

man who gathered wood on a Sabbath, and is, therefore, turned into stone." Some say he was a sheep-stealer, and enticed the sheep to him by a bunch of cabbages; others, that he merely stole willow bows. Dante speaks of him as Cain. Chaucer has the larceny theory, and pictures him—

"Bearing a bush of thorns on his back,  
Which for his theft might cline so ner the heaven."

So Alexander Neckham, a writer in the twelfth century, has it, his theory being familiarly translated—

"See the rustic in the moon,  
How his bundle weighs him down;  
Thus his sticks the truth reveal—  
It never profits man to steal."

Now, a great many contend that there is a dog there too. Shakespeare has this version in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," where directions are being given for the play of Pyramus and Thisbe—

"All I have to say,  
Is to tell you that the lantern is the moon—  
Is the man in the moon;  
This thorn bush, my thorn bush;  
And this dog, my dog."

Again, in the "Tempest," he brings in the dog. Indeed, so much prominence is given to the dog, as to suggest whether the man was not sent there because he kept a dog that barked at nights and kept the neighbours awake. This new little theory of my own would obtain colour from the fact that, if ever upon a moonlight night you are particularly tired and anxious to sleep, all the dogs in your neighbourhood are to be seen and heard, sitting upon their haunches, arguing the subject out with their representative in the moon in loud and discordant tones. It being thus uncertain whether the man in the moon was sent there for Sabbath-breaking, for stealing, or for keeping a noisy dog, it becomes impossible to point the moral with that clearness of statement which should characterize the utterances of a public teacher. I may dismiss the fable with the observation that, perhaps, it will be well to be on the safe side, and equally to avoid Sabbath-breaking, stealing, and keeping noisy dogs.

It is one thing to sit down and construct a fable to illustrate a truth, as Æsop and Gay doubtless did, and quite another to interpret a myth whose origin is lost in antiquity. Lord Bacon, in his preface to the series of fables which he groups under the title of "The Wisdom of the Ancients," says—"It is true that fables in general are composed of ductile matter that may be drawn into great variety by a witty talent or an inventive genius, and be delivered of plausible meanings which they never contained. But this procedure has already been carried to excess; and great numbers, to procure the sanction of antiquity to their own notions and inventions, have miserably worsened and abused the fables of the ancients." Indeed, more than one of the dissertations of Lord Bacon himself, which follow, seem distinguished rather by their sound philosophy and freedom of expression than by any exact analogy to, or natural sequence from, the myths explained. He says that, upon deliberate consideration, his judgment is that a "concealed instruc-

tion and allegory was originally intended in many of the ancient fables, the very monstrosity of many of them proving that they were framed to illustrate some truth; for," he says, "certainly no mortal could, but for the sake of the moral it couches, invent such an absurd dream, so much out of the road of the thought." "Thus," he continues, "Metis plainly signifies counsel, prudence." By way of parenthesis, I may observe that when pronounced Metis, it perhaps does not as plainly signify prudence. That Lord Bacon's view is a rational one few will question, for we know that in the early history of all peoples and all literatures, parable and metaphor occupy relatively the position which inductive science does at a later period.

We know well the fable of the Sphinx, that monster with a woman's head and a lion's body, who used to way-lay the poor Thebans, and when they failed to solve the mysterious riddle which she proposed to them, she fell upon them in their confusion and tore them to pieces. The Thebans, wishing to rid their country of so terrible a plague, offered their kingdom to the man who could solve her riddle, as this was the only way in which she could be subdued. Œdipus at last presented himself before her, when she propounded the riddle:—"What is that creature which has four feet, then two feet, then three feet, and is weakest when it has most?" Œdipus answered promptly—"It is man, who first goes on all fours, then stands erect upon two feet, and finally grows old, and uses a staff as a third foot." Her riddle being answered, the she monster throws herself from the rock and is killed. Œdipus obtained the kingdom, but his sad fate, and his daughter Antigone's devotion, you have in the matchless tragedies of Sophocles. It is improbable that any such riddle would have been imagined and placed in the mouth of the Sphinx, unless the minds of the people, among whom the fable arose, had been habituated to seek for truth in symbols and similes. Therefore, Lord Bacon may be right when he says that the Sphinx represents Science propounding perplexing questions to mankind, impelling to action, choice, and determination, annexing to all her riddles the alternative conditions—dilaceration to those who do not solve them, but empire to those who do.

Whether or not it be true that the ancient fables were originally intended to present morals is really not very material, for even if they were but the erratic workings of uncivilized imagination, they may still be lawfully employed to illustrate truth.

Into what a sphere of poetry and romance we ascend if we rise to gaze upon their manifold divinities. As we have not before us the great picture of Jupiter among the gods, we cannot, of course, hope to breathe, even in imagination, the rare atmosphere of the lower heavens, but, at the mere mention of the classical deities, what pictures shape themselves in every mind! Every class of mankind, and almost every feature of nature, has its appropriate god or goddess, and the number of feminine deities is sufficient to provoke some envy on our part. What a group they make! Jupiter, the ruler of heaven, and Juno, his queen; Neptune, the god of the sea; blushing Æolus, the god of the winds; Minerva, the