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1. LETTER TO MADAME DE LA FONTAINE

Among the other statues which have their rooms and their niches there, Apollo and Bacchus carry the prize according to the taste of the learned. It was however Mercury that I examined more, because of those swallows who are so naive as to entrust their little ones to him, all thief that he is. Read that passage in the Promenades de Richelieu; it it seemed beautiful to me, as well as the description of these two captives of which M. Desmarets says that "one bears his chains patiently, the other with strength and constraint." They were placed in a remarkable place, that is to say at the place of the great degree, one on one side of the vestibule, the other on the other: which is a kind of consolation for these marbles, of which Michelangelo could make two emperors.

*L'un toutefois de son destin soupire,
L'autre paroist un peu moins mutiné.
Heureux captifs! si cela se peut dire
D'un marbre dur et d'un homme enchaîné.*

*Je ne voudrois estre ny l'un ny l'autre
Pour embellir un séjour si charmant;
En d'autres cas, vostre sexe et le nostre
De l'un des deux se pique également.*

*Nous nous piquons d'estre esclaves des dames,
Vous vous piquez d'estre marbres pour nous,
Mais c'est en vers, où les fers et les flames
Sont fort communs et n'ont rien que de doux.*

Forgive me for this little digression; it is impossible for me to come across this word slave without stopping: what do you want? everyone likes to talk about their profession, this being said, however, without hurting you. To come back to our two captives, I think there were formerly slaves of your way that were esteemed, but they would hardly be worth as much as these. It is said that nothing more excellent can be seen and that in these statues Michelangelo surpassed not only modern sculptors, but also much of the ancients. There is a passage which is as if only roughed-out: either Death, unable to tolerate the completion of a work which was to be immortal, had stopped Michelangelo at that place, or that that great person had done it intentionally, in order that posterity recognized that no one was capable of touching a figure after him. However that may be, I only esteem these two captives the more, and I maintain that the master derives as

much glory from what they lack as from what he has given to them that is most finished.

(Jean de la Fontaine. *Journey from Paris to the Limousin: Letters to Madame de La Fontaine, 1663*). Transl. Robert W. Berger and JLY, d'AIDA. Cranbury (NJ), Associated University Presses, 2008. p. 18-19)

Original version

A Madame de La Fontaine
A Limoge, ce 12 Septembre 1663.

Parmi les autres statues qui ont là leur appartement et leurs niches, l'Apollon et le Bacchus emportent le prix, au goust des sçavants; ce fut toutefois Mercure que je considéray davantage, à cause de ces hirondelles qui sont si simples que de luy confier leurs petits, tout larron qu'il est: lisez cet endroit des *promenades* de Richelieu; il m'a semblé beau, aussi bien que la description de ces deux captifs, dont monsieur Desmarets dit que l'un porte ses chaisnes patiemment, l'autre avecque force et contrainte: On les a placez en lieu remarquable, c'est-à-dire, à l'endroit du grand degré, l'un d'un costé du vestibule, l'autre de l'autre; ce qui est une espece de consolation pour ces marbres, dont Michel-Ange pouvoit faire deux empereurs.

L'un toutefois de son destin soupire,
L'autre paroist un peu moins mutiné.
Heureux captifs! si cela se peut dire
D'un marbre dur et d'un homme enchainé.

Je ne voudrois estre ny l'un ny l'autre
Pour embellir un séjour si charmant;
En d'autres cas, vostre sexe et le nostre
De l'un des deux se pique également.

Nous nous piquons d'estre esclaves des dames,
Vous vous piquez d'estre marbres pour nous,
Mais c'est en vers, où les fers et les flames
Sont fort communs et n'ont rien que de doux.

Pardonnez-moi cette petite digression; il m'est impossible de tomber sur ce mot d'esclave sans m'arrester; que voulez-vous? Chacun ayme à parler de son mestier; cecy soit dit toutefois sans vous faire tort. Pour revenir à nos deux captifs, je pense bien qu'il y a eu autrefois des esclaves de votre façon qu'on a estimez, mais ils auroient de la peine à valoir autant que ceux-cy. On dit qu'il ne se peut rien voir de plus excellent, et qu'en ces statues Michel-Ange a surpassé non seulement les sculpteurs modernes, mais aussi beaucoup de choses des anciens. Il y a un endroit qui n'est quasi qu'ébauché, soit que la mort, ne pouvant souffrir l'accomplissement d'un ouvrage qui devoit estre immortel, ayt arrêté

Michel-Ange en cet endroit-là, soit que ce grand personnage l'ayt fait à dessein, et afin que la postérité reconnust que personne n'est capable de toucher à une figure après luy. De quelque façon que cela soit, je n'en estime que davantage ces deux captifs, et je tiens que l'ouvrier tire autant de gloire de ce qui leur manque, que de ce qu'il leur a donné de plus accompli.

