

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 11 eBook

Tales and Novels of J. de La Fontaine — Volume 11 by Jean de La Fontaine

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Page 1

Title: The Tales and Novels, v11: Friar Philip's Geese and Minutolo

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

Contains:

Preface to The Second Book
Friar Philips Geese
Richard Minutolo

*The author's preface
to the second book of these tales*

These are the last works of this style that will come from the pen of the Author, and consequently this is the last opportunity he has of vindicating the boldness and privilege which he has assumed. We make no mention of villainous rhymes, of lines that run into the next, of two vowels without elision, nor, in general, of such kinds of carelessness as he would not allow himself in another style of poetry, but which are part and parcel, so to say, of this style. Too anxious a care in avoiding such would force a tale-writer into a labyrinth of shifts, into narratives as dull as they are grand, into straits that are utterly useless, and would make him disregard the pleasure of the heart in order to labour for the gratification of the ear. We must leave studied narrative for lofty subjects, and not compose an epic poem of the Adventures of Renaud d'Ast. Suppose the Author, who has put these tales into rhyme, had brought to bear on them all the care and



preciseness required of him; not only would this care be observed, especially as it is unnecessary, but it would also transgress the precept laid down by Quintilian, still the Author would not have attained the main object, which is to interest the reader, to charm him, to rivet his attention in spite of himself,—in a word, to please him. As everybody knows, the secret of pleasing the reader is not always based on regulation, nor even on symmetry; there is need of smartness and tastefulness, if we would strike home. How many of those perfect types of beauty do we see which never strike home, and of which nobody feels enamoured! We do not wish to rob Modern Authors of the praise that is due to them. Nicely turned lines, fine language, accuracy, elegance of rhyme are



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accomplishments in a poet. However that may be, let us consider of our own epigrams wherein all these qualities are combined, perhaps we shall find in them far less point, nay, I would venture to add, far less charm than in those of Marot or Saint-Gelais, although almost all the works of the latter poets are full of the same faults as are attributed to us. We will be told that these were not faults in their day, whereas they are very great faults in ours. To this we answer by a similar kind of argument, by saying, as we have already said, that these would undoubtedly be faults in another style of poetry, but not in this. The late M. de Voiture is a proof in point. We need only read the works in which he brings to life again the character of Marot. For our Author does not lay claim to praise for himself, nor to rounds of applause from the public for having put a few tales into rhyme. Without doubt he has entered on quite a new path, and has pursued it to the utmost of his power, choosing now one road, now another, and always treading with surer step when he has followed the manner of our old poets “*quorum in hae re imitari negligentiam exoptat potius quam istorum diligentiam.*”

But while saying that we wished to waive this question, we have unconsciously involved ourselves in its discussion. Perhaps this has not been without advantage; for there is nothing that resembles faults more than these licenses. Let us now consider the liberty which the Author has assumed in cutting into the property of others as well as his own, without making exception even to the best known stories, none of which he scruples to tamper with. He curtails, enlarges, and alters incidents and details, at times the main issue and the sequel; in short, the story is no longer the same; it is, in point of fact, quite a new tale; its original author would find it no small difficulty to recognise in it his own work. “*Non sic decet contaminari fabulas,*” Critics will say. Why should they not? They twitted Terence in just the same way; but Terence sneered at them, and claimed a right to treat the matter as he did. He has mingled his own ideas with the subjects he drew from Menander, just as Sophocles and Euripides mingled theirs with the subjects they drew from former writers, sparing neither history nor romance, where “*decorum*” and the rules of the Drama were at issue. Shall this privilege cease with respect to fictitious stories? Must we in future have more scrupulous or religious regard, if we may be allowed the expression, for falsehood than the Ancients had for truth? What people call a good tale never passes from hand to hand without receiving some fresh touch of embellishment. How comes it then, we may be asked, that in many passages the Author curtails instead of enlarging on the original? On that point we are agreed: the Author does so in order to avoid lengthiness and ambiguity,—two faults which are inadmissible in such matters, especially



