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Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine -- Volume 12

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*The tales and novels
of
J. De La Fontaine*

Volume 12.

Contains:
The Monks of Catalonia
The Cradle

The monks of Catalonia

*To you, my friends, allow me to detail,
The feats of monks in Catalonia's vale,
Where oft the holy fathers pow'rs displayed,
And showed such charity to wife and maid,
That o'er their minds sweet fascination reigned,
And made them think, they Paradise had gained.*

*Such characters oft preciously advise,
And youthful easy female minds surprise,
The beauteous fair encircle with their net,
And, of the feeling heart, possession get:
Work in the holy vineyard, you may guess,
And, as our tale will show, with full success.*

*Intimes of old, when learning 'mong the fair,
Enough to read the testament, was rare,*

(Times howsoe'er thought difficult to quote,)
A swarm of monks of gormandizing note,
Arrived and fixed themselves within a town,
For young and beauteous belles of great renown,
While, of gallants, there seemed but very few,
Though num'rous aged husbands you might view.

A *Noble* chapel soon the fathers raised,
To which the females ran and highly praised,
Surveyed it o'er and confidently thought,
'Twas there, of course, salvation should be sought.
And when their faith had thoroughly been proved,
To gain their point the monks the veil removed.---
Good father Andrew scorned to use finesse,
And in discourse the sex would thus address.

If any thing prevent your sov'reign bliss,
And Paradise incautiously you miss,
Most certainly the evil will arise,
From keeping for your husbands large supplies,
Of what a surplus you have clearly got,
And more than requisite to them allot,
Without bestowing on your trusty friends,
The saving that to no one blessings lends.

Perhaps you'll tell me, marriage boons we shun;
'Tis true, and Heav'n be praised enough is done,
Without those duties to require our share
You know from direful sin we guard the *fair*.
Ingratitude 's declared the height of crimes,
And God pronounced it such in early times;
For this eternally was Satan curst;
Howe'er you err, be careful of the worst.
Return to Heav'n your thanks for bounteous care,
And then to us a tithe of surplus spare,
Which costs you nothing worth a moment's thought;
And marks the zeal with which our faith is taught,
A claim legitimate our order opes,
Bestowed, for holy offices, by popes,
No charitable gift, but lawful right:
Priests well supported are a glorious sight.
Four times a year, exactly to a day,
Each wife this tithe should personally pay
Our holy saint requires that you submit:
'Tis founded on decrees of holy writ.
All Nature carefully the law reveres,
That gratitude and fealty endears.

Now marriage works we rank as an estate,
And tithe is due for that at any rate.
We'll take it patiently, whate'er the toil:
Nor be o'er nice about the justful spoil.
Our order have not, you must surely know,
By many comforts, what we wish below.

'Tis right, however, that I now suggest,
Whatever passes must not be expressed;
But naught to husbands, parents, friends, reveal;
From ev'ry one the mysterious conceal.
Three words th' apostle taught: be these your care;
faith, charity, and Prudence learn to share.

The holy father, by his fine discourse,
Delivered with the most impressive force,
Gave wonderous satisfaction and surprise,
And passed with all for Solomon the wise;
Few slept while Andrew preached, and ev'ry wife,
His precepts guarded as she would her life;
And these not solely treasured in the mind,
But showed to practise them the heart inclined,
Each hastened tithe to bring without delay,
And quarrelled who should be the first to pay;
Loud murmurs rang, and many city dames,
Were forced to keep till morn the friar's claims,
And *holy church*, not knowing what to do,
Such numbers seemed to be in paying cue,
At length was forced, without restraint, to say,
The Lord commands that, till a future day,
You give us time to breathe:---so large the lot,
To serve for present we enough have got;
Too much the whole at once, but by degrees,
Your tithe we'll take and all contrive to please.
With us arrange the hour you would be here,
And some to-day:---to-morrow more we'll cheer;
The whole in order, and you'll clearly see,
That *softly* with *Fairly* best agree.

