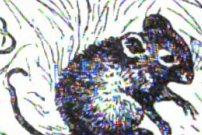


THE Frogmoussiad.¹

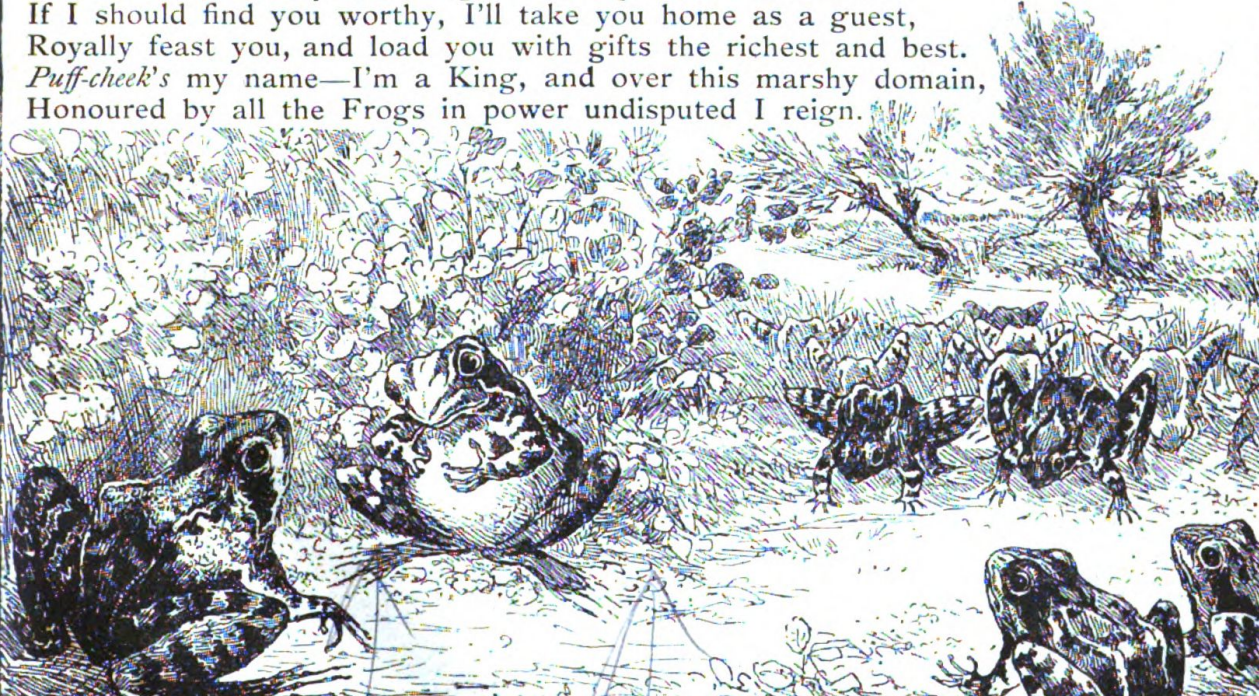
by

The Rev D^r H KYNASTON.

Illustrated
by
LOUIS WAIN.



ONCE on a time, escaped from the claws of Pussy, a Mouse stood at the brink of a pond, his thirsty muzzle to souse deep in the sweet fresh water; when, looking up from below, Organ-voiced *Mud-king's* son beheld him, and shouted "What ho! Friend, who are you? Who's your father? What brings you here to this strand? Don't let me catch you fibbing: the simple truth I demand. If I should find you worthy, I'll take you home as a guest, Royally feast you, and load you with gifts the richest and best. *Puff-cheek's* my name—I'm a King, and over this marshy domain, Honoured by all the Frogs in power undisputed I reign.



Monarch of Mud was my father, who wooed the fair *Puddle-Princess*,
Wooed and made her his Queen in a bower of green watercress.
Thou too bearest thyself like a chieftain and warrior bold,
Tell me then of thy birth, and thy family record unfold."
Then did the Mouse make answer: "Why ask me? the annals of Fame
Far and wide have distinguished our race: *Crumb-snatcher's* my name,
Son of the brave *Loaf-nibbler*: my mother too was a Queen,
Lick-flour, daughter of *Gnaw-ham*: on scraps of the richest cuisine
Daintily fattened was I, and with figs, and apples, and cake.

Louis Wain.

