

At Last Sanskrit Original of Fables Is Put Into English

"The Panchatantra," translated by Arthur W. Ryder (University of Chicago Press).

For the first time a complete translation has been made of the five books of Sanskrit wisdom called the Panchatantra. Arthur W. Ryder of the University of California has done it, and he has thus made available to us a volume of quaint and unusual tales. They are the originals of all of the animal fables in literature.

The volume is a source book of such literature, and the most amazing thing about it is that all of the stories sound as modern as if they had been written by a contributor to Vanity Fair. It resembles the Arabian Nights, except that the adventures are not so fleshly. It has also a tinge of the Decameron.

The pattern of the tales is the same as those famous classics, an intricate one in which the outer story leads into an inner one and that into a still more secluded one and so on until, like those little boxes that they sell at Christmas time to amuse children (of your age and mine as well as veritable babies), you come to the innermost of the tales. Then the teller of the stories begins to fit the boxes back into each other and you, the reader, emerge with him at the end of one of the five parts of the story, with your outer box intact. Each of the five parts is not too intricate, but most of them are.

The stories themselves are told by animals typifying human traits, and have cynicism and satire and wit. They are interspersed with poems, most of them in four lines, doggerelish, in the main, but with simple wisdom as their theme. This, for instance:

A friend in need is a friend indeed,
Although of different caste;
The whole world is your eager friend
So long as riches last.

"The Panchatantra" is worth owning—and reading thoroughly—for the sense of the fundamental unchangeability of human life and endeavor that it gives you.