These were inclined to follow this advice;
About receipts however they were not nice;
The entertainment greatly was admired,
And pure devotion all their bosoms fired,
A glass of cordial some apart received;
Good cheer was given, may be well believed;
Ten youthful dames brisk friar Fripart took,
Gay, airy, and engaging ev'ry look,
Who paid with pleasure all the monk could wish;

Some had fifteen:---some twelve to taste their dish;
Good friar Rock had twenty for his share,
And gave such satisfaction to the *fair*,
That some, to show they never grudged the price,
And proved their punctuality,---paid twice.

So much indeed, that satiated with ways,
That six long months engaged their nights and days:
They gladly credit would have given now,
But found the ladies would not this allow,
Believing it most positively wrong,
To keep whate'er might to the church belong.
No tithe arrears were any where around,
So zealous were the dames in duty found,
They often in advance paid holy dues,
How pure the monks!--how just the ladies views!
The friars used despatch alone with those,
That for their fascinating charms they chose,
And sent the sempiternals to bestow,
The tribute they had brought on those below,
For in the refuse tithes that were their lot,
The laicks oft pleasant pickings got.
In short 'twas difficult to say,
What charity was shown from day to day.

I happened that one night a married dame,
Desirous to convey the monks their claim,
And walking with her spouse just by the spot,
Where dwelled the arch contrivers of the plot,
Good Heavens! said she, I well remember now,
I've business with a friar here, I vow;
'Twill presently be done if you'll but wait;
Religious duties we must ne'er abate.
What duties? cried the husband with surprise;
You're surely mad:---'tis midnight I surmise;
Confess yourself to-morrow if required;
The holy fathers are to bed retired.
That makes no difference, the lady cried.---
I think it does, the husband straight replied,
And thither I'll not let you go to-night:---
What heinous sins so terribly affright,
That in such haste the mind you wish to ease?
To-morrow morn repair whene'er you please:

You do me wrong, rejoined the charming fair;
I neither want confession nor a prayer,
But anxiously desire what is due to pay;
For if incautiously I should delay,

Long time 'would be ere I the monk should see,
 With other matters he'll so busy be.
 But what can you the holy fathers owe?
 To which the lady said:---what don't you know?
 A tithe, my dear, the friars always claim.---
 What tithe? cried he; it surely has a name.
 Not know! astonishingly, replied the wife.---
 To which the husband answered:---On my life,
 That women friars pay is very strange;
 Will you particulars with me arrange?
 How cunningly, said she, you seem to act;
 Why clearly you're acquainted with the fact?
 'Tis Hymeneal works:---What works? cried he---
 Lord! said the dame, assuredly you see,
 Why I had paid an hour ago or more
 And you've prevented me when at the door;
 I'm sure, of those who owe, I'm not the worst,
 For I, in paying, always was the first.

The husband quite astonished now appeared;
 At once a hundred diff'rent ills he feared;
 But questioning his wife howe'er, he found,
 That many other dames who lived around,
 Like her; in paying tithes, the monks obeyed,
 Which consolation to his breast conveyed.
 Poor innocent! she nothing wished to hide;
 Said she, not one but tithe they make provide;
 Good friar Aubrey takes your sister's dues;
 To father Fabry Mrs. B's accrues;
 The mayoress friar William likes to greet,
 A monk more handsome scarcely you will meet;
 And I to friar Gerard always go;
 I wished this night to pay him all I owe.

Alas! when tongues unbridled drop disguise,
 What direful ills, what discords oft arise!
 The cunning husband having thus obtained,
 Particulars of what the fathers gained,
 At first designed in secret to disclose,
 Those scenes of fraud and matrimonial woes:
 The mayor and citizens should know, he thought;
 What dues were paid: what tithes the friars sought;
 But since 'twas rather difficult to place,
 Full credence, at the first, in such a case,
 He judged it best to make the fellow speak,
 To whom his wife had shown herself so weak.

For father Gerard in the morn he sent,
Who, unsuspecting, to the husband went,
When, in the presence of the injured wife,
He drew his sword and swore he'd take his life,
Unless the mystery he would disclose,
Which he reluctantly through terror chose.
Then having bound the friar hand and foot,
And in another room his lady put,
He sallied forth his hapless lot to tell,
And to the mayor exposed the wily spell;
The corporation next; then up and down,
The secret he divulged throughout the town.