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the latter. For if lucidity is to be commended in all literary works, we may say that it is especially necessary in narratives, where one thing is, as a rule, the sequel and the result of another; where the less important sometimes lays the basis of the more important; so that, once the thread becomes broken, the reader cannot gather it up again. Besides, as narratives in verse are very awkward, the author must clog himself with details as little as possible; by means of this you relieve not only yourself, but also the reader, for whom an author should not fail to prepare pleasure unalloyed. Whenever the Author has altered a few particulars and even a few catastrophes, he has been forced to do so by the cause of that catastrophe and the urgency of giving it a happy termination. He has fancied that in tales of this kind everyone ought to be satisfied with the end: it pleases the reader at any rate, if the author has not given the characters too distasteful a rendering. But he must not go so far as that, if possible, nor make the reader laugh and cry in the same tale. This medley shocks Horace above all things; his wish is not that our works should border on the grotesque, and that we should draw a picture half woman half fish. These are the general motives the Author has had in view. We might still quote special motives and vindicate each point; but we must needs leave something to the capacity and leniency of our readers. They will be satisfied, then, with the motives we have mentioned. We would have stated them more clearly and have set more by them, had the general compass of a Preface so allowed.

Friar Philip's geese

*If these gay tales give pleasure to the fair,
The honour's great conferred, I'm well aware;
Yet, why suppose the sex my pages shun?
Enough, if they condemn where follies run;
Laugh in their sleeve at tricks they disapprove,
And, false or true, a muscle never move.
A playful jest can scarcely give offence:
Who knows too much, oft shows a want of sense.
From flatt'ry oft more dire effects arise,
Enflame the heart and take it by surprise;
Ye beauteous belles, beware each sighing swain,
Discard his vows:—my book with care retain;
Your safety then I'll guarantee at ease.—
But why dismiss?—their wishes are to please:
And, truly, no necessity appears
For solitude:—consider well your years.
I have, and feel convinced they do you wrong,
Who think no virtue can to such belong;
White crows and phoenixes do not abound;
But lucky lovers still are sometimes found;*



And though, as these famed birds, not quite so rare,
The numbers are not great that favours share;
I own my works a diff'rent sense express,
But these are tales:—mere tales in easy dress.



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To beauty's wiles, in ev'ry class, I've bowed;
Fawned, flattered, sighed, e'en constancy have vowed
What gained? you ask—but little I admit;
Howe'er we aim, too oft we fail to hit.
My latter days I'll now devote with care,
To guard the sex from ev'ry latent snare.
Tales I'll detail, and these relate at ease:
Narrations clear and neat will always please;
Like me, to this attention criticks pay;
Then sleep, on either side, from night till day.
If awkward, vulgar phrase intervene,
Or rhymes imperfect o'er the page be seen,
Condemn at will; but stratagems and art,
Pass, shut your eyes, who'd heed the idle part?
Some mothers, husbands, may perhaps be led,
To pull my locks for stories white or red;
So matters stand: a fine affair, no doubt,
And what I've failed to do—my book makes out.

The fair my pages safely may pursue,
And this apology they'll not refuse.
What recompense can I presume to make?
A tale I'll give, where female charms partake,
And prove resistless whatsoe'er assail:
Blessed *beauty, nature* ever should prevail.

Had Fate decreed our *youth*, at early morn,
To view the angel features you adorn,
The captivating pow'rs *Aurora* bless,
Or airy *Spring* bedecked in beauteous dress,
And all the azure canopy on high
Had vanished like a dream, once you were nigh.
And when his eyes at length your charms beheld,
His glowing breast with softest passion swelled;
Superior lustre beamed at ev'ry view;
No pleasures pleased: his soul was fixed on you.
Crowns, jewels, palaces, appeared as naught.
'Twas solely beauteous woman now he sought.

A *Wood*, from earliest years, his home had been,
And birds the only company he'd seen,
Whose notes harmonious often lulled his care,
Beguiled his hours, and saved him from despair;



Delightful sounds! from nightingale and dove
Unknown their tongue, yet indicant of love.

*This*savage, solitary, rustick school,
The father chose his infancy to rule.
The mother's recent death induced the sire,
To place the son where only beasts retire;
And long the forest habitants alone
Were all his youthful sight had ever known.



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Two reasons, good or bad, the father led
To fly the world:—all intercourse to dread
Since fate had torn his lovely spouse from hence;
Misanthropy and fear o'ercame each sense;
Of the world grown tired, he hated all around:—
Too oft in solitude is sorrow found.
His partner's death produced distaste of life,
And made him fear to seek another wife.
A hermit's gloomy, mossy cell he took,
And wished his child might thither solely look.

