

The Fool who Sold Wisdom

by Jean de La Fontaine

A fool, in town, did wisdom cry;
The people, eager, flock'd to buy.
Each for his money got,
Paid promptly on the spot,
Besides a box upon the head,
Two fathoms' length of thread.
The most were vex'd--but quite in vain,
The public only mock'd their pain.
The wiser they who nothing said,
But pocketed the box and thread.
To search the meaning of the thing
Would only laughs and hisses bring.
Hath reason ever guaranteed
The wit of fools in speech or deed?
'Tis said of brainless heads in France,
The cause of what they do is chance.
One dupe, however, needs must know
What meant the thread, and what the blow
So ask'd a sage, to make it sure.
"They're both hieroglyphics pure,"
The sage replied without delay;
"All people well advised will stay
From fools this fibre's length away,
Or get--I hold it sure as fate--
The other symbol on the pate.
So far from cheating you of gold,
The fool this wisdom fairly sold."