A cry for vengeance presently was heard;
The whole at once to slaughter, some preferred
While others would the place with fire surround,
And burn the house with those within it found.
Some wished to drown them, bound within their dress;
With various other projects you may guess;
But all agreed that death should be their lot,
And those for burning had most voices got.

Without delay they to the convent flew;
But when the holy mansion came in view,
Respect, the place of execution changed;
A citizen his barn for this arranged;
The crafty crew together were confined,
And in the blaze their wretched lives resigned,
While round the husbands danced at sound of drum,
And burnt whatever to their hands had come;
Naught 'scaped their fury, monks of all degrees,
Robes, mantles, capuchins, and mock decrees:
All perished properly within the flames;
But nothing more I find about the dames;
And friar Gerard, in another place,
Had met apart his merited disgrace.

The cradle

Near Rome, of yore, close to the Florence road,
Was seen a humble innkeeper's abode;
Small sums were charged; few guests the night would stay;
And these could seldom much afford to pay.
A pleasing active partner had the host
Her age not much 'bove thirty at the most;
Two children she her loving husband bore;
The boy was one year old: the daughter more;
Just fifteen summers o'er her form had smiled;

In person charming, and in temper mild.

I happened that Pinucio, young and gay,
A youth of family, oft passed the way,
Admired the girl, and thought she might be gained,
Attentions showed, and like return obtained;
The mistress was not deaf, nor lover mute;
Pinucio seemed the lady's taste to suit,
Of pleasing person and engaging air;
And 'mong the equals of our youthful fair,
As yet, not one a preference had received;
Nor had she e'er in golden dreams believed;
But, spite of tender years, her mind was high,
And village lads she would not let come nigh.

COLUTTA, (such her name,) though much admired;
And many in the place her hand desired,
Rejected some, and others would not take,
And this most clearly for Pinucio's sake.
Long conversations she could rarely get,
And various obstacles the lovers met;
No interviews where they might be at ease,
But ev'ry thing conspired to fret and teaze.
O parents, husbands! be advised by me;
Constraint with wives or children won't agree;
'Tis then the god of love exerts his art,
To find admittance to the throbbing heart.

*P*inucio and a friend, one stormy night,
The landlord's reached and would in haste alight;
They asked for beds, but were too late they found:
You know, sir, cried the host, we don't abound;
And now the very garrets we have let:
You'd better elsewhere try your wish to get,
And spite of weather, further on pursue
At best, our lodging is unfit for you.

*H*ave you no truckle bed? the lover cried;
No corner left?--we fain would here abide:
Why, truly, said the host, we always keep
Two beds within the chamber where we sleep;
My wife and I, of course, take one of these;
Together lie in t'other if you please.
The spark replied, this we will gladly do;
Come, supper get; that o'er, the friends withdrew:
Pinucio, by Coletta's sage advice,
In looking o'er the room was very nice;
With eagle-eyes particulars he traced,

Then 'tween the clothes himself and friend he placed.
A camp-bed for the girl was on the floor;
The landlord's, 'gainst the wall and next the door;
Another opposite the last was set,
And this, to guests, at certain times was let;
And 'tween the two, but near the parents' best,
A cradle for the child to rest its head,
From which a pleasant accident arrived,
That our gallant's young friend of rest deprived.

When midnight came, and this gay spark supposed
The host and hostess' eyes in sleep were closed,
Convinced the time appointed was at hand,
To put in execution what was planned,
He to the camp-bed silently repaired,
And found the belle by Morpheus not insnared;
Coletta taught a play that mortals find
Fatigues the body more than plagues the mind:
A truce succeeded, but 'twas quickly o'er:
Those rest not long who pilfer Cupid's store.

Again, when to the room the hostess came,
And found the cradle rested not the same,
Good heav'ns! cried she, it joins my husband's head:
And, but for that, I truly had been led
To lay myself unthinkingly beside
The strangers whom with lodging we provide;
But, God be praised, this cradle shows the place
Where my good husband's pillow I must trace.
This said, she with the friend was quickly laid,
Without suspecting what mistake she'd made.