Among the poor his little wealth he threw,
And with his infant son alone withdrew;
The forest's dreary wilds concealed his cell;
There Philip (such his name) resolved to dwell.

By holy motives led, and not chagrin,
The hermit never spoke of what he'd seen;
But, from the youth's discernment, strove to hide,
Whate'er regarded love, and much beside,
The softer sex, with all their magick charms,
That fill the feeling bosom with alarms.
As years advanced, the boy with care he taught;
What suited best his age before him brought;
At five he showed him animals and flow'rs,
The birds of air, the beasts, their sev'ral pow'rs;
And now and then of hell he gave a hint,
Old Satan's wrath, and what might awe imprint,
How formed, and doomed to infamy below;
In childhood *fear*'s the lesson first we know!

The years had passed away, when Philip tried,
In matters more profound his son to guide;
He spoke of Paradise and Heav'n above;
But not a word of woman,—nor of *love*.
Fifteen arrived, the sire with anxious care,
Of *nature*'s works declaimed,—but not the *fair*:
An age, when those, for solitude designed,
Should be to scenes of seriousness confined,
Nor joys of youth, nor soft ideas praised
The flame soon spreads when Cupid's torch is raised.

At length, when twenty summers time had run,
The father to the city brought his son;



With years weighed down, the hermit scarcely knew
His daily course of duty to pursue;
And when Death's venom'd shaft should on him fall;
On whom could then his boy for succour call?
How life support, unknowing and unknown?
Wolves, foxes, bears, ne'er charity have shown;
And all the sire could give his darling care,
A staff and wallet, he was well aware
Fine patrimony, truly, for a child!
To which his mind was no way reconciled.
Bread



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few, 'twas clear, the hermit would deny,
And rich he might have been you may rely;
When he drew near, the children quickly cried
Here's father Philip—haste, the alms provide;
And many pious men his friends were found,
But not one female devotee around:
None would he hear; the *fair* he always fled
Their smiles and wiles the friar kept in dread.

Our hermit, when he thought his darling youth;
Well fixed in duty and religious truth,
Conveyed him 'mong his pious friends, to learn
How food to beg, and other ways discern.
In tears he viewed his son the forest quit,
And fain would have him for the world unfit.

The city's palaces and lofty spires,
Our rustick's bosom filled with new desires.
The prince's residence great splendour showed,
And lively pleasure on the youth bestowed.
What's here? said he; The court, his friends replied:—
What there?—The mansions where the great reside:—
And these?—Fine statues, noble works of art:
All gave delight and gratitude his heart.
But when the *beauteous fair* first caught his view,
To ev'ry other sight he bade adieu;
The palace, court, or mansions he admired,
No longer proved the objects he desired;
Another cause of admiration rose,
His breast pervaded, and disturbed repose.
What's this, he cried, so elegantly neat?
O tell me, father; make my joy complete!

What gave the son such exquisite delight,
The parent filled with agonizing fright.
To answer, howsoe'er he'd no excuse,
So told the youth—a bird they call a goose.

O *beauteous* bird, exclaimed th' enraptured boy,
Sing, sound thy voice, 'twill fill my soul with joy;
To thee I'd anxiously be better known;
O father, let me have one for my own!



A thousand times I fondly ask the boon;
Let's take it to the woods: 'tis not too soon;
Young as it is, I'll feed it morn and night,
And always make it my supreme delight.

Richard Minutolo

; *Inev'ry age, at Naples, we are told,
Intrigue and gallantry reign uncontrolled;
With beauteous objects in abundance blessed.
No country round so many has possessed;
Such fascinating charms the *fair* disclose,
That irresistibly soft passion flows.*

*'Mong these a belle, enchanting to behold,
Was loved by one, of birth and store of gold;
Minutolo (and Richard) was his name,
In Cupid's train a youth of brilliant fame:
'Tween Rome and Paris none was more gallant,
And num'rous hearts were for him known to pant.*



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Catella(thus was called our lady fair,
So long, howe'er, resisted Richard's snare,
That prayers, and vows, and promises were vain;
A favour Minutolo could not gain.
At length, our hero weary, coldness showed,
And dropt attendance, since no kindness flowed;
Pretended to be cured:—another sought,
And feigned her charms his tender heart had caught:
Catella laughed, but jealousy was nigh;
'Twas for her friend that now He heaved the sigh.

