

The Carter in the Mire

by Jean de La Fontaine

The Phaëton who drove a load of hay
Once found his cart bemired.
Poor man! the spot was far away
From human help--retired,
In some rude country place,
In Brittany, as near as I can trace,
Near Quimper Coëntan,--
A town that poet never sang,--
Which Fate, they say, puts in the traveller's path,
When she would rouse the man to special wrath.
May Heaven preserve us from that route!
But to our carter, hale and stout:--
Fast stuck his cart; he swore his worst,
And, fill'd with rage extreme,
The mud-holes now he cursed,
And now he cursed his team,
And now his cart and load,--
Anon, the like upon himself bestow'd.
Upon the god he call'd at length,
Most famous through the world for strength.
"O, help me, Hercules!" cried he; "for if thy back of yore
This burly planet bore, thy arm can set me free."
This prayer gone up, from out a cloud there broke
A voice which thus in godlike accents spoke:--
"The suppliant must himself bestir,
Ere Hercules will aid confer.
Look wisely in the proper quarter,
To see what hindrance can be found;
Remove the execrable mud and mortar,
Which, axle-deep, beset thy wheels around.
Thy sledge and crowbar take,
And pry me up that stone, or break;
Now fill that rut upon the other side.
Hast done it?" "Yes," the man replied.
"Well," said the voice, "I'll aid thee now;
Take up thy whip." "I have ... but, how?

My cart glides on with ease!
I thank thee, Hercules."
"Thy team," rejoin'd the voice, "has light ado;
So help thyself, and Heaven will help thee too."