The weasels live, no more than cats,
On terms of friendship with the rats;
And, were it not that these
Through doors contrive to squeeze
Too narrow for their foes,
The animals long-snouted
Would long ago have routed,
And from the planet scouted
Their race, as I suppose.
One year it did betide,
When they were multiplied,
An army took the field
Of rats, with spear and shield,
Whose crowded ranks led on
A king named Ratapon.
The weasels, too, their banner
Unfurl'd in warlike manner.
As Fame her trumpet sounds,
The victory balanced well;
Enrich’d were fallow grounds
Where slaughter’d legions fell;
But by said trollop’s tattle,
The loss of life in battle
Thinn’d most the rattish race
In almost every place;
And finally their rout
Was total, spite of stout
Artarpax and Psicarpax,
And valiant Meridarpax,
Who, cover’d o’er with dust,
Long time sustain’d their host
Down sinking on the plain.
Their efforts were in vain;
Fate ruled that final hour,
(Inexorable power!)
And so the captains fled
As well as those they led;
The princes perish’d all.
The undistinguish’d small
In certain holes found shelter;
In crowding, helter-skelter;
But the nobility
Could not go in so free,
Who proudly had assumed
Each one a helmet plumed;
We know not, truly, whether
For honour’s sake the feather,
Or foes to strike with terror;
But, truly, 'twas their error.
Nor hole, nor crack, nor crevice
Will let their head-gear in;
While meaner rats in bevies
An easy passage win;—
So that the shafts of fate
Do chiefly hit the great.
A feather in the cap
Is oft a great mishap.
An equipage too grand
Comes often to a stand
Within a narrow place.
The small, whate'er the case,
With ease slip through a strait,
Where larger folks must wait.

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