

The Monkey and the Cat

by Jean de La Fontaine

Sly Bertrand and Ratto in company sat,
 (The one was a monkey, the other a cat,)
Co-servants and lodgers:
 More mischievous codgers
Ne'er mess'd from a platter, since platters were flat.
Was anything wrong in the house or about it,
The neighbours were blameless,--no mortal could doubt it;
For Bertrand was thievish, and Ratto so nice,
More attentive to cheese than he was to the mice.
One day the two plunderers sat by the fire,
Where chestnuts were roasting, with looks of desire.
To steal them would be a right noble affair.
A double inducement our heroes drew there--
'Twould benefit them, could they swallow their fill,
And then 'twould occasion to somebody ill.
Said Bertrand to Ratto, "My brother, to-day
Exhibit your powers in a masterly way,
 And take me these chestnuts, I pray.
 Which were I but otherwise fitted
 (As I am ingeniously witted)
 For pulling things out of the flame,
 Would stand but a pitiful game."
"'Tis done," replied Ratto, all prompt to obey;
And thrust out his paw in a delicate way.
 First giving the ashes a scratch,
 He open'd the coveted batch;
 Then lightly and quickly impinging,
 He drew out, in spite of the singeing,
One after another, the chestnuts at last,--
While Bertrand contrived to devour them as fast.
A servant girl enters. Adieu to the fun.
Our Ratto was hardly contented, says one.--

*No more are the princes, by flattery paid
For furnishing help in a different trade,
And burning their fingers to bring*

More power to some mightier king.