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## **Poems**

Poems and fables

**Gay, John**

**Edinburgh, 1773**

Fable I

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F A B L E S,

PART SECOND.

F A B L E I.

*The Dog and the Fox.*

*To a LAWYER.*

**I** Know you lawyers can, with ease,  
Twist words and meanings as you please;  
That language, by your skill made pliant,  
Will bend to favour ev'ry client;  
That 'tis the fee directs the sense,  
To make out either side's pretence.  
When you peruse the clearest case,  
You see it with a double face:  
For scepticism's your profession;  
You hold there's doubt in all expression.  
Hence is the bar with fees supply'd;  
Hence eloquence takes either side.  
Your hand would have but poultry gleaning,  
Could ev'ry man express his meaning.

VOL. II.

K

Who dares presume to pen a deed,  
 Unless you previously are feed?  
 'Tis drawn; and, to augment the cost,  
 In dull prolixity ingross.  
 And now we're well secur'd by law,  
 Till the next brother find a flaw.

Read o'er a will. Was't ever known,  
 But you could make the will your own?  
 For when you read, 'tis with intent  
 To find out meanings never meant.  
 Since things are thus, *se defendendo*,  
 I bar fallacious innuendo.

Sagacious Porta's skill could trace  
 Some beast or bird in ev'ry face.  
 The head, the eye, the nose's shape,  
 Prov'd this an owl, and that an ape.  
 When, in the sketches thus design'd,  
 Resemblance brings some friend to mind,  
 You show the piece, and give the hint,  
 And find each feature in the print;  
 So monstrous-like the portrait's found,  
 All know it, and the laugh goes round.  
 Like him I draw from gen'ral nature:  
 Is't I or you then fix the satire?

So, Sir, I beg you spare your pains  
 In making comments on my strains.  
 All private slander I detest,  
 I judge not of my neighbour's breast;  
 Party and prejudice I hate,  
 And write no libels on the state.

Shall not my fable censure vice,  
 Because a knave is over-nice?

And, lest the guilty hear and dread,  
 Shall not the decalogue be read?  
 If I lash vice in gen'ral fiction,  
 Is't I apply, or self-conviction?  
 Brutes are my theme. Am I to blame,  
 If men in morals are the same?  
 I no man call an ape or ass;  
 'Tis his own conscience holds the glass.  
 Thus void of all offence I write:  
 Who claims the fable, knows his right.

A shepherd's dog, unskill'd in sports,  
 Pick'd up acquaintance of all sorts;  
 Among the rest a fox he knew;  
 By frequent chat their friendship grew.

Says Reynard, 'Tis a cruel case,  
 That man should stigmatize our race.  
 No doubt, among us rogues you find,  
 As among dogs and human kind;  
 And yet (unknown to me and you)  
 There may be honest men and true.  
 Thus slander tries, whate'er it can,  
 To put us on the foot with man.  
 Let my own actions recommend;  
 No prejudice can blind a friend:  
 You know me free from all disguise;  
 My honour as my life I prize.

By talk like this, from all mistrust  
 The dog was cur'd, and thought him just.

As on a time the fox held forth  
 On conscience, honesty, and worth,  
 Sudden he stopt; he cock'd his ear;  
 Low dropt his brushy tail with fear.

K 2



Bless us ! the hupsters are abroad,  
What's all that clatter on the road?

Hold, says the dog, we're safe from harm;  
'Twas nothing but a false alarm.  
At yonder town 'tis market-day;  
Some farmer's wife is on the way:  
'Tis so, (I know her pye-ball'd mare),  
Dame Dobbins with her poultry-ware.

Reynard grew huff. Says he, this sneer  
From you I little thought to hear:  
Your meaning in your looks I see.

Pray, what's Dame Dobbins, friend, to me?  
Did I e'er make her poultry thinner?  
Prove that I owe the dame a dinner.

Friend, quoth the cur, I meant no harm:  
Then why so captious? why so warm?  
My words, in common acceptation,  
Could never give this provocation.  
No lamb, (for aught I ever knew),  
May be more innocent than you.

At this, gall'd Reynard wine'd, and swore  
Such language ne'er was giv'n before.

What's lamb to me? This faucey hint  
Shows me, base knave, which way you squint.  
If t'other night your master lost  
Three lambs; am I to pay the cost?  
Your vile reflections would imply  
That I'm the thief. You dog, you lie.

Thou knave, thou fool; (the dog reply'd)  
The name is just, take either side;  
Thy guilt these applications speak;  
Sirrah, 'tis conscience makes you squeak.

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.*

**E**RE 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.