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## **Poems**

Poems and fables

**Gay, John**

**Edinburgh, 1773**

Fable VII

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## F A B L E VII.

*The COUNTRYMAN and JUPITER.**To MYSELF.*

**H**AVE you a friend (look round and spy)  
 So fond, so prepossess'd as I?  
 Your faults, so obvious to mankind,  
 My partial eyes could never find.  
 When, by the breath of Fortune blown,  
 Your airy castles were o'erthrown;  
 Have I been over prone to blame?  
 Was I e'er known to damp your spirit,  
 Or twit you with the want of merit?  
 'Tis not so strange that Fortune's frown,  
 Still perseveres to keep you down.  
 Look round, and see what others do.  
 Would you be rich and honest too?  
 Have you (like those she rais'd to place)  
 Been opportunely mean and base?  
 Have you (as times requir'd) resign'd  
 Truth, honour, virtue, peace of mind?  
 If these are scruples, give her o'er;  
 Write, practise morals, and be poor.  
 The gifts of Fortune truly rate;  
 Then tell me what would mend your state.  
 If happiness on wealth were built,  
 Rich rogues might comfort find in guilt.

As grows the miser's hoarded store,  
His fears, his wants increase the more.

Think, Gay, (what ne'er may be the case),  
Should Fortune take you into grace,  
Would that your happiness augment?  
What can she give beyond content?

Suppose yourself a wealthy heir,  
With a vast annual income clear;  
In all the affluence you possess,  
You might not feel one care the less.  
Might you not then (like others) find,  
With change of fortune, change of mind?  
Perhaps, profuse beyond all rule,  
You might start out a glaring fool;  
Your luxury might break all bounds;  
Plate, table, horses, stewards, hounds,  
Might swell your debts: Then, lust of play  
No regal income can defray,  
Sunk is all credit, writs assail,  
And doom your future life to jail.

Or were you dignified with pow'r,  
Would that avert one pensive hour?  
You might give avarice its swing,  
Defraud a nation, blind a king:  
Then, from the hirelings in your cause,  
Though daily fed with false applause,  
Could it a real joy impart?  
Great guilt knew never joy at heart.

Is happiness your point in view?  
(I mean th' intrinsic and the true),  
She nor in camps or courts resides,  
Nor in the humble cottage hides;

Yet found alike in ev'ry sphere :  
Who finds content, will find her there.

O'erſpent with toil, beneath the ſhade,  
A Peaſant reſted on his ſpade.

Good gods ! he cries, 'tis hard to bear  
This load of life from year to year.

Soon as the morning ſtreaks the ſkies,  
Induſtrious labour bids me riſe ;  
With ſweat I earn my homely fare,  
And ev'ry day renews my care.

Jove heard the diſcontented ſtrain,  
And thus rebuk'd the murm'ring ſwain.

Speak out your wants then, honeſt friend ;  
Unjuſt complaints the gods offend.

If you repine at partial fate,  
Inſtruct me what could mend your ſtate.

Mankind in ev'ry ſtation ſee.  
What wiſh you ? tell me what you'd be.

So ſaid, upborne upon a cloud,  
The clown ſurvey'd the anxious croud.

Yon face of care, ſays Jove, behold,  
His bulky bags are fill'd with gold.

See with what joy he counts it o'er !  
That ſum to-day hath ſwell'd his ſtore.

Were I that man, (the Peaſant cry'd),  
What bleſſing could I aſk beſide ?

Hold, ſays the god ; firſt learn to know  
True happineſs from outward ſhow.

This optic glaſs of intuition,——  
Here, take it, view his true condition.

He look'd, and saw the miser's breast,  
 A troubled ocean, ne'er at rest ;  
 Want ever stares him in the face,  
 And fear anticipates disgrace :  
 With conscious guilt he saw him start ;  
 Extortion gnaws his throbbing heart ;  
 And never, or in thought or dream,  
 His breast admits one happy gleam.

May Jove, he cries, reject my pray'r,  
 And guard my life from guilt and care.  
 My soul abhors that wretch's fate.  
 O keep me in my humble state !  
 But see, amidst a gaudy croud,  
 Yon minister so gay and proud,  
 On him what happiness attends,  
 Who thus rewards his grateful friends !  
 First take the glass, the god replies ;  
 Man views the world with partial eyes.

Good gods! exclaims the startled wight,  
 Defend me from this hideous sight !  
 Corruption, with corrosive smart,  
 Lies cank'ring on his guilty heart :  
 I see him, with polluted hand,  
 Spread the contagion o'er the land.  
 Now Av'rice with insatiate jaws,  
 Now Rapine with her harpy claws,  
 His bosom tears. His conscious breast  
 Groans with a load of crimes oppress'd.  
 See him, mad and drunk with power,  
 Stand tott'ring on Ambition's tower.  
 Sometimes, in speeches vain and proud,  
 His boasts insult the nether croud ;

Now, seiz'd with giddiness and fear,  
He trembles lest his fall is near.

Was ever wretch like this, he cries!  
Such misery in such disguise!

The change, O Jove, I disavow,  
Still be my lot the spade and plough.

He next, confirm'd by speculation,  
Rejects the lawyer's occupation;

For he the statesman seem'd in part,  
And bore similitude of heart.

Nor did the soldier's trade inflame  
His hopes with thirst of spoil and fame:

The miseries of war he mourn'd;  
Whole nations into desarts turn'd.

By these have laws and rights been brav'd;

By these was free-born man enslav'd:

When battles and invasion cease,

Why swarm they in the lands of peace?

Such change (says he) may I decline;

The scythe and civil arms be mine!

Thus, weighing life in each condition,

The clown withdrew his rash petition.

When thus the god: How mortals err!

If you true happiness prefer,

'Tis to no rank of life confin'd,

But dwells in ev'ry honest mind.

Be justice then your sole pursuit.

Plant virtue, and content's the fruit.

So Jove, to gratify the clown,

Where first he found him set him down.