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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable X

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The hog with warmth express'd his zeal,
 And was for hanging those that steal;
 But hop'd, though low, the public board
 Might half a turnip still afford.
 Since saving measures were profess'd,
 A lamb's head was the wolf's request.
 The fox submitted, if to touch
 A goslin would be deem'd too much.
 The monkey thought his grin and chatter
 Might ask a nut, or some such matter.

Ye hirelings, hence, (the Leopard cries);
 Your venal conscience I despise.
 He who the public good intends,
 By bribes needs never purchase friends.
 Who acts this just, this open part,
 Is propt by ev'ry honest heart.
 Corruption now, too late, has show'd,
 That bribes are always ill-bestow'd.
 By you your bubbled master's taught,
 Time-serving tools, not friends, are bought.

F A B L E X.

The DEGENERATE BEES.

To the Reverend Dr SWIFT, Dean of St Patrick's.

THough courts the practice disallow,
 A friend at all times I'll avow.
 In politics I know 'tis wrong:
 A friendship may be kept too long:

And that they call the prudent part,
Is to wear int'rest next the heart.
As the times take a diff'rent face,
Old friendships should to new give place.

I know too you have many foes,
That owning you is sharing those;
That ev'ry knave in ev'ry station,
Of high and low denomination,
For what you speak and what you write,
Dread you at once, and bear you spite.
Such freedoms in your works are shown,
They can't enjoy what's not their own.
All dunces too in church and state
In frothy nonsense show their hate;
With all the petty scribbling crew,
(And those pert fots are not a few),
'Gainst you and Pope their envy spurt.
The bookfellers alone are hurt.

Good gods! by what a powerful race
(For blockheads may have pow'r and place)
Are scandals rais'd, and libels writ,
To prove your honesty and wit!
Think with yourself: Those worthy men,
You know, have suffer'd by your pen.
From them you've nothing but your due.
From hence, 'tis plain, your friends are few.
Except myself, I know of none,
Besides the wife and good alone.
To set the case in fairer light,
My fable shall the rest recite;
Which (though unlike our present state)
I for the moral's sake relate,

A bee, of cunning, not of parts,
 Luxurious, negligent of arts,
 Rapacious, arrogant, and vain;
 Greedy of pow'r, but more of gain,
 Corruption sow'd throughout the hive,
 By petty rogues the great ones thrive.

As pow'r and wealth his views supply'd,
 'Twas seen in overbearing pride,
 With him loud impudence had merit;
 The Bee of conscience wanted spirit;
 And those who follow'd honour's rules,
 Were laugh'd to scorn for squeamish fools.

Wealth claim'd distinction, favour, grace;
 And poverty alone was base.
 He treated industry with slight,
 Unless he found his profit by't.
 Rights, laws, and liberties gave way,
 To bring his selfish schemes in play.
 The swarm forgot the common toil,
 To share the gleanings of his spoil.

While vulgar souls, of narrow parts,
 Waste life in low mechanic arts,
 Let us (says he) to genius born,
 The drudg'ry of our fathers scorn.
 The wasp and drone, you must agree,
 Live with more elegance than we,
 Like gentlemen they sport and play;
 No bus'ness interrupts the day:
 Their hours to luxury they give,
 And nobly on their neighbours live.

A stubborn bee among the swarm,
 With honest indignation warm,

Thus from his cell with zeal reply'd.

I slight thy frowns, and hate thy pride.
 The laws our native rights protect;
 Offending thee, I those respect.
 Shall luxury corrupt the hive,
 And none against the torrent strive?
 Exert the honour of your race;
 He builds his rise on your disgrace.
 'Tis industry our state maintains.
 'Twas honest toil and honest gains
 That rais'd our fires to pow'r and fame.
 Be virtuous; save yourselves from shame.
 Know that, in selfish ends pursuing,
 You scramble for the public ruin.

He spoke; and, from his cell dismiss'd,
 Was insolently scoff'd and hiss'd.
 With him a friend or two resign'd,
 Disdaining the degen'rate kind.

These drones (says he) these insects vile,
 (I treat them in their proper style),
 May for a time oppress the state.
 They own our virtue by their hate;
 By that our merits they reveal,
 And recommend our public zeal;
 Disgrac'd by this corrupted crew,
 We're honour'd by the virtuous few.