

The Fable of the Cicada and the Ant

Let mirrors crack, let belly writhe!
Behold! The man yet darts his scythe,
Whose glitter lifts and drops again
A lightning-flash on ruddy grain.

With grass and water well supplied,
His whetstone dangles at his side;
The whetstone in its case of wood
Has moisture for each thirsty mood;
But he, poor fellow, pants and moans,
The marrow boiling in his bones.

Dost thirst, Cicada? Never mind!
Deep in a young bough's tender rind
Thy sharp proboscis bores a well,
Whence, narrowly, sweet juices swell.
Ah, soon what honied joys are thine
To quaff a vintage so divine!

In peace? Not always. . . . There's a band
Of roving thieves (or close at hand)
Who watched thee draw the nectar up
And beg one drop with doleful cup.
Beware, my love! They humbly crave;
Soon each will prove a saucy knave.

The merest sip?—'Tis set aside.
What's left?—They are not satisfied.
All must be theirs, who rudely fling
A rakish claw athwart thy wing;
Next on thy back swarm up and down,
From tip to toe, from tail to crown.