Thesedames together met, and Richard too,
The gay gallant a glowing picture drew,
Of certain husbands, lovers, prudes, and wives;
Who led in secret most lascivious lives.
Though none he named, *Catella* was amazed;
His hints suspicions of her husband raised;
And such her agitation and affright,
That, anxious to procure more certain light,
In haste she took Minutolo aside,
And begged the names he would not from her hide,
With all particulars, from first to last:—
Her ardent wish to know whate'er had passed.

Solong your reign, said Richard, o'er my mind,
Deny I could not, howsoe'er inclined;
With Mrs. Simon often is your spouse;
Her character no doubt your spleen will rouse;
I've no design, observe to give offence,
But, when I see your int'rest in suspense,
I cannot silent keep; though, were I still
A slave, devoted wholly to your will,
As late I moved, I would not drop a word
Mistrust of lovers may not be absurd;
Besides, you'd fancy other motives led
To tell you of your husband what was said;
But heav'n be praised, of you I nothing want;
My object's plain—no more the fond gallant.

I've lately certain information had,
Your spouse (I scarcely thought the man so bad,)
Has with the lady an appointment made;
At Jack's nice bagnio he will meet the jade.



Now clearly Jack's not rich, and there's no doubt;
A hundred ducats give, and—*all* will out;
Let him but have a handsome sum in view,
And any thing you wish, be sure he'll do;
You then can manage ev'ry way so well,
That, at the place assigned to meet his belle,
You'll take this truant husband by surprise;—
Permit me in this nice affair to advise.



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The lady has agreed, you will remark,
That in a room where ev'ry part is dark,
(Perhaps to 'scape the keeper's prying sight,
Or shame directs exclusion of the light,)
She will receive your gay inconstant spouse;
Now, take her place; the case deceit allows;
Make Jack your friend; nor haggle at the price;
A hundred ducats give, is my advice;
He'll place you in the room where darkness reigns;
Think not too fast, nor suffer heavy chains;
Do what you wish, and utter not a word;
To speak, assuredly would be absurd;
'Twould spoil the whole; destroy the project quite;
Attend, and see if all things be not right.

The project pleased Catella to the soul;
Her wrath, no longer able to controul,
She Richard stopt; enough, enough, she cried;
I fully understand:—leave me to guide;
I'll play the fellow and his wanton lass
A pretty trick—shall all their art surpass,
Unless the string gives way and spoils my scheme;
What, take me for a nincompoop?—they dream.

This said, she sought excuse to get away,
And went in quest of Jack without delay.
The keeper, howsoe'er, a hint had got;
Minutolo had schooled him for the plot;
Oft cash does wonders, and, if such the case
In France or Britain, when conferred a grace,
The bribe is taken, and the truth abused,
In Italy it will not be refused;
There this sole quiver Cupid useful finds,—

A purse well stored—all binds, gunlocks, or blinds:
Jack took the pelf from Richard and the dame;
Had Satan offered—'twould have been the same.
In short, Minutolo had full success,
All came about, and marked the spark's address.

The lady had at first some warm dispute
To many questions Jack was even mute;
But when he saw the golden charms unmasked,
Far more he promised than Catella asked.



*The*time of rendezvous arrived, our spark
To Jack's repaired, and found the room quite dark;
So well arranged, no crevice could he find,
Through which the light might hurt what he designed.

*Not*long he waited, ere our jealous dame,
Who longed to find her faithless husband, came,
Most thoroughly prepared his ears to greet.
Jack brought the couple presently to meet.
The lady found, howe'er, not what she sought:
No guilty spouse, nor Mrs. Simon caught;
But wily Richard, who, without alarms,

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In silence took Catella in his arms.
What further passed between the easy pair,
Think what you will, I mean not to declare;
The lover certainly received delight
The lady showed no terror nor affright;
On neither side a syllable was dropt
With care Minutolo his laughter stopt;
Though difficult, our spark succeeded well;
No words of mine can Richard's pleasure tell.
His fav'rite beauteous belle he now possessed,
And triumphed where so oft he'd been repressed,
Yet fondly hoped her pardon he should get,
Since they together had so gaily met.

