

The Council held by the Rats

by Jean de La Fontaine

Old Rodilard, a certain cat,
Such havoc of the rats had made,
'Twas difficult to find a rat
With nature's debt unpaid.
The few that did remain,
To leave their holes afraid,
From usual food abstain,
Not eating half their fill.
And wonder no one will
That one who made of rats his revel,
With rats pass'd not for cat, but devil.
Now, on a day, this dread rat-eater,
Who had a wife, went out to meet her;
And while he held his caterwauling,
The unkill'd rats, their chapter calling,
Discuss'd the point, in grave debate,
How they might shun impending fate.
Their dean, a prudent rat,
Thought best, and better soon than late,
To bell the fatal cat;
That, when he took his hunting round,
The rats, well caution'd by the sound,
Might hide in safety under ground;
Indeed he knew no other means.
And all the rest
At once confess'd
Their minds were with the dean's.
No better plan, they all believed,
Could possibly have been conceived.
No doubt the thing would work right well,
If any one would hang the bell.
But, one by one, said every rat,
"I'm not so big a fool as that."
The plan knock'd up in this respect,
The council closed without effect.

And many a council I have seen,
Or reverend chapter with its dean,
That, thus resolving wisely,
Fell through like this precisely.

*To argue or refute
Wise counsellors abound;
The man to execute
Is harder to be found.*