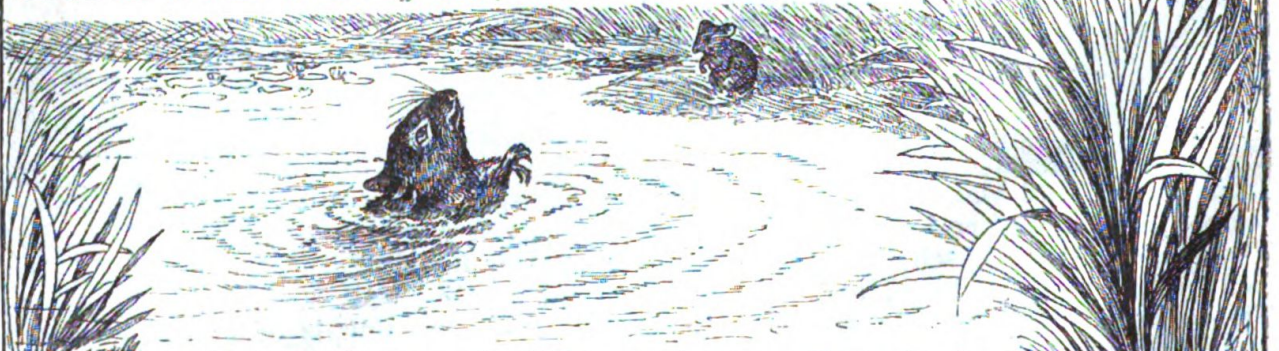
¹ A translation of the *Batrachomyomachia*, which was a parody of the Homeric Epic, probably written in the fifth century B.C. by Pigres of Halicarnassus.

Friendship with me I wonder that you're proposing to make :
 You live down in the water, while I on the bountiful land
 All the goodies of men's desserts can daily command—
 Finest of rolls, mixed biscuits, cheese-cakes, bacon and ham—
 Primest of Stilton, with *pâtés de foie*, and heavenly jam.
 None of your green-stuff for me, your duck-meat, or wish-washy weed.
 Such is the trash, I believe, on which pond-inhabitants feed."

Puff-cheek answered him gently, with smile extremely polite,
 "More than enough, my friend, thou boastest a rare appetite.
 We too know what's what, and can skip (thank goodness) beyond
 These familiar waters: we're not confined to a pond.
 You know only the land: if you'd like to see how we fare,
 Jump on my back, and hold tight, I'll give you a pleasure-trip rare."



Lightly upon the back thus kindly offered, in haste
 Leaped little Mouse, and the Frog's podgy neck securely embraced;
 Pleasant awhile was the ride, for *Puff-cheek's* swimming was brave,
 While the banks were still near; but when the darkening wave
 Splashed up around, the Mouse wept sore, and in very despair
 Tightened the grip of his paws, and tore his velvety hair,
 Blaming his folly and rashness, as thoughts of a watery bier
 Struck his poor little heart with an icy shudder of fear.
 Suddenly, close beside them—oh, monstrous terrible sight!—
 Rose a snake with its towering crest o'er the waters upright:
 Down in a trice went *Puff-cheek*, to seek his safety below:



Little he recked of his comrade, if he could escape from the foe.
 Poor little comrade! he squeaked, and kicked, and struggled amain—
 Sank underneath the billow, then rose to the surface again—
 Then, as his water-logged fur was dragging him down to the death,
 Thus to a final effort he summoned his faltering breath:—

