

The Fable of the Cicada and the Ant

little story, only echoes another fabulist. The legend of the Cicada's sorry welcome by the Ant is as old as selfishness, that is to say, as old as the world. The children of Athens, going to school with their esparto-grass baskets crammed with figs and olives, were already mumbling it as a piece for recitation:

"In winter," said they, "the Ants dry their wet provisions in the sun. Up comes a hungry Cicada begging. She asks for a few grains. The greedy hoarders reply, 'You used to sing in summer; now dance in winter.'"¹

This, although a little more baldly put, is precisely La Fontaine's theme and is contrary to all sound knowledge.

¹ Sir Roger L'Estrange attributes the fable to Anianus and, as is usual in the English version, substitutes the Grasshopper for the Cicada. It may be interesting to quote his translation:

"As the Ants were airing their provisions one winter, up comes a hungry Grasshopper to 'em and begs a charity. They told him that he should have wrought in summer, if he would not have wanted in winter. 'Well,' says the Grasshopper, 'but I was not idle neither; for I sung out the whole season.' 'Nay then,' said they, 'you shall e'en do well to make a merry year on't and dance in winter to the tune that you sung in summer.'"*—Translator's Note.*