

The Dragon with Many Heads

by Jean de La Fontaine

An envoy of the Porte Sublime,
As history says, once on a time,
Before th' imperial German court
Did rather boastfully report,
The troops commanded by his master's firman,
As being a stronger army than the German:
To which replied a Dutch attendant,
"Our prince has more than one dependant
Who keeps an army at his own expense."
The Turk, a man of sense,
Rejoin'd, "I am aware
What power your emperor's servants share.
It brings to mind a tale both strange and true,
A thing which once, myself, I chanced to view.
I saw come darting through a hedge,
Which fortified a rocky ledge,
A hydra's hundred heads; and in a trice
My blood was turning into ice.
But less the harm than terror,--
The body came no nearer;
Nor could, unless it had been sunder'd,
To parts at least a hundred.
While musing deeply on this sight,
Another dragon came to light,
Whose single head avails
To lead a hundred tails:
And, seized with juster fright,
I saw him pass the hedge,--
Head, body, tails,--a wedge
Of living and resistless powers.--
The other was your emperor's force; this ours."