

The Oyster and the Litigants

by Jean de La Fontaine

Two pilgrims on the sand espied
An oyster thrown up by the tide.
In hope, both swallow'd ocean's fruit;
But ere the fact there came dispute.
While one stoop'd down to take the prey,
The other push'd him quite away.
Said he, "'Twere rather meet
To settle which shall eat.
Why, he who first the oyster saw
Should be its eater by the law;
The other should but see him do it."
Replied his mate, "If thus you view it,
Thank God the lucky eye is mine."
"But I've an eye not worse than thine,"
The other cried, "and will be cursed,
If, too, I didn't see it first."
"You saw it, did you? Grant it true,
I saw it then, and felt it too."
Amidst this sweet affair,
Arrived a person very big,
Ycleped Sir Nincom Periwig.
They made him judge,--to set the matter square.
Sir Nincom, with a solemn face,
Took up the oyster and the case:
In opening both, the first he swallow'd,
And, in due time, his judgment follow'd.
"Attend: the court awards you each a shell
Cost free; depart in peace, and use them well."

*Foot up the cost of suits at law,
The leavings reckon and awards,
The cash you'll see Sir Nincom draw,
And leave the parties--purse and cards.*