

The Ass Loaded with Sponges

by Jean de La Fontaine

A man, whom I shall call an ass-eteer,
His sceptre like some Roman emperor bearing,
Drove on two coursers of protracted ear,
The one, with sponges laden, briskly faring;
The other lifting legs
As if he trod on eggs,
With constant need of goading,
And bags of salt for loading.
O'er hill and dale our merry pilgrims pass'd,
Till, coming to a river's ford at last,
They stopp'd quite puzzled on the shore.
Our asseteer had cross'd the stream before;
So, on the lighter beast astride,
He drives the other, spite of dread,
Which, loath indeed to go ahead,
Into a deep hole turns aside,
And, facing right about,
Where he went in, comes out;
For duckings, two or three
Had power the salt to melt,
So that the creature felt
His burden'd shoulders free.
The sponger, like a sequent sheep,
Pursuing through the water deep,
Into the same hole plunges
Himself, his rider, and the sponges.
All three drank deeply: asseteer and ass
For boon companions of their load might pass;
Which last became so sore a weight,
The ass fell down,
Belike to drown
His rider risking equal fate.
A helper came, no matter who.

*The moral needs no more ado--
That all can't act alike,--*

The point I wish'd to strike.