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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable IV

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Not two days since (says he) you bow'd:
The lowest of my fawning croud.

Proud fool, (replies the goose), 'tis true,
Thy corn a flutt'ring levee drew;
For that I join'd the hungry train,
And sold thee flat'ry for thy grain.
But then, as now, conceited ape,
We saw thee in thy proper shape.

F A B L E IV.

The ANT in office.

To a FRIEND.

YOU tell me that you apprehend
My verse may touchy folks offend:
In prudence too you think my rhimes
Should never squint at courtiers crimes;
For though nor this, nor that is meant,
Can we another's thoughts prevent?

You ask me, If I ever knew
Court-chaplains thus the lawn pursue?
I meddle not with gown or lawn.
Poets, I grant, to rise must fawn.
They know great ears are over-nice,
And never shock their patron's vice.
But I this hackney path despise:
'Tis my ambition not to rise.

If I must prostitute the muse,
The base conditions I refuse.

I neither flatter or defame,
Yet own I would bring guilt to shame.
If I Corruption's hand expose,
I make corrupted men my foes.
What then? I hate the paltry tribe.
Be virtue mine; be theirs the bribe.
I no man's property invade:
Corruption's yet no lawful trade.
Nor would it mighty ills produce,
Could I shame brib'ry out of use.
I know 'twould cramp most politicians,
Were they ty'd down to these conditions.
'Twould stint their power, their riches bound,
And make their parts seem less profound.
Were they deny'd their proper tools,
How could they lead their knaves and fools?
Were this the case, let's take a view,
What dreadful mischiefs would ensue.
Though it might aggrandize the state,
Could private lux'ry dine on plate?
Kings might indeed their friends reward,
But ministers find less regard.
Informers, sycophants, and spies,
Would not augment the year's supplies.
Perhaps too, take away this prop,
An annual job or two might drop.
Besides, if pensions were deny'd,
Could Avarice support its pride?
It might ev'n ministers confound,
And yet the state be safe and sound.

I care not though 'tis understood ;
 I only mean my country's good :
 And (let who will my freedom blame)
 I with all courtiers did the same.
 Nay, though some folks the less might get,
 I wish the nation out of debt.
 I put no private man's ambition
 With public good in competition :
 Rather than have our laws defac'd,
 I'd vote a minister disgrac'd.

I strike at vice, be't where it will ;
 And what if great fools take it ill ?
 I hope, corruption, brib'ry, pension,
 One may with detestation mention :
 Think you the law (let who will take it)
 Can *scandalum magnatum* make it ?

I vent no slander, owe no grudge,
 Nor of another's conscience judge :
 At him or him I take no aim,
 Yet dare against all vice declaim.
 Shall I not censure breach of trust,
 Because knaves know themselves unjust ?
 That steward whose account is clear,
 Demands his honour may appear :
 His actions never shun the light ;
 He is, and would be prov'd upright.

But then you think my fable bears
 Allusion too to state-affairs.

I grant it does : And who's so great,
 That has the privilege to cheat ?
 If then in any future reign
 (For ministers may thirst for gain)

Corrupted hands defraud the nation;
I bar no reader's application.

An Ant there was, whose forward prate
Controll'd all matters in debate;
Whether he knew the thing or no,
His tongue eternally would go:
For he had impudence at will,
And boasted univ'fal skill.
Ambition was his point in view.
Thus by degrees to pow'r he grew.
Behold him now his drift attain:
He's made chief treas'r'er of the grain.

But as their ancient laws are just,
And punish breach of public trust,
'Tis order'd, (lest wrong application
Should starve that wise industrious nation),
That all accounts be stated clear,
Their stock, and what defray'd the year;
That auditors shall these inspect,
And public rapine thus be check'd.
For this the solemn day was set.
The auditors in council met.
The gran'ry-keeper must explain,
And balance his account of grain.
He brought (since he could not refuse 'em)
Some scraps of paper to amuse 'em.

An honest pismire, warm with zeal,
In justice to the public weal,
Thus spoke. The nation's hoard is low,
From whence does this profusion flow?

I know our annual fund's amount.
Why such expence? and where's th' account?

With wonted arrogance and pride,
The Ant in office thus reply'd.

Consider, Sirs, were secrets told,
How could the best-schem'd projects hold?
Should we state-mysteries disclose,
'Twould lay us open to our foes.

My duty and my well-known zeal
Bid me our present schemes conceal:
But, on my honour, all th' expence
(Though vast) was for the swarm's defence.

They pass'd th' account, as fair and just,
And voted him implicit trust.

Next year again the gran'ry drain'd,
He thus his innocence maintain'd.

Think how our present matters stand,
What dangers threat from ev'ry hand;
What hosts of turkeys stroll for food;
No farmer's wife but hath her brood.

Consider, when invasion's near,
Intelligence must cost us dear;
And, in this ticklish situation,
A secret told betrays the nation.
But, on my honour, all th' expence
(Though vast) was for the swarm's defence.

Again, without examination,
They thank'd his sage administration.

The year revolves. The treasure spent,
Again in secret service went.

His honour too again was pledg'd
To satisfy the charge alledg'd.

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When thus, with panic shame possess'd,
An auditor his friends address'd.

What are we? ministerial tools.
We little knaves are greater fools.
At last this secret is explor'd;
'Tis our corruption thins the hoard.
For ev'ry grain we touch'd, at least
A thousand his own heaps increas'd.
Then, for his kin, and fav'rite spies,
A hundred hardly could suffice.
Thus, for a paltry sneaking bribe,
We cheat ourselves, and all the tribe;
For all the magazine contains,
Grows from our annual toil and pains.

They vote th' account shall be inspected;
The cunning plund'rer is detected:
The fraud is sentenc'd; and his hoard,
As due, to public use restor'd.

F A B L E V.

The BEAR in a Boat.

To a COXCOMB.

THAT man must daily wiser grow,
Whose search is bent himself to know:
Impartially he weighs his scope,
And on firm reason founds his hope;