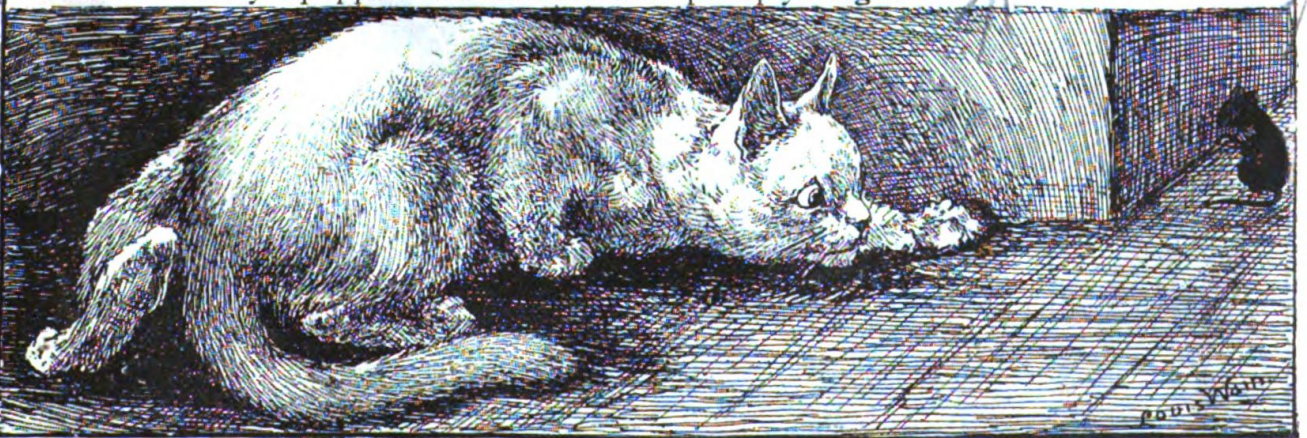
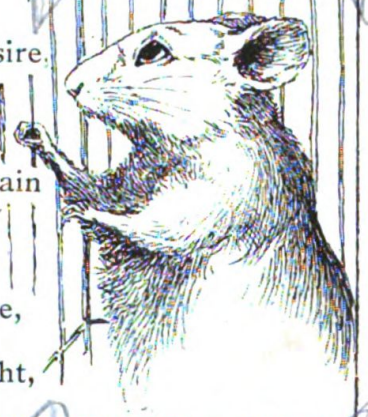
Louis Wain.

“Anger of gods to escape thou shalt surely never make shift,
Puff-cheek, casting me thus like shipwrecked sailor adrift :
 Never on land for me couldst thou have been nearly a match,
 Wretch, in a contest athletic, wrestling, or toeing the scratch ;
 But, as there's justice in heaven, for this thy wat'ry device
 Penalty dear shalt thou pay to th' avenging army of Mice.”
 So the water closed o'er him, and down to the bottom he sank.

Lick-trencher saw him drown, as he sat on the slippery bank,
 Saw, and cried aloud ; then homeward speeding like fire
 Told the sad tale to his friends, and roused their deadliest ire.



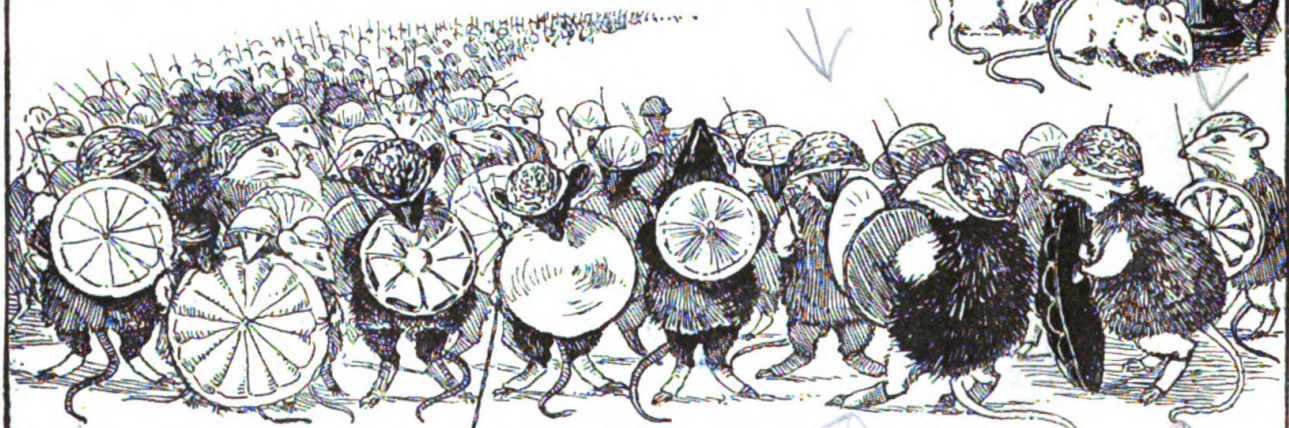
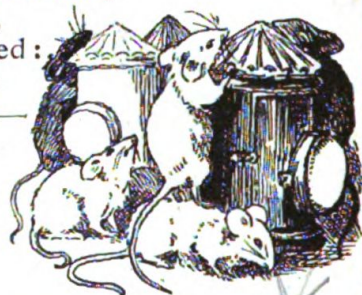
Then to the halls of *Loaf-nibbler*, the aged father, forlorn,
 Bade he the heralds summon assembly at earliest morn,
 While on the pitiless wave *Crumb-snatcher's* motionless form
 Lay without life outspread, the sport of billow and storm.
 Summoned in haste they came, and to them the sorrowing sire,
 Mourning his offspring lost, thus spake in terrible ire :—
 “Friends, though on me alone unmeasured calamities fall,
 Yet not alone I grieve : there is woe and wailing for all.
 Thrice have I been bereaved : one son on my threshold, in vain
 Flying for life, by the merciless Cat was o'ertaken and slain
 And by the craft of men ensnaring innocent Mice
 Yet another was caught in an engine of novel device :
 Now, too, a third has perished, his mother's darling and mine,
 Drowned in the fathomless deep by *Puff-cheek's* cruel design.
 Come then, arm ye for vengeance, and issue forth to the fight,
 Warriors bravely equipped and harnessed in panoply bright.”



