

*Prior's Hans Carvel*

WERE we to investigate the genealogy of our best modern stories, we should often discover the illegitimacy of our favourites; should trace them frequently to the East. My well-read friend, Mr. Douce, has collected materials for such a work; but his modesty has too long prevented him from receiving the gratitude of the curious in literature.

The story of the ring of Hans Carvel is of very ancient standing, as are most of the tales of this kind.

Menage says that Poggius, who died in 1459, has the merit of its invention; but I suspect he only related a very popular story.

Rabelais, who has given it in his peculiar manner, changed its original name of Philephus to that of Hans Carvel.

This title is likewise in the eleventh of *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* collected in 1461, for the amusement of Louis XI. when Dauphin, and living in solitude.

Ariosto has borrowed it, at the end of his fifth Satire; but, by his pleasant manner of relating it, it is fairly appropriated.

In a collection of novels at Lyons, in 1555, it is also employed, in the eleventh novel.

Celio Malespini has it again in page 288 of the sec-

ond part of his Two Hundred Novels, printed at Venice in 1609.

Fontaine has prettily set it off, and an anonymous writer has composed it in Latin Anacreontic verses; and at length our Prior has given it in his best manner, with equal gaiety and freedom. After Ariosto, La Fontaine, and Prior, let us hear of it no more; yet this has been done.

Voltaire has a curious essay to show that most of our best modern stories and plots originally belonged to the eastern nations, a fact which has been made more evident by recent researches. The *Amphitruon* of Molière was an imitation of Plautus, who borrowed it from the Greeks, and they took it from the Indians! It is given by Low in his *History of Hindostan*. In Captain Scott's *Tales and Anecdotes from Arabian writers*, we are surprised at finding so many of our favourites very ancient orientalist.—The *Ephesian Matron*, versified by La Fontaine, was borrowed from the Italians; it is to be found in Petronius, and Petronius had it from the Greeks. But where did the Greeks find it? In the *Arabian Tales*! And from whence did the Arabian fabulists borrow it? From the Chinese! It is found in Du Halde, who collected it from the Versions of the Jesuits.