Fable No. 9 — "In some shrine there was a wooden god,"

In some shrine stood a wooden god
Who gave prophetic answers
And wise advice.
For that, from head to toe
He was hung with silver and gold,
Stood in rich array,
Buried under offerings, drowned out by prayers
And choked with incense.
All believed blindly in the Oracle;
When suddenly — oh wonder, oh shame! —
The Oracle began to talk nonsense:
He answered incoherently and absurdly;
And whoever came to him, whatever for,
Whatever our Oracle said was a lie;
So that everyone marveled,
Where had his prophetic gift gone!
The truth was
That the idol was hollow, and priests sat inside it
To speak to the laity.
And so,
As long as a clever priest was there, the idol did not spin lies;
But when a fool took up residence in it,
The idol became a perfect fool.

I've heard — is it true? — that in olden days
There were judges like this,
Who were very clever,
As long as they had a clever secretary.