Cundall, for whom Weir had also worked, this compendium owes everything to his fine visualisation of animals in their fable landscapes. His drawings were engraved on wood by John Greenaway, father of Kate. Later editions were published by Routledge, that edited by George Fyler

Townsend being an influence on John Vernon Lord (see item 62 below).

### 38.

1867 *Aesop's Fables* A new edition edited by Edward Garrett M.A. With one hundred illustrations by J.Wolf, J.B.Zwecker, and T.Dalziel. Alexander Strahan Publisher, 1867

During the 1860s Strahan was a notable publisher of children's books and this Aesop is in series with the finely produced editions of George MacDonald's *Dealings with the Fairies* and *Lilliput Levee*. As often occurred with pioneers however, he overshot himself and later editions were published by Daldy and Isbister.

### 39.

1868 *Aesop's Fables in Words of One Syllable* by Mary Godolphin. Cassell, Petter and Galpin n.d. [1868]

Mary Godolphin was something of a one-syllable specialist, reducing many a wordy classic (*Sandford and Merton*, *Robinson Crusoe* etc) to a simpler, but not altogether ridiculous, prose. Her books, like the previous item, were later done by Routledge, who retained the rather impressive but entirely anonymous colour-printed plates.

### 40.

1868 *Aesop's Fables* Illustrated by Ernest Griset. With text based chiefly upon Croxall, La Fontaine and L'Estrange. Revised and re-written by J.B.Rundell. Cassell, Petter and Galpin n.d. [1868]

Said to be influenced by the tremendous La Fontaine edition illustrated by Doré in 1868. I have not seen this first printing, but the "new and enlarged edition" of 1879, which added "about" 130 fables to the original text, surpasses Doré in its verve and approachability. Griset is a much-neglected artist and all his qualities ? energy, a gift for dramatic delineation, a winning, if mordant, sense of humour, wonderful draftsmanship ? are on display here, alongside versions of fable which are plain and unpretentious. Truly a classic version.

### 41.

1870 *The Little Child's Fable Book, arranged progressively in words of one, two, and three syllables*. With sixteen illustrations by Georgina Bowers. New edition. Griffith & Farran (Successors to Newbery and Harris), n.d. [1870]

As the sub-title suggests, and as is supported by the provenance of the publisher, this volume turns out to be a large-format version of *The Ladder to Learning*, discussed above at entry 13. The artist ? the second woman to draw for *Punch* ? was a specialist in hunting scenes and caricatures, evidence for which appears in several of her full-page plates here, engraved for the book by Messrs Swain.

### 42.

1872 *The Word-Picture Fable Book; or, Old Aesop in a new dress*. T.Nelson and Sons, 1872

"Uncle William" explains to "My dear Children" what he is about at the start of the book: "...in order to puzzle you a little, and to entertain you while puzzling you, I have made the printer insert a little picture here and there instead of a word..." Such rebus books have a long history, dating back at least to Mattsperger's "hieroglyphic Bible" of 1685, and although Uncle William's inserted pictures are easy to interpret he has given his young puzzlers "a Key" at the end of the book with the fable-text printed in full. Most of these are also given a fable illustration to start with but it seems likely that all the illustrations for the book are printed from Nelson's large supply of stereotype blocks. An additional feature in this fairly elaborate picture book is the surrounding of each page with a double rule, within which four apophthegms are printed, thus furnishing some fables with as many as a dozen morals.

### 43.

1883 *Some of Aesop's Fables with Modern Instances* shewn in designs by Randolph Caldecott from new translations by Alfred Caldecott M.A. The engravings by J.D.Cooper. Macmillan and co. 1883

The idea for this series of "modern instances" may have come from Charles Bennett's fable book (item 36 above). Each

of the twenty fables is given a naturalistic illustration followed at the end with a caricature drawing applying the moral point to a modern scene. The graphic work has all Caldecott's skill, but to present-day eyes several of the instances are almost beyond interpretation. Alfred Caldecott gives an account of his sources in a prefatory note and adds a complaint that his illustrator has forced upon him some customary English usages which are at variance with the originals (eg. we customarily have the crow with cheese rather than meat in his beak in the fable of "The Fox and the Crow").

