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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable II

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So saying, on the fox he flies,
The self-convicted felon dits.

F A B L E II.

The VULTURE, the SPARROW, and other Birds.

To a FRIEND in the Country.

ERE I begin, I must premise
Our ministers are good and wise;
So, though malicious tongues apply,
Pray, what care they, or what care I?
If I am free with courts; be't known,
I ne'er presume to mean our own.
If general morals seem to joke
Our ministers, and such like folk,
A captious fool may take offence;
What then? He knows his own pretence;
I meddle with no state-affairs,
But spare my jest, to save my ears.
Our present schemes are too profound,
For Machiavel himself to sound:
To censure 'em I've no pretension;
I own they're past my comprehension.
You say your brother wants a place,
'Tis many a younger brother's case,
And that he very soon intends
To ply the court, and teaze his friends.

If there his merits chance to find
 A patriot of an open mind,
 Whose constant actions prove him just
 To both a king's and people's trust;
 May he, with gratitude, attend,
 And owe his rise to such a friend.

You praise his parts, for bus'ness fit,
 His learning, probity, and wit;
 But those alone will never do,
 Unless his patron have 'em too.

I've heard of times, (pray God defend us,
 We're not so good but he can mend us),
 When wicked ministers have trod
 On kings and people, law and God;
 With arrogance they girt the throne,
 And knew no int'rest but their own.
 Then virtue, from preferment barr'd,
 Gets nothing but its own reward.
 A gang of petty knaves attend 'em,
 With proper parts to recommend 'em.
 Then, if his patron burn with lust,
 The first in favour's pimp the first.
 His doors are never clos'd to spies,
 Who cheer his heart with double lies;
 They flatter him, his foes defame,
 So lull the pangs of guilt and shame.
 If schemes of lucre haunt his brain,
 Projectors swell his greedy train;
 Vile brokers ply his private ear
 With jobs of plunder for the year;
 All consciences must bend and ply;
 You must vote on, and not know why:

Through thick and thin you must go on ;
 One scruple, and your place is gone.

Since plagues like these have curs'd a land,
 And fav'rites cannot always stand ;
 Good courtiers should for change be ready,
 And not have principles too steady :
 For, should a knave ingross the pow'r,
 (God shield the realm from that sad hour),
 He must have rogues, or slavish fools :
 For what's a knave without his tools ?

Wherever those a people drain,
 And strut with infamy and gain ;
 I envy not their guilt and state,
 And scorn to share the public hate.
 Let their own servile creatures rise,
 By screening fraud, and venting lies :
 Give me, kind Heav'n, a private station †,
 A mind serene for contemplation :
 Title and profit I resign ;
 The post of honour shall be mine.
 My fable read, their merits view,
 Then herd who will with such a crew.

In days of yore (my cautious rhimes
 Always except the present times)
 A greedy Vulture, skill'd in game,
 Inur'd to guilt, unaw'd by shame,

† ———— When impious men bear sway,
 The post of honour is a private station.

ADDISON.

Approach'd the throne in evil hour,
 And step by step intrudes to pow'r :
 When at the royal eagle's ear
 He longs to ease the monarch's care.
 The monarch grants. With pride elate,
 Behold him minister of state !
 Around him throng'd the feather'd rout.
 Friends must be serv'd, and some must out.
 Each thinks his own the best pretension ;
 This asks a place, and that a pension.

The nightingale was set aside.
 A forward daw his room supply'd.

This bird, (says he), for bus'ness fit,
 Hath both sagacity and wit.
 With all his turns, and shifts, and tricks,
 He's docile, and at nothing sticks.
 Then with his neighbours one so free
 At all times will connive at me.
 The hawk had due distinction shown,
 For parts and talents like his own.

Thousands of hireling cocks attend him,
 As blust'ring bullies to defend him.

At once the ravens were discarded,
 And magpies with their posts rewarded.

Those fowls of omen I detest,
 That pry into another's nest.

State-lies must lose all good intent ;
 For they foresee and croak th' event.

My friends ne'er think, but talk by rote,
 Speak what they're taught, and so to vote.

When rogues like these (a Sparrow cries)
 To honours and employments rise,

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.