Ames. 13 Sept. 52 Chislett



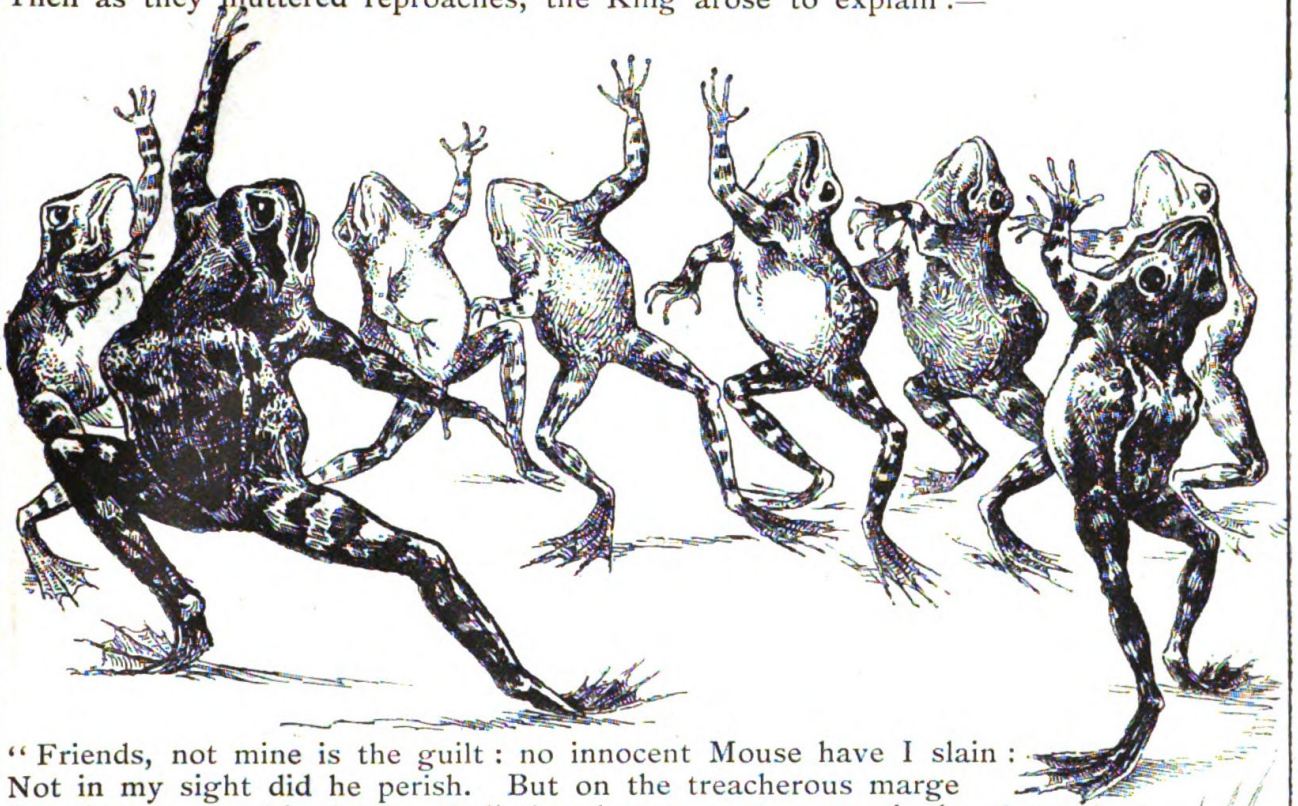
So at his bidding they armed them: and first, with vigorous haste
 Splitting the verdant bean-pod, in greaves their legs they encased;
 Next their bodies in well-stitched jerkins of leather arrayed,
 Cunningly stript from the corpse of Grimalkin recently flayed:
 Each had the central lid of a lamp for his circular shield—
 Each for a spear the burnished length of a needle to wield—
 Each on his head for helmet a walnut's ponderous shell:—
 So they went forth equipped the foe to attack and repel.



