

Quotes and Images From The Tales and Novels of Jean de La Fontaine

Jean de La Fontaine - Edited and Arranged by David Widger

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK QUOTES FROM FONTAINE ***

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QUOTES AND IMAGES FROM THE NOVELS OF FONTAINE

THE TALES AND NOVELS

OF

J. DE LA FONTAINE

A pretty wife? Beware the monks as you would guard your life

Above all law is might

Avoid attorneys, if you comfort crave

Delays are dangerous, in love or war
Ev'ry grave's the same
Extremes in ev'ry thing will soonest tire
In childhood FEAR 's the lesson first we know!
In country villages each step is seen
In the midst of society, he was absent from it
Monks are knaves in Virtue's mask
No folly greater than to heighten pain
Some ostentation ever is with grief
The god of love and wisdom ne'er agree
Those who weep most the soonest gain relief
Tis past our pow'r to live on love or air
Twere wrong with hope our fond desires to feed
We scarcely good can find without alloy
Who knows too much, oft shows a want of sense

LIFE OF

JEAN DE LA FONTAINE

Jean de La Fontaine was born on the 8th of July, 1621, at Chateau-Thierry, and his family held a respectable position there.

His education was neglected, but he had received that genius which makes amends for all. While still young the tedium of society led him into retirement, from which a taste for independence afterwards withdrew him.

He had reached the age of twenty-two, when a few sounds from the lyre of Malherbe, heard by accident, awoke in him the muse which slept.

He soon became acquainted with the best models: Pheedrus, Virgil, Horace and Terence amongst the Latins; Plutarch, Homer and Plato, amongst the Greeks; Rabelais, Marot and d'Urfe, amongst the French; Tasso, Ariosto and Boccaccio, amongst the Italians.

He married, in compliance with the wishes of his family, a beautiful, witty and chaste woman, who drove him to despair.

He was sought after and cherished by all distinguished men of letters. But it was two Ladies who kept him from experiencing the pangs of poverty.

La Fontaine, if there remain anything of thee, and if it be permitted to thee for a moment to soar above all time; see the names of La Sabliere and of Hervard pass with thine to the ages to come!

The life of La Fontaine was, so to speak, only one of continual distraction. In the midst of society, he was absent from it. Regarded almost as an imbecile by the crowd, this clever author, this amiable man, only permitted himself to be seen at intervals and by friends.

He had few books and few friends.

Amongst a large number of works that he has left, everyone knows his fables and his tales, and the circumstances of his life are written in a hundred places.

He died on the 16th of March, 1695.

He was buried in the cemetery of Saint-Joseph, by the side of Moliere.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO THE FIRST VOLUME OF THESE TALES

I had resolved not to consent to the printing of these Tales, until after I had joined to them those of Boccaccio, which are those most to my taste; but several persons have advised me to produce at once what I have remaining of these trifles, in order to prevent from cooling the curiosity to see them, which is still in its first ardour. I gave way to this advice without much difficulty, and I have thought well to profit by the occasion. Not only is that permitted me, but it would be vanity on my part to despise such an advantage..... Now, that I should be permitted to write about these as so many others have done and with success I do not believe it can be doubted; and people cannot condemn me for so doing, without also condemning Ariosto before me and the Ancients before Ariosto. It may be said that I should have done better to have suppressed certain details, or at least to have disguised them. Nothing was more easy, but it would have weakened the tale and taken away some of its charm: So much circumspection is only necessary in works which promise great discretion from the beginning, either by their subject or by the manner in which they are treated. I confess that it is necessary to keep within certain limits, and that the narrowest are the best; also it must be allowed me that to be too scrupulous would spoil all. He who would wish to reduce Boccaccio to the same modesty as Virgil, would assuredly produce nothing worth having, and would sin against the laws of propriety by setting himself the task to observe them. For in order that one may not make a mistake in matters of verse and prose, extreme modesty and propriety are two very different things. Cicero makes the latter consist in saying what is appropriate one should say, considering the place, the time, and the persons to whom one is speaking. This principle once admitted, it is not a fault of judgment to entertain the people of to-day with Tales which are a little broad.

TALES AND NOVELS

OF

J. DE LA FONTAINE

.....

THE SERVANT GIRL JUSTIFIED

BOCCACE alone is not my only source;
T'another shop I now shall have recourse;
Though, certainly, this famed Italian wit
Has many stories for my purpose fit.
But since of diff'rent dishes we should taste;
Upon an ancient work my hands I've placed;
Where full a hundred narratives are told,
And various characters we may behold;
From life, Navarre's fair queen the fact relates;
My story int'rest in her page creates;
Beyond dispute from her we always find,
Simplicity with striking art combin'd.
Yet, whether 'tis the queen who writes, or not;
I shall, as usual, here and there allot
Whate'er additions requisite appear;
Without such license I'd not persevere,
But quit, at once, narrations of the sort;
Some may be long, though others are too short.