(Philippe-Emmanuel de Coulanges. "Opuscles de La Fontaine", in: *Memories de M. de Coulanges suivis de lettres inédites de madame de Sévigné, de son fils, de l'abbé de Coulanges, d'Arnauld-d'Andilly, d'Arnauld de Pomponne, de Jean de La Fontaine, et d'autres personnages du même siècle*. Paris, J. J. Blaise, 1820. 469-471)

2. **THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT (Version 1: Charles Denis, 1754)**

A Grasshopper had chaunted it away,
Each summer's day;
Now that cold weather was sat in,
Began to look most piteous thin.
Away she hopp'd, to see her neighbour th'Ant:
And begg'd some small relief, she'd grant
From her abundant store;
Or else ere half the Winter ore,
She needs must die for want:
And faith and troth, she swore
The loan with int'rest to restore,
By Autumn next, if not before.
Your Ants they never lend on trust.
Our housewife was devout as well as just;
T'encourage sloth she held a crime.
How did you spend, quoth she, the harvest time?
And please you, night and day I tun'd my Song,
T'amuse the travellers that pass'd along.
Oh oh! and so you sung the Summer out?
Yes Ma'am. Why that was wond'rous wise:
And now that Winter's come, might I advise,
E'en dance about.
You'll have at least, this comfort for't,
To've led a merry life, tho' short.

(Jean de La Fontaine. "The ant and the grasshopper". *Select fables*. Fable XIX. Transl. Charles Denis. London, J. and R. Tonson andnS. Draper, 1754. p. 81-82)

Original version: *vid. infra*

3. **THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT (Version 2: Robert Thomson, 1806)**

The gay grasshopper having sung
All the sunny season long,
Was unprovided and brought low,
When the north wind began to blow;
Had not a scrap of worm or fly,
Hunger and want began to cry;
Never was creature more perplex'd,
She call'd upon her neighbour ant,
And humbly pray'd her just to grant
Some grain till August next;
I'll pay, she said, if I exist,
Both principal and interest,
Honor of insects and that's tender.
The ant, however, is no lender;
That is her least defective side:
But hark ye pray Miss Borrower, she cried,
What were ye doing in fine weather?
Singing. I hope there's no offence,
To every comer day and night together:
Singing! I'm glad of that, why now then dance.

(Jean de La Fontaine. *La Fontaine's fables. Now first translated from the French...*
Book first, fable 1. Transl. Robert Thomson. Paris, G. Doyen, 1806)

Original version: *vid. infra*

4. **THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT (Version 3: John Matthews, 1820)**

A Grasshopper, whose sprightly song
Had lasted all the summer long,
At length when wintry gales assail her
Perceiv'd her old resources fail her.
No tiny worm or slender fly
Can now her ready food supply.
Of neighbour Ant in quer'lous strain
She begs a little loan of grain;
And whilst her suit she thus preferr'd
Engaged an insect's honest word,
She would next Lammas, to the day,
Both principal and interest pay.
The prudent, cautious Ant, 'tis said,
Holds borrowing in a sort of dread;
And (from this charge we'll not defend her)

Abhors the very name of lender.
With importunity grown weary,
She checks it with this single query.
"Pray, neighbour, how d'ye spend your summer? -
"I charm, an't please you, every comer;
"All thro' the season every day
"I sing the merry hours away."
"Oh!" cries the Ant, and bars the door
Which safely guards her winter's store, -
"I'm glad such sports your means allow;
"You'd better practise dancing now!"

(Jean de La Fontaine. *Fables from La Fontaine's in English verse*. Part first.
Transl. John Matthews. London, John Murray, 1820. p. 16-17)

Original version: *vid. infra*

5. **THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT (Version 4: Elizur Wright Jr., 1841)**

A Grasshopper gay
Sang the summer away,
And found herself poor
By the winter's first roar.
Of meat or of bread,
Not a morsel she had;
So a begging she went,
To her neighbor the ant,
For the loan of some wheat,
Which would serve her to eat
Till the season came round.
I will pay you, she saith,
On an animal's faith,
Double weight in the pound
Ere the harvest be bound.
The ant is a friend
(And here she might mend)
Little given to lend.
How spent you the summer?
Quoth she, looking shame
At the borrowing dame.
Night and day to each comer
I sang, if you please.
You sang! I'm at ease;
For 'tis plain at a glance,
Now, ma'am, you must dance.

(Jean de La Fontaine. *Fables of La Fontaine*. Transl. Elizur Wright Jr. Boston, E. Wright Jr. and Tappan & Dennet, 1841. p. 7-8)

Original version

LA CIGALE ET LA FOURMI

La Cigale, ayant chanté
Tout l'Été,
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la bise fut venue.
Pas un seul petit morceau
De mouche ou de vermisseau.
Elle alla crier famine
Chez la Fourmi sa voisine,
La priant de lui prêter
Quelque grain pour subsister
Jusqu'à la saison nouvelle.
«Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,
Avant l'Oût, foi d'animal,
Intérêt et principal.»
La Fourmi n'est pas prêteuse ;
C'est là son moindre défaut.
«Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud?
Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.
— Nuit et jour à tout venant
Je chantais, ne vous déplaie.
— Vous chantiez? j'en suis fort aise.
Eh bien! dansez maintenant.»

(Jean de La Fontaine. *Fables choisies mises en verse*. Paris, Claude Barbin, 1668. Livre I, fable I)