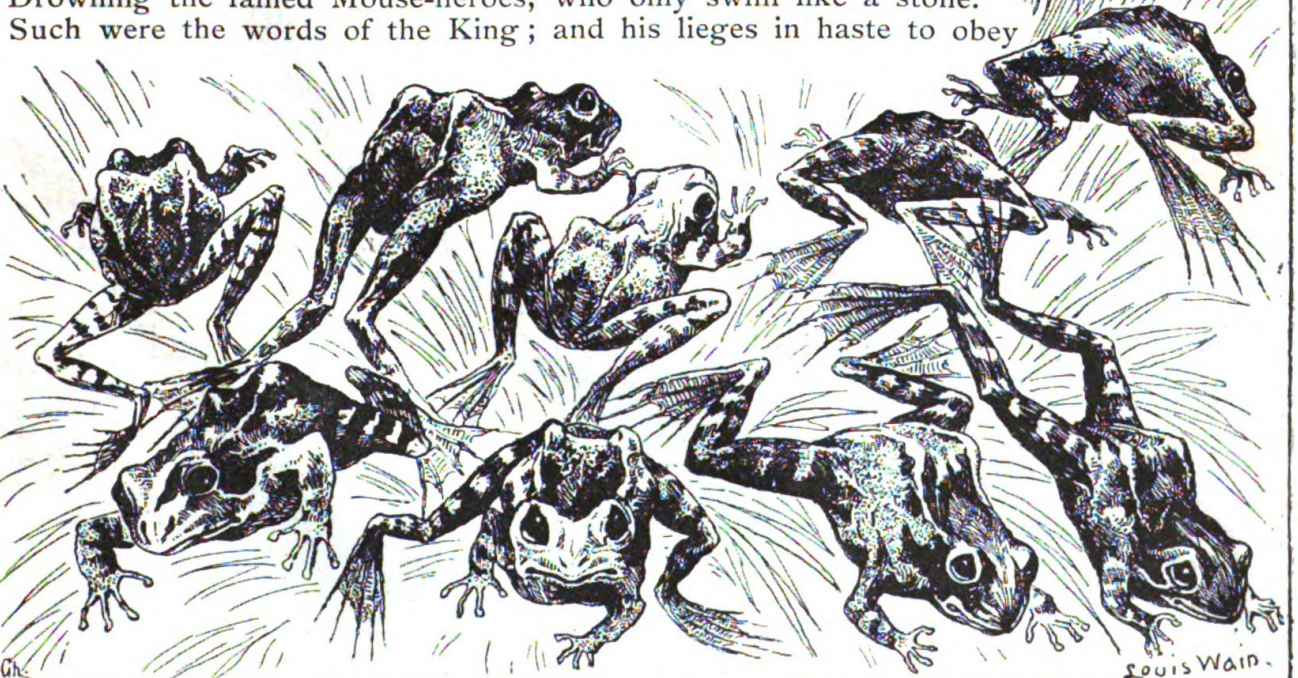
But when the Frogs perceived their gathering troops from afar,
 Straightway they rose from the water and called a council of war:
 And, as they gravely debated, a herald to audience came,
 Son of the mighty *Cheese-scraper* himself, *Pot-searcher* by name,
 Big with a message of battle, and thus he delivered the same:—



"Listen, ye Frogs, I come from the outraged nation of Mice,
 Bringing you stern defiance: so arm your host in a trice.
 Slain by *Puff-cheek* your King, *Crumb-snatcher's* corpse from the wave
 Calls on his country for vengeance; and so we challenge your brave
 Champions to battle." He spake: in their ears that utterance shrill
 Rang, and raised in their valiant hearts an answering thrill:
 Then as they muttered reproaches, the King arose to explain:—