LET us proceed, howe'er (our plan explained:)

A pretty servant-girl a man retain'd.

She pleas'd his eye, and presently he thought,

With ease she might to am'rous sports be brought;

He prov'd not wrong; the wench was blithe and gay,

A buxom lass, most able ev'ry way.

AT dawn, one summer's morn, the spark was led

To rise, and leave his wife asleep in bed;

He sought at once the garden, where he found

The servant-girl collecting flow'rs around,

To make a nosegay for his better half,

Whose birth-day 'twas:--he soon began to laugh,

And while the ranging of the flow'rs he prais'd,

The servant's neckerchief he slyly rais'd.

Who, suddenly, on feeling of the hand,

Resistance feign'd, and seem'd to make a stand;

But since these liberties were nothing new,

They other fun and frolicks would pursue;

The nosegay at the fond gallant was thrown;

The flow'rs he kiss'd, and now more ardent grown

They romp'd and rattl'd, play'd and skipt around;

At length the fair one fell upon the ground;

Our am'rous spark advantage took of this,

And nothing with the couple seem'd amiss.

UNLUCKILY, a neighbour's prying eyes

Beheld their playful pranks with great surprise,

She, from her window, could the scene o'erlook;
When this the fond gallant observ'd, he shook;
Said he, by heav'ns! our frolicking is seen,
By that old haggard, envious, prying quean;
But do not heed it; instantly he chose
To run and wake his wife, who quickly rose;--
So much the dame he fondl'd and caress'd,
The garden walk she took at his request,
To have a nosegay, where he play'd anew
Pranks just the same as those of recent view,
Which highly gratified our lady fair,
Who felt dispos'd, and would at eve repair,
To her good neighbour, whom she bursting found,
With what she'd seen that morn upon the ground.

THE usual greetings o'er, our envious dame,
With scowling brow exclaim'd,--my dear, your fame,
I love too much not fully to detail,
What I have witnessed, and with truth bewail;
Will you continue, in your house to keep
A girl, whose conduct almost makes me weep?
Anon I'd kick her from your house, I say;
The strumpet should not stay another day.
The wife replied, you surely are deceiv'd;
An honest, virtuous creature she's believ'd.
Well, I can easily, my friend, suppose,
Rejoin'd the neighbour, whence this favour flows;
But look about, and be convinc'd, this morn
From my own window (true as you are born,)

Within the garden I your husband spi'd
And presently the servant girl I ey'd;
At one another various flow'rs they threw,
And then the minx a little graver grew.
I understand you, cried the list'ning fair;
You are deceiv'd:--myself alone was there.

NEIGHBOUR

But patience, if you please: attend I pray
You've no conception what I meant to say:
The playful fair was actively employ'd,
In plucking am'rous flow'rs--they kiss'd and toy'd.

WIFE

'Twas clearly I, howe'er, for her you took.

NEIGHBOUR

The flow'rs for bosoms quickly they forsook;
Large handfuls frequently they seem'd to grasp,
And ev'ry beauty in its turn to clasp.

WIFE

But still, why think you, friend, it was not I?
Has not your spouse with you a right to try
What freaks he likes?

NEIGHBOUR

But then, upon the ground

This girl was thrown, and never cried nor frown'd;

You laugh.--

WIFE

Indeed I do, 'twas myself.

NEIGHBOUR

A flannel petticoat display'd the elf.

WIFE

'Twas mine:

NEIGHBOUR

Be patient!--and inform me, pray,

If this were worn by you or her to-day?

There lies the point, for, if you'll me believe,

Your husband did--the most you can conceive.

WIFE

How hard of credence!--'twas myself I vow.

NEIGHBOUR

Oh! that's conclusive; I'll be silent now;
Though truly I am led to think, my eyes
Are pretty sharp, and much I feel surprise
At what you say; in fact, I would have sworn,
I saw them thus at romps this very morn;
Excuse the hint, and do not turn her off.

WIFE

Why, turn her off?--the very thought I scoff;
She serves me well.

NEIGHBOUR

And so it seems is taught;
By all means keep her then, since thus she's thought.

THE AVARICIOUS WIFE AND TRICKING GALLANT

WHO knows the world will never feel surprise,
When men are duped by artful women's eyes;
Though death his weapon freely will unfold;
Love's pranks, we find, are ever ruled by gold.
To vain coquettes I doubtless here allude;
But spite of arts with which they're oft endued;
I hope to show (our honour to maintain,)

We can, among a hundred of the train,
Catch one at least, and play some cunning trick:--
For instance, take blithe Gulphar's wily nick,
Who gained (old soldier-like) his ardent aim,
And gratis got an avaricious dame.

