

## The Fox, the Flies, and the Hedgehog

by Jean de La Fontaine

A fox, old, subtle, vigilant, and sly,--  
By hunters wounded, fallen in the mud,--  
Attracted by the traces of his blood,  
That buzzing parasite, the fly.  
He blamed the gods, and wonder'd why  
The Fates so cruelly should wish  
To feast the fly on such a costly dish.  
"What! light on me! make me its food!  
Me, me, the nimblest of the wood!  
How long has fox-meat been so good?  
What serves my tail? Is it a useless weight?  
Go,--Heaven confound thee, greedy reprobate!--  
And suck thy fill from some more vulgar veins!"  
A hedgehog, witnessing his pains,  
(This fretful personage  
Here graces first my page,)  
Desired to set him free  
From such cupidity.  
"My neighbour fox," said he,  
"My quills these rascals shall empale,  
And ease thy torments without fail."  
"Not for the world, my friend!" the fox replied.  
"Pray let them finish their repast.  
These flies are full. Should they be set aside,  
New hungrier swarms would finish me at last."

*Consumers are too common here below,  
In court and camp, in church and state, we know.  
Old Aristotle's penetration  
Remark'd our fable's application;  
It might more clearly in our nation.  
The fuller certain men are fed,  
The less the public will be bled.*