

Nothing too Much

by Jean de La Fontaine

Look where we will throughout creation,
We look in vain for moderation.

The grain, best gift of Ceres fair,
Green waving in the genial air,
By overgrowth exhausts the soil;
By superfluity of leaves
Defrauds the treasure of its sheaves,
And mocks the busy farmer's toil.

Not less redundant is the tree,
So sweet a thing is luxury.

The grain within due bounds to keep,
Their Maker licenses the sheep
The leaves excessive to retrench.

In troops they spread across the plain,
And, nibbling down the hapless grain,
Contrive to spoil it, root and branch.

So, then, with licence from on high,
The wolves are sent on sheep to prey;
The whole the greedy gluttons slay;
Or, if they don't, they try.

Next, men are sent on wolves to take
The vengeance now condign:
In turn the same abuse they make
Of this behest divine.

Of animals, the human kind
Are to excess the most inclined.
On low and high we make the charge,--
Indeed, upon the race at large.
There liveth not the soul select
That sinneth not in this respect.
Of "Nought too much," the fact is,
All preach the truth,--none practise.