LOOK well at this, ye heroes of the sword,
Howe'er with wily freaks your heads be stored,
Beyond a doubt, at court I now could find,
A host of lovers of the Gulphar kind.

To Gasperin's so often went our wight,
The wife at length became his sole delight,
Whose youth and beauty were by all confessed;
But, 'midst these charms, such av'rice she possessed,
The warmest love was checked--a thing not rare,
In modern times at least, among the FAIR.
'Tis true, as I've already said, with such
Sighs naught avail, and promises not much;
Without a purse, who wishes should express,
Would vainly hope to gain a soft caress.
The god of love no other charm employs,
Then cards, and dress, and pleasure's cheering joys;
From whose gay shops more cuckolds we behold,
Than heroes sallied from Troy's horse of old.

BUT to our lady's humour let's adhere;
Sighs passed for naught: they entered not her ear;

'Twas speaking only would the charmer please,
The reader, without doubt, my meaning sees;
Gay Gulphar plainly spoke, and named a sum
A hundred pounds, she listened:--was o'ercome.

OUR wight the cash by Gasperin was lent;
And then the husband to the country went,
Without suspecting that his loving mate,
Designed with horns to ornament his pate.

THE money artful Gulphar gave the dame,
While friends were round who could observe the same;
Here, said the spark, a hundred pounds receive,
'Tis for your spouse:--the cash with you I leave.
The lady fancied what the swain had said,
Was policy, and to concealment led.

NEXT morn our belle regaled the arch gallant,
Fulfilled his promise:--and his eager want.
Day after day he followed up the game;
For cash he took, and int'rest on the same;
Good payers get, we always may conclude,
Full measure served, whatever is pursued.

WHEN Gasperin returned, our crafty wight,
Before the wife addressed her spouse at sight;
Said he the cash I've to your lady paid,
Not having (as I feared) required its aid;

To save mistakes, pray cross it in your book;
The lady, thunderstruck, with terror shook;
Allowed the payment; 'twas a case too clear;
In truth for character she 'gan to fear.
But most howe'er she grudged the surplus joy,
Bestowed on such a vile, deceitful boy.

THE loss was doubtless great in ev'ry view
Around the town the wicked Gulphar flew;
In all the streets, at every house to tell,
How nicely he had trick'd the greedy belle.

To blame him useless 'twere you must allow;
The French such frolicks readily avow.

FAVORITE QUOTATIONS

A pretty wife? Beware the monks as you would guard your life
Above all law is might
Avoid attorneys, if you comfort crave
But reason 's fruitless, with a soul on fire
By others do The same as you would like they should by you
Caresses lavish, and you'll find return
Criticism never stops short nor ever wants for subjects
Delays are dangerous, in love or war
Ev'ry grave's the same
Extremes in ev'ry thing will soonest tire
Favours, when conferred with sullen air, But little gratify
Few ponder long when they can dupe with ease
Fools or brutes, With whose ideas reason never suits
He who loves would fain be loved as well
He, who laughs, is always well received
Her doll, for thought, was just as well designed
Historick writ
How could he give what he had never got?
In childhood FEAR 's the lesson first we know!
In country villages each step is seen
In the midst of society, he was absent from it
Monks are knaves in Virtue's mask
No folly greater than to heighten pain

No grief so great, but what may be subdued
No pleasure's free from care you may rely
Not overburdened with a store of wit
Oft what we would not, we're obliged to do
Opportunity you can't discern--prithie go and learn
Perhaps one half our bliss to chance we owe
Possession had his passion quite destroyed
Regarded almost as an imbecile by the crowd
Removed from sight, but few for lovers grieve
Sight of meat brings appetite about
Some ostentation ever is with grief
The eyes:-- Soul-speaking language, nothing can disguise
The god of love and wisdom ne'er agree
The less of such misfortunes said is best
The more of this I think, the less I know
The plaint is always greater than the woe
The promises of kings are airy dreams
The wish to please is ever found the same
Those who weep most the soonest gain relief
Though expectations oft away have flown
Tis all the same:--'twill never make me grieve
Tis past our pow'r to live on love or air
To avoid the tempting bit, 'Tis better far at table not to sit
Too much you may profess
Twere wrong with hope our fond desires to feed
Was always wishing distant scenes to know
We scarcely good can find without alloy
When husbands some assistance seemed to lack
When mourning 's nothing more than change of dress
When passion prompts, few obstacles can clog
While good, if spoken, scarcely is believed
Who knows too much, oft shows a want of sense
Who only make friends in order to gain voices in their favour
Who would wish to reduce Boccaccio to the same modesty as Virgil
Who, born for hanging, ever yet was drowned?
Wife beautiful, witty and chaste woman, who drove him to despair
You little dream for whom you guard the store

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