"Friends, not mine is the guilt: no innocent Mouse have I slain:
 Not in my sight did he perish. But on the treacherous marge
 Sporting he met his death: shall they lay on your monarch the charge
 Basely accusing the guiltless? At once then let us debate
 How these treacherous Mice we can wholly annihilate.
 My advice is to arm ourselves, and stand in a rank
 On the brink of the pond at the steepest slope of the bank;
 Then, as they rush upon us, to seize each foe by the helm,
 And in the watery deep their encumbered bodies o'erwhelm.
 So shall we raise our trophy, and make our victory known,
 Drowning the famed Mouse-heroes, who only swim like a stone."
 Such were the words of the King; and his lieges in haste to obey





Stripped them leaves of the mallow to guard their shanks in the fray,
 Breastplates the broad green beet, and the cabbage furnishes shields,
 While for spear a bulrush's length each champion wields,
 And for a visor dons the untenanted shell of a snail:—
 Thus they stood on the bank arrayed in ponderous mail,
 Poising their terrible spears, resolved at no peril to quail.



Then the King of the Gods called his council up in the sky,
 Bade them the gathering crowds and doughty heroes espy,
 And with a smile demanded: "The side of the Frogs who will take?
 Who will befriend the Mice?" And thus to Minerva he spake:—
 "Thou, my daughter, wilt go and give aid to the Mice, without doubt,
 Creatures who in thy temple are always scamp'ring about,
 Picking up sundry scraps and sniffing the roast sacrifice."
 "Father, indeed you're mistaken," replied Minerva, "these Mice
 No friends of mine I reckon: they are such mischievous scamps,
 Gnawing the sacred garlands, and sipping the oil of the lamps:
 Worse too than this have they done—they gnawed great holes in a shawl
 Which I had lately woven, the closest, finest of all
 Both in warp and in woof. But for all their mischievous pranks

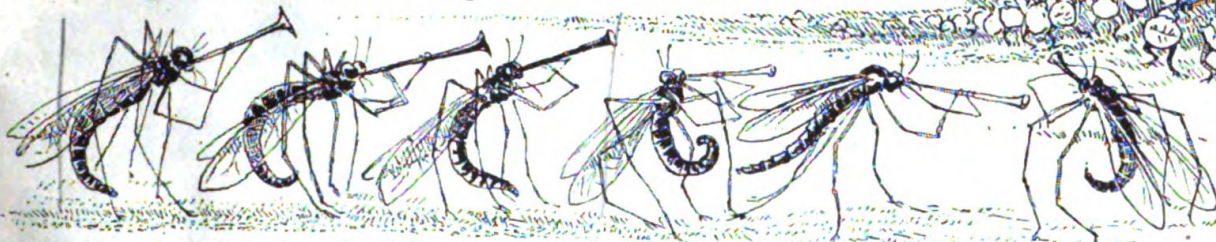


I'm not going to help their foes : for I owe them no thanks,
 Ill-natured brutes ! who lately, when I'd come home tired out
 After fighting all day, made such a detestable rout,
 Croaking all night, that I couldn't sleep, not the least little bit,
 Lying till cock-crow awake, with my poor head ready to split.



Nay—let us hold our hands, nor join in this terrible fray :
 Some of us might get wounded, for sharp are their weapons, and they
 Fight at close quarters, I ween, and even a god will defy.
 'Twill be a safer pastime to watch them here in the sky."
 So she advised, and the gods considered her argument sound.

Then, as the warriors mustered below on the battle-ground,
 Came the gnats with their trumpets, to sound the onset of war,



While the thunder-signal of Jove resounded afar.

First with his lance at rest *Harsh-croaker* wounded to death,
Lick-gravy stationed in front, and pierced the source of his breath ;
 Headlong he fell, and laid his delicate fur in the dust.
 Him to avenge *Pop-in-hole* his spear irresistible thrust
 Into the breast of *Mud-son*, who fell in death to the ground,
 While from his lifeless trunk the spirit escaped through the wound.
 Likewise fell *Marsh-tenor*, whom *Nibble-roll* pierced to the heart ;
 But *Bog-dandy*, as soon as he saw that spirit depart,
 Smote *Pop-in-hole* on the throat with a boulder mighty of size,
 Smote, and severed the spine, so that darkness clouded his eyes.