Between the lovers all was blithe and gay,
When suddenly the friend, though far from day,
Was forced to rise ('twas plain a pressing case,)
And move the infant's cradle from its place,
To ope the door, and lest he noise might make,
Or any way by chance the child should wake,
He set it carefully beside his bed,
And (softly treading) to the garden sped.

On his return he passed the cradle by;
To place it as before he would not try,
But went to sleep; when presently a sound,
From something that had tumbled, rang around,
Awoke his wife, who ran below,
That what had happened she might clearly know.
No fool in such adventures was our Wight:

The opportunity he would not slight,
But played the husband well: no, no, I'm wrong;
He played it ill:---too oft, too much, too long;
For whosoe'er would wish to do it well,
Should softly go:---the gentle most excel.

*In*truth, the wife was quite surprised to find
Her spouse so much to frolicking inclined;
Said she, what ails the man, he's grown so gay?
A lad of twenty's not more fond of play.
Well! let's enjoy the moments while we can;
God's will be done, since life is but a span!

*The*words were scarcely said, when our gallant
Renewed his fun, and nothing seemed to want;
Indeed, the hostess still her charms possessed,
And, on occasion, well might be caressed.

Meanwhile Coletta, dreading a surprise,
Prevailed upon her paramour to rise;
'Twas nearly break of day when he withdrew,
But, groping to his place the way anew,
Pinucio, by the cradle too, was led
To miss his friend's and take the landlord's bed.
No sooner in than with an under voice,
(Intriguers oft too eagerly rejoice,)
Said he, my friend, I wish I could relate
The pleasure I've received; my bliss is great;
To you, I'm sorry, Fortune proves so cold;
Like happiness I'd fain in you behold;
Coletta is a morsel for a king;
Inestimable girl!--to me she'll cling.
I've many seen, but such a charming fair,
There's not another like her any where.

*With*softest skin, delightful form and mien;
Her ev'ry act resembles BEAUTY's queen;
In short, before we'd ended with our fun,
Six posts (without a fiction) we had run.
The host was struck with what the spark averred,
And muttered something indistinctly heard.

*The*hostess whispered *him* she thought her spouse:---
Again, my dear, such sparks let's never house;
Pray don't you hear how they together chat?---
Just then the husband raised himself and sat;
Is this your plan? said he with mighty rage;
Was it for *this* you would my house engage?

You understand me, but I'll seek redress;
Think you so very cheap to have success?
What, would you ruin families at will,
And with our daughters take at ease your fill?
Away, I say! my house this moment quit;
And as for You, abominable chit,
I'll have your life: this hour you breathe your last;
Such creatures only can with beasts be classed.

Pinucio heard the lecture with dismay,
At once was mute, and grew as cold as clay;
A moment's silence through the room prevailed;
Coletta trembled, and her lot bewailed.
The hostess now, on ev'ry side perceived
Her peril great, and for the error grieved.
The friend, howe'er, the cradle called to mind,
Which caused the many ills we've seen combined,
And instantly he cried:---*Pinucio!* strange
You thus allow yourself about to range;
Did I not tell you when the wine you took,
'Twould make many sad misfortunes hook?
Whene'er you freely drink, 'tis known fall well,
Your sleep's disturbed, you walk, and nonsense tell.
Come, come to bed: the morning soon will peep;
Pinucio took the hint, pretended sleep,
And carried on so artfully the wile,
The husband no suspicion had of guile.
The stratagem our hostess likewise tried,
And to her daughter's bed in silence hied,
Where she conceived her fortress was so strong,
She presently began to use her tongue,
And cried aloud:---Impossible the fact;
Such things he could not with *Coletta* act;
I've with her been in bed throughout the night,
And she, no more than I, has swerved from right;
'Twere mighty pretty, truly, here to come;
At this the host a little while was dumb;
But in a lower tone at length replied
I nought with your account I'm satisfied.

The party rose; the titter circled round;
And each sufficient reason for it found;
The whole was secret, and whoe'er had gained,
With care upon the subject mute remained.

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