#### 44.

1887 *The Baby's Own Aesop, being the fables condensed in rhyme* [by W.J.Linton] *with portable morals pictorially pointed* by Walter Crane. Engraved and printed in colours by Edmund Evans. George Routledge and Sons, 1887

A bit of flummery on the brink of art nouveau. Linton's condensations take the form of only intermittently successful limericks, while the pictorial pointing is done in Crane's Greek manner: finely balanced, decorative double-page spreads but with the berobed and bebonneted human characters no match for the beasts.

#### 45.

1894 *The Fables of Aesop* selected, told anew and their history traced by Joseph Jacobs; done into pictures by Richard Heighway. Macmillan & co. 1894

And here art nouveau is fully-fledged. Frames and Celtic curlicues surround the titles to each fable and the pen drawings (of which some of the originals have survived) try out all manner of graphic devices from straight natural scenes to near-abstract japonaiserie. Jacobs's brief texts reveal his storytelling gifts.

#### 46.

[1896] *Aesop's Fables* ed. W.T.Stead. "Review of Reviews" Office, n.d. [1896] (Books for the Bairns Vol.I No.I)

The first publication in what was to become a long series of 62-page penny booklets that might be seen as an industrialised form of the chapbook. Each spread is occupied by two fables positioned each side of the gutter with three or four line drawings running down the outer edges somewhat like strip cartoons. A propitious beginning to a project which, despite its cheap production (dreadful newsprint paper), was consistently imaginative in managing its often abbreviated classic texts.

#### 47.

1899 *A Hundred Fables from Aesop* from the English version of Sir Roger L'Estrange with pictures by Percy J.Billinghurst and an introduction by Kenneth Grahame. John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1899

Grahame's Preface was commissioned by John Lane who, in 1898, had published *Dream Days*, the sequel to *The Golden Age*. It was a typically urbane performance and probably the most intelligent assessment of Fable yet to appear? seeing the genre as the invention of "the superior, or preaching portion of humanity" as a means to improve the manners of their inferiors. He continues however by defending the unfortunate animals who have been dragooned into the exercise and by way of allowing them to get their own back he produces a couple of fables about human affairs said to have been gleaned from a monkey and a dog. (It has been plausibly suggested that the working out of his ideas here formed an early prompt to what would become *The Wind in the Willows*.) Further on he has some salutary remarks about the excellence of L'Estrange's crisp prose as against the longueurs of most other fabulists. The design of the book and Billinghurst's pen drawings turn it into a handsome example of art nouveau publishing, a good deal more formal than Heighway's less-controlled responses noted above? but probably greeted enthusiastically by greenery-yallery children.

#### 48.

1912 *Aesop's Fables* A new translation by V.S.Vernon Jones, with an introduction by G.K.Chesterton and illustrations by Arthur Rackham. William Heinemann, 1912

This was round about the tenth of his "gift books" where traditional texts were illustrated in elaborate style by Rackham and published in de luxe as well as trade editions. (The first was Washington Irvine's *Rip Van Winkle* in 1905.) The

book bears witness to the artist's mastery of all the elements of graphic technique, both in black and white and in the comparatively new three-colour process and he incorporates himself into several of the illustrations. Monochrome versions of all the pictures, reduced in size, were used in the recent *Aesop's Fables* published by CRW Ltd in their "Collector's Library" (2006).

**49.**

1925 *Aesop's Fables* with designs by Phyllis A. Treary. Humphrey Milford: Oxford University Press n.d. [1925]

One of the foremost examples from a British publisher of art deco illustration where the broken lines of the design are reinforced by coloured geometric shapes.

**50.**

1936 *Aesop: Fables* translated by Sir Roger L'Estrange with illustrations by Stephen Gooden. George G, Harrap, 1936

The virtues of L'Estrange's "salty" text (Hodnett) are here enhanced by Gooden who, as etcher and metal engraver, was among the most distinguished book illustrators of the twentieth century. This work was commissioned after he had completed a set of illustrations for La Fontaine's fables and here he added to his etched plates vigorous and witty wood engraved initials for all the fables.

