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## **Poems**

Poems and fables

**Gay, John**

**Edinburgh, 1773**

Fable III

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263877](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263877)

I court no favour, ask no place;  
 From such preferment is disgrace.  
 Within my thatch'd retreat I find  
 (What these ne'er feel) true peace of mind.

## F A B L E III.

*The BABOON and the POULTRY.*

*To a LEVEE-HUNTER.*

WE frequently misplace esteem  
 By judging men by what they seem.  
 To birth, wealth, power, we should allow  
 Precedence and our lowest bow.  
 In that is due distinction shown,  
 Esteem is virtue's right alone.

With partial eye we're apt to see  
 The man of noble pedigree,  
 We're prepossess'd my Lord inherits  
 In some degree his grandfire's merits;  
 For those we find upon record:  
 But find him nothing but my Lord.

When we with superficial view  
 Gaze on the rich, we're dazzled too.  
 We know that wealth, well understood,  
 Hath frequent pow'r of doing good,  
 Then fancy that the thing is done,  
 As if the pow'r and will were one.

Thus oft the cheated croud adore  
The thriving knaves that keep 'em poor.

The cringing train of pow'r survey;  
What creatures are so low as they!  
With what obsequiousness they bend!  
To what vile actions condescend!  
Their rise is on their meanness built,  
And flatt'ry is their smallest guilt.  
What homage, rev'rence, adoration,  
In ev'ry age, in ev'ry nation,  
Have sycophants to pow'r address'd!  
No matter who the pow'r possess'd.  
Let ministers be what they will,  
You find their levees always fill.  
Ev'n those who have perplex'd a state,  
Whose actions claim'd contempt and hate,  
Had wretches to applaud their schemes,  
Though more absurd than madmens dreams.  
When barb'rous Moloch was invok'd,  
The blood of infants only smoak'd!  
But here (unless all hist'ry lies)  
Whole realms have been a sacrifice.

Look through all courts. 'Tis pow'r we find  
The gen'ral idol of mankind;  
There worshipp'd under ev'ry shape.  
Alike the lion, fox, and ape,  
Are follow'd by time-serving slaves,  
Rich prostitutes and needy knaves.

Who then shall glory in his post?  
How frail his pride, how vain his boast!  
The followers of his prosp'rous hour  
Are as unstable as his pow'r.

Pow'r, by the breath of flatt'ry nurst,  
The more it swells, is nearer burst.  
The bubble breaks, the gewgaw ends,  
And in a dirty tear descends.

Once on a time, an ancient maid,  
By wishes and by time decay'd,  
To cure the pangs of restless thought,  
In birds and beasts amusement sought:  
Dogs, parrots, apes, her hours employ'd;  
With these alone she talk'd and toy'd.

A huge Baboon her fancy took,  
(Almost a man in size and look).  
He finger'd ev'ry thing he found,  
And mimick'd all the servants round.  
Then too his parts and ready wit  
Show'd him for ev'ry bus'ness fit.  
With all these talents, 'twas but just  
That Pug should hold a place of trust:  
So to her fav'rite was assign'd  
The charge of all her feather'd kind.  
'Twas his to tend 'em eve and morn,  
And portion out their daily corn.

Behold him now with haughty stride,  
Assume a ministerial pride.  
The morning rose. In hope of picking,  
Swans, turkeys, peacocks, ducks, and chicken,  
Fowls of all ranks surround his hut,  
To worship his important strut.  
The minister appears. The croud,  
Now here, now there, obsequious bow'd.

This prais'd his parts, and that his face,  
 T'other his dignity in place.  
 From bill to bill the flatt'ry ran.  
 He hears and bears it like a man;  
 For, when we flatter self-conceit,  
 We but his sentiments repeat.

If we're too scrupulously just,  
 What profit's in a place of trust?  
 The common practice of the great,  
 Is, to secure a snug retreat.  
 So Pug began to turn his brain  
 (Like other folks in place) on gain.

An apple-woman's stall was near,  
 Well stock'd with fruits through all the year.  
 Here ev'ry day he cramm'd his guts,  
 Hence were his hoards of pears and nuts;  
 For 'twas agreed (in way of trade)  
 His payments should in corn be made.

The stock of grain was quickly spent,  
 And no account which way it went.  
 Then too the poultry's starv'd condition  
 Caus'd speculations of suspicion.  
 The facts were prov'd beyond dispute.  
 Pug must refund his hoards of fruit;  
 And, though then minister in chief,  
 Was branded as a public thief.  
 Disgrac'd, despis'd, confin'd to chains,  
 He nothing but his pride retains.

A goose pass'd by: He knew the face,  
 Seen ev'ry levee while in place.

What, no respect! no reverence shown!  
 How saucy are these creatures grown!

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.*

**Y**OU 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.