

The Fable of the Cicada and the Ant

or six weeks of wassail, which is a long space of time, the singer, exhausted by the strain of life, drops from the tree. The sun dries up the body; the feet of the passers-by crush it. The Ant, always a highway-robber in search of spoil, comes upon it. She cuts up the rich dish, dissects it, carves it and reduces it to morsels which go to swell her hoard of provisions. It is not unusual to see a dying Cicada, with his wing still quivering in the dust, drawn and quartered by a gang of knackers. He is quite black with them. After this cannibalistic proceeding, there is no question as to the true relations between the two insects.

The ancients held the Cicada in high favour. Anacreon, the Greek Béranger,¹ devoted an ode to singing his praises in curiously exaggerated language:

"Thou art almost like unto the gods," says he.

The reasons which he gives for this apotheosis are none of the best. They consist of these three privileges: *γηγενής, ἀπαθής, ἀναιμόσαρκε*; earthborn, insensible to pain, bloodless. Let us not start reproaching

¹ Pierre Jean de Béranger (1780-1857), the popular French lyric poet.—*Translator's Note.*