**51.**

1939 *The Hare and the Tortoise and other stories*. Decorated by Clarke Hutton. Country Life Ltd., n.d. [1939]. [cover title]

At this time the publishing of children's picture books was much influenced by the new techniques in lithographic printing that had come from Soviet Russia (perhaps via Paris). Noel Carrington was foremost in developing a distinctive British character to the technology (he and Country Life were notable thus for the fostering of Kathleen Hale and Orlando) and here he is seen encouraging another of his protégés in a 24-page, highly modernistic version of three fables with handwritten text and pictures lithographed throughout.

**52.**

1942 *A Book of Fables* adapted from Aesop by Sheila Hawkins. A Puffin Picture Book. n.d. [1942]. [cover title]

Noel Carrington went on to be the first editor of children's books at Penguin: the Puffin Picture Books (preceding the Story Books which were edited by Eleanor Graham). Here with PPB no.22 he adopted a similar approach in design to that of the preceding item with the illustrations "drawn direct to the plate by the Author and Lithographed in England by W.S.Cowell Ltd, Ipswich". The text is printed letterpress.

**53.**

1944 *Fables from Aesop and Others* illustrated by Arnrid Johnston. Transatlantic Arts. n.d. [1944]

And here Carrington is to be found in a third editorial manifestation as director of this notable company that lent distinction (if not financial glory), to the middle years of the 1940s. Unlike the two predecessors (above) the book was a hardback with cloth-backed decorated paper boards and an impressive full-colour jacket. Twenty-two fables are printed on one side of each page-opening faced by a full-page illustration of great character primarily in lithographic chalks (and ? surprise, surprise ? printed by Cowell's of Ipswich). A twenty-third fable and its illustration occupies the final page before the rear free endpaper. The plain and eminently serviceable text leaves readers to work out the morals for themselves.

**54.**

1945 ? *Some Very Old Fables or, the modern dictators' handbook* [front cover title]. This is a Perry Colour Book devised by Powell Perry from an old book of fables by Aesop (& others) [rear cover imprint] n.d. [1945 ?]

The Perry Colour Books were blatant copies of the Puffin Picture Books, both in format and in their use of offset

lithography, appearing during and after the War. This collection of fables however is in crown octavo format with sixteen pages, including wrappers, and ? given the sub-title ? may be earlier than the general run of the series (was this an attempt to emphasize the tendency for governments to adopt severe moral codes?). Certainly Mr Powell Perry has turned to a suitable source for a moralizing volume, the text being after Croxall, but with blown-up versions of Kirkall's metalcuts gaudily coloured. It seems that the British Library does not possess a copy of this work.

## 55.

1954 *Fables of Aesop*. A new translation by S.A.Handford with illustrations by Brian Robb. Penguin Books, 1954

A scholarly edition furnished with a brief but authoritative introduction and notes on the classical sources. Tiresomely though, for the lazy comparative historian, many fables have been given new titles and thus become difficult to find quickly. Familiar examples like "The Stag Drinking" or "The Crab and its Mother" turn up as "The Irony of Fate" and "Example is better than Precept". Restrained and sensitive pen sketches by the illustrator who preceded Quentin Blake as Head of Illustration at the Royal College of Art.

## 56.

1961 *Aesop's Fables* translated by John Warrington, illustrated by Joan Kiddell-Monroe. J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd. 1961 (Dent's Children's Illustrated Classics)

Warrington writes truly that he has translated his Greek and Latin originals "into the plain straightforward English of today", morals being attached only when not apparent. Kiddell-Monroe's two-colour illustrations ? clean pen drawings with varyingly coloured tints ? modernize in a very satisfying way design practices that date back to Ancient Greece.

## 57.

1961 *Fables from Aesop* retold by James Reeves, illustrated by Maurice Wilson. Blackie of London and Glasgow, 1961

Reeves too aims for "simplicity and directness" in his retellings, but he also seeks to turn the brevity of Fable into something more like a story: giving a background to events and, particularly, "a sense of immediacy" by introducing more direct speech between the participants.

