

*Fable*

***"THE ELEPHANT AND THE  
BOOKSELLER"***

*By*

*John Gay*

**Free**editorial 

*The man who, with undaunted toils,  
Sails unknown seas to unknown soils,  
With various wonders feasts his sight:  
What stranger wonders does he write!  
We read, and in description view  
Creatures which Adam never knew:  
For, when we risk no contradiction,  
It prompts the tongue to deal in fiction.  
Those things that startle me or you,  
I grant are strange; yet may be true.*

*Who doubts that elephants are found  
For science and for sense renowned?  
Borri records their strength of parts,  
Extent of thought, and skill in arts;  
How they perform the law's decrees,  
And save the state the hangman's fees;  
And how by travel understand  
The language of another land.  
Let those, who question this report,  
To Pliny's ancient page resort;*

*How learn'd was that sagacious breed!  
Who now (like them) the Greek can read!  
As one of these, in days of yore,  
Rummaged a shop of learning o'er;  
Not, like our modern dealers, minding  
Only the margin's breadth and binding;  
A book his curious eye detains,  
Where, with exactest care and pains,  
Were every beast and bird portrayed,  
That e'er the search of man surveyed,*

*Their natures and their powers were writ,  
With all the pride of human wit.*

*The page he with attention spread,  
And thus remarked on what he read:  
'Man with strong reason is endowed;  
A beast scarce instinct is allowed.  
But let this author's worth be tried,  
'Tis plain that neither was his guide.  
Can he discern the different natures,  
And weigh the power of other creatures*

*Who by the partial work hath shown  
He knows so little of his own?  
How falsely is the spaniel drawn!  
Did man from him first learn to fawn?  
A dog proficient in the trade!  
He the chief flatterer nature made!  
Go, man, the ways of courts discern,  
You'll find a spaniel still might learn.  
How can the fox's theft and plunder  
Provoke his censure or his wonder;*

*From courtiers' tricks, and lawyers' arts,  
The fox might well improve his parts.  
The lion, wolf, and tiger's brood,  
He curses, for their thirst of blood:  
But is not man to man a prey?  
Beasts kill for hunger, men for pay.'  
The bookseller, who heard him speak,  
And saw him turn a page of Greek,  
Thought, what a genius have I found!  
Then thus addressed with bow profound:*

*'Learn'd sir, if you'd employ your pen  
Against the senseless sons of men,  
Or write the history of Siam, [2]  
No man is better pay than I am;*

*Or, since you're learn'd in Greek, let's see  
Something against the Trinity.'  
When wrinkling with a sneer his trunk,  
'Friend,' quoth the elephant, 'you're drunk;  
E'en keep your money and be wise:  
Leave man on man to criticise;*

*For that you ne'er can want a pen  
Among the senseless sons of men.  
They unprovoked will court the fray:  
Envy's a sharper spur than pay.  
No author ever spared a brother;  
Wits are game-cocks to one another.'*

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