

The Life of the Grasshopper

Nevertheless the fable comes to us from Greece, which is preeminently the land of olive-trees and Cicadæ. Was Æsop really the author, as tradition pretends? It is doubtful. Nor does it matter, after all: the narrator is a Greek and a fellow-countryman of the Cicada, whom he must know well enough. My village does not contain a peasant so ignorant as to be unaware of the absolute lack of Cicadæ in winter; every tiller of the soil is familiar with the insect's primary state, the larva, which he turns over with his spade as often as he has occasion to bank up the olive-trees at the approach of the cold weather; he knows, from seeing it a thousand times along the paths, how this grub leaves the ground through a round pit of its own making, how it fastens on to some twig, splits its back, divests itself of its skin, now drier than shrivelled parchment, and turns into the Cicada, pale grass-green at first, soon to be succeeded by brown.

The Attic peasant was no fool either: he had remarked that which cannot escape the least observant eye; he also knew what my rustic neighbours know so well. The poet, whoever he may have been, who invented the fable was writing under the best con-