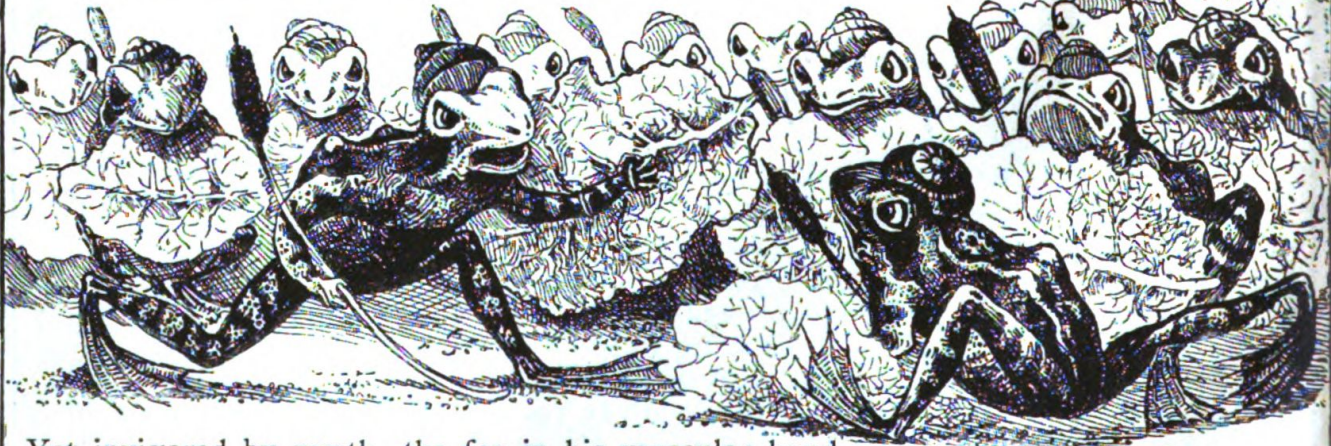




Thus they slew one another ; and some on the slippery bank
Breathed their last, while some 'neath the wave in agony sank
Trampled were all the rushes, and strewn with corpses the shore—
Fouled with carnage the field, and the waters crimsoned with gore.



Yet did the conflict rage—the blameless *Mud-wallower* died
Pierced by *Lick-trencher's* lance, and his soul to the shadow-land hied :
But *Bog-trotter* avenged him—a compress of glutinous mud
Right in the face of the foe he hurled, and a sickening thud
Followed the deadly aim ; half-blinded, scarce able to stand,



Yet invigorated by wrath, the foe in his muscular hand
Lifting on high a mighty boulder that burdened the land,
Smote *Bog-trotter* amain with a crashing blow on the shank,
So that the limb was shattered, and down in the dust he sank.
Then *Fitz-croaker* arose and drove his glittering spear
Into *Scrap-filcher's* heart, and closed his earthly career.
But there was one young champion of irresistible might,
Blameless *Cake-sniffer's* son, the bold *Bun-ravager* hight :



Louis Wain.

He was a host in himself, and like Mars in his menacing frown
 Leading the conquering Mice through the battle he ranged up and down,
 And on the brink of the pond he solemnly swore to efface
 From creation's record the whole Batrachian race.

Then the King of the Gods, on Olympus' towering hill,
 Pitied the suffering Frogs, and thus he uttered his will,
 Shaking his awful head:—"Methinks this is going too far,
 If *Bun-ravager's* pride should control the issues of war.
 Slaughter all Frogs indeed! Come, Mars and Minerva, and stay
 This o'erweening boaster from thus concluding the fray!"
 So spake the King of Gods, and thus answered Juno his Queen:
 "Might of Minerva or Mars will scarce avail us, I ween,
 Now the vanquished to save. Let thy lightning terribly flash,
 Wherewith thou into atoms the rebel giants didst dash."
 Then at her word he let loose the consuming fiery levin
 And with his thundering shook the firm foundation of heaven,
 So that all nations trembled: only the Mice undismayed
 More than ever resolved their triumph should not be delayed.
 But the decrees of Fate were against their arrogant boast:



Sent by the gods there came another more terrible host—
 Sidelong and all awry the eight-legged monstrosities marched,
 Hard were their backs as anvils of steel, and graspingly arched
 Nipper-armed claws before them—with eyes in their breasts flashing fire—
 Sherd-like things that no weapon could wound, no labour could tire—
 Crabs they are vulgarly called. These fell on the army of Mice,
 Nipping and snapping asunder their toes and tails in a trice,
 Routing them all in a panic, and driving them mangled and maimed
 Till they slunk slowly back to their holes, curtailed and ashamed.

Thus as the wearied Sun 'neath Ocean extinguished his ray,
 All the noise of battle died out with the ending of day.

