

## The Tortoise and the Two Ducks

by Jean de La Fontaine

A light-brain'd tortoise, anciently,  
Tired of her hole, the world would see.  
Prone are all such, self-banish'd, to roam--  
Prone are all cripples to abhor their home.  
Two ducks, to whom the gossip told  
The secret of her purpose bold,  
Profess'd to have the means whereby  
They could her wishes gratify.  
"Our boundless road," said they, "behold!  
It is the open air;  
And through it we will bear  
You safe o'er land and ocean.  
Republics, kingdoms, you will view,  
And famous cities, old and new;  
And get of customs, laws, a notion,--  
Of various wisdom, various pieces,  
As did, indeed, the sage Ulysses."  
The eager tortoise waited not  
To question what Ulysses got,  
But closed the bargain on the spot.  
A nice machine the birds devise  
To bear their pilgrim through the skies.  
Athwart her mouth a stick they throw:  
"Now bite it hard, and don't let go,"  
They say, and seize each duck an end,  
And, swiftly flying, upward tend.  
It made the people gape and stare  
Beyond the expressive power of words,  
To see a tortoise cut the air,  
Exactly poised between two birds.  
"A miracle," they cried, "is seen!  
There goes the flying tortoise queen!"  
"The queen!" ('twas thus the tortoise spoke;)  
"I'm truly that, without a joke."  
Much better had she held her tongue,  
For, opening that whereby she clung,

Before the gazing crowd she fell,  
And dash'd to bits her brittle shell.

*Imprudence, vanity, and babble,  
And idle curiosity,  
An ever-undivided rabble,  
Have all the same paternity.*