

The barbing, which is so minute that its structure can only be seen under considerable magnification, is formed simply of tiny overlapping scales, like shingles on a roof. To the touch it is only a slight roughness at the point of the quill, but the hold it takes is astonishing. Once the quill makes an entrance, it never draws back, and every movement of the victim only serves to drive the dart in deeper. Its policy, like that of the high-handed Strafford is "Thorough." A hapless dog with his nose, jaws and tongue stuck full of these inexorable little arrows is a most painful sight; and a strong forceps is needed to pull them out.

Obviously, without the protection afforded by its quills, the slow-moving, dull-witted porcupine would fall an easy victim to its many predaceous enemies; but usually wild creatures seem to leave him alone, and those that do attack him are generally sorry for it. Hornaday says that pumas and lynxes have been found in starving condition with their mouths and throats stuck so full of porcupine quills that eating was impossible; and I have heard of horned owls taken with numerous spines piercing their claws.

The only animal known to prey on the Canada porcupine habitually is the fisher (*Mustela pennanti*). This active tree-climber hunts the porcupine assiduously for food, and when it has exterminated them in one district moves on to the next. Its method of attack seems to be to turn the porcupine over on its back and eat it out from the belly. I have seen foxes feeding in this way on a porcupine shot by a wanton hunter. But like the Scotch thistle, the porcupine cannot be assailed with impunity, and a fisher with a taste for porcupine meat always has numerous quills implanted in his head and breast, but which, strange to say, do not seem to incommode him very much. An ancient error, still in existence in connection with the porcupine family, is that they can shoot their quills to a distance, and some old writers went so far as to affirm that in this way the porcupine could kill very large animals. Considering that more than 150 years ago the majestic M. Buffon himself went to the trouble of disproving the myth by practical experiments, and that since his time no writer of any standing has attempted to support the fiction, it is very remarkable that it should still be current. It is true that in "Hiawatha" Longfellow commits the double zoological crime of referring to the porcupine as a "hedgehog" and of asserting that the animal "shot its shining quills like arrows," but the fallacy is commonly repeated by people who never heard of "Hiawatha" or Longfellow either. Apparently, like the story firmly believed by most small boys that if you soak a horse hair in water it will turn into a snake, the fable is handed down by oral tradition among the illiterate.

So far from ever shooting its shining arrows, the fact is that beyond erecting its quills and sometimes striking at the aggressor with