At length, the fair could no longer contain:
Vile wretch, she cried, I've borne too much 'tis plain;
I'm not the fav'rite whom thou had'st in view:
To tear thy eyes out justly were thy due,
'Tis this, indeed, that makes thee silent keep,
Each morn feign sickness, and pretend to sleep,
Thyself reserving doubtless for amours:—
Speak, villain! say, of charms have I less stores?
Or what has Mrs. Simon more than I?
A wanton wench, in tricks so wondrous sly!
Where my love less? though truly now I hate;
Would that I'd seen thee hung, thou wretch ingrate!

Minutolo, while thus Catella spoke,
Caressed her much, but silence never broke;
A kiss e'en tried to gain, without success;
She struggled, and refused to acquiesce;
Begone! said she, nor treat me like a child;
Stand off!—away!—thy taction is defiled;
My tears express an injured woman's grief;
No more thy wife I'll be, but seek relief;
Return my fortune—go:—thy mistress seek;
To be so constant:—How was I so weak?
It surely would be nothing more than right,
Were Richard I to see this very night,
Who adoration constantly has paid:—



You much deserve to be a cuckold made;
I'm half inclined, I vow, to do the worst.
At this our arch gallant with laughter burst.
What impudence!—You mock me too? she cried
Let's see, with blushes if his face be dyed?
When from his arms she sprang, a window sought;
The shutters ope'd, and then a view she caught;
Minutolo, her lover! * * * what surprise!
Pale, faint, she instant grew, and closed her eyes:
Who would have thought, said she, thou wert so base?
I'm lost! * * * for ever sunk in dire disgrace!



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Who'll, know it? Richard earnestly replied;
In Jack's concealment we may both confide;
Excuse the trick I've played and ne'er repine;
Address, force, treachery, in love combine;
All are permitted when intrigue 's the word;
To hold the contrary were quite absurd.
Till stratagem was used I naught could gain,
But looks and darts from eyes, for all my pain.
I've paid myself;—Would you have done it?—No;
'Tis all as might be wished;—come, smiles bestow;
I'm satisfied, the fault was not with you.
In this, to make you wretched, naught I view;
Why sigh and groan?—What numbers could I name,
Who would be happy to be served the same.

*His*reas'ning yet could not the belle appease;
She wept, and sought by tears her mind to ease;
Affliction highly added to her charms;
Minutolo still gave her new alarms;
He took her hand, which she at once withdrew:
Away, she cried; no longer me pursue;
Be satisfied; you surely don't desire
That I assistance from the house require,
Or rouse the neighbours with my plaintive cries
I'll ev'ry thing declare without disguise.

*Such*folly don't commit, replied the spark;
Your wisest plan is nothing to remark:
The world at present is become so vile,
If you the truth divulge, they'll only smile;
Not one a word of treachery would believe,
But think you came—and money to receive:
Suppose, besides, it reached your husband's ears;
Th' effect has reason to excite your fears;
'Twould give displeasure and occasion strife:
Would you in duels wish to risk his life?
Whatever makes you with him disagree,
At all events, I'm full as bad as he.

Thesereasons with Catella greatly weighed
Since things, continued he, are thus displayed;
And cannot be repaired, console your mind;
A perfect being never was designed.
If, howsoe'er you will * * * but say no more;



Such thoughts for ever banish, I implore.
'Mid all my perseverance, zeal, and art,
I nothing got but frowns that pierced the heart:
'Twill now on you depend if pleasure prove
This day imperfect, ere from hence we move.
What more remains to do? the worst is past;
'Tis step the first that costs, however classed.

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So well Minutolo preferred his suit,
The lady with him more would not dispute,
With downcast eyes she listened to his prayer,
And looked disposed to tranquilize his care;
From easy freedom soon he 'gan to soar;
A smile received:—a kiss bestowed and more:
At length, the lady passed resistance by,
And all conceded, e'en without a sigh.

Ourhero felt a thousand times more blessed
Than when he first the *beauteous* fair caressed;
For when a flame reciprocal is raised,
The bliss redoubles, and by all is praised.

Thus Richard pleasantly employed his time,
Contented lived, concentrating joys sublime.
A sample, now, we have given of his pow'rs,
And who would wish for more delightful hours?
O grant, kind heav'n! that I the like may meet,
And ever prove so wary and discreet.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

In childhood *fear* 's the lesson first we know!
Who knows too much, oft shows a want of sense

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