## 58.

1975 *Aesop's Fables* retold by Marie Stuart with illustrations by Robert Ayton. Loughborough: Ladybird Books, 1975 (A Ladybird Special)

The "special" element lies in the conversion of two standard Ladybird versions into a larger format edition bound in glazed paper boards. The unappealing, woodenly-phrased texts bear an unhappy family relationship to the nineteenth-century single-syllable editions and many of the gaudy, cartoon-like illustrations are given a faux-medieval setting.

## 59.

1978 *Borrowed Feathers and Other Fables* edited from Aesop by Bryna Stevens, illustrated by Freire Wright and Michael Foreman. Hamish Hamilton Children's Books Ltd. 1978

Seven popular fables whose brief texts ramble a way through 32 colour-illustrated pages which exemplify at least six different ways of planning narrative pictures.

## 60.

1984 *Aesop's Fables* in William Caxton's original illustrated edition, edited by Bamber and Christina Gascoigne. Hamish Hamilton, 1984

The *raison d'être* of this revival will be apparent to anyone who recognizes it as coinciding with the five hundredth anniversary of no.01 above. Nothing about this is said in the book, but the two flaps of the dustjacket have been used to provide suitable prefatory material (which will of course disappear if the jacket is disposed of, as occurs in many scholarly libraries). Here we also learn that the thirty-seven fables that have been reprinted follow Caxton's originals

except in their spelling and in the use of words that would be no longer understood. (The editors amusingly conclude their selection with Caxton's teasing tale "of Juno / of Venus / and of the other wymmen". He starts the thing off and then tantalisingly gives it up saying that "we alle ben bounden to kepe the ladyes in theyre worship" and that if you want to know more then you must go back to the original "latyn".) All the woodcut illustrations for the included fables are given, cheerfully coloured up.

### 61.

1989 *Aesop's Fables* illustrated by Lisbeth Zwerger. Picture Book Studio / Neugebauer Press, 1989

Originating from Neugebauer in Salzburg, the book's twelve fables have been chosen to give play to Zwerger's customary pictorialism laid out within generous allowance of white space. Good, no-nonsense texts and morals.

### 62.

1989 *Aesop's Fables* introduced, selected and illustrated by John Vernon Lord; retold in verse by James Michie. Jonathan Cape, 1989

A labour of love by both artist and poet (whose loosely rhymed, conversational verses are a nice change from so much prosiness). Lord, who had long nurtured the idea of a fable book, has done more than a hundred pen drawings for his selection of two hundred fables ? drawings whose astonishing attention to minute detail has done nothing to hamper the energy (and comedy) of their illustrative function. He notes too that "most of the scenery was set near my home at the village of Ditchling, Sussex ? admittedly an unlikely place in which to encounter some of the animals represented!"

### 63.

1990 *Anno's Aesop; a book of fables by Aesop and Mr Fox* retold and illustrated by Mitsumasa Anno. Reinhardt Books in association with Viking, 1990

First published in a Japanese edition in 1987, this experiment is (unsurprisingly, being by Anno) the most eccentric of all the Aesopics. Freddy Fox finds an illustrated fable book lying on the ground. He takes it home and persuades his father to read it to him. But there is some doubt as to whether his father can read so what we get is the "found" book on the top two thirds of every page opening and Mr Fox's interpretation of the pictures below. There are complications in the method, not always as well resolved as they might be, but that doesn't invalidate the book as a stimulating investigation into what can happen when you try to read pictures.

### 64.

1990 *The Best of Aesop's Fables* retold by Margaret Clark, illustrated by Charlotte Voake. Walker Books, 1990

Twenty-seven well-told fables given a setting which is a masterpiece of picture-book design. The large quarto format allows Voake to engage in an exhibition of her skills as watercolourist, varying her treatment of subjects from grand landscapes and streetscapes to vignettes and framed drawings which are pretty and vigorous by turns.



[Brian Alderson.JPG](#) [3]

Brian Alderson

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