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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable XLIII

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Can I such matchless sleight withstand?
 How practice hath improv'd your hand?
 But now and then I cheat the throng;
 You ev'ry day, and all day long.

F A B L E XLIII.

The council of HORSES.

UPON a time a neighing-steed,
 Who graz'd among a num'rous breed,
 With mutiny had fir'd the train,
 And spread dissension through the plain,
 On matters that concern'd the state
 The council met in grand debate:
 A colt, whose eye-balls flam'd with ire,
 Elate with strength and youthful fire,
 In haste stept forth before the rest,
 And thus the list'ning throng address'd.

Good gods! how abject is our race,
 Condemn'd to slav'ry and disgrace!
 Shall we our servitude retain,
 Because our sires have borne the chain?
 Consider, friends, your strength and might;
 'Tis conquest to assert your right.
 How cumb'rous is the gilded coach!
 The pride of man is our reproach.
 Were we design'd for daily toil,
 To drag the plough-share through the soil,

To sweat in harness through the road,
 To groan beneath the carrier's load?
 How feeble are the two-legg'd kind!
 What force is in our nerves combin'd!
 Shall then our nobler jaws submit
 To foam and champ the galling bit?
 Shall haughty man my back bestride?
 Shall the sharp spur provoke my side?
 Forbid it, Heav'ns! Reject the rein;
 Your shame, your infamy disdain.
 Let him the lion first controul,
 And still the tyger's famish'd growl.
 Let us, like them, our freedom claim,
 And make him tremble at our name.
 A general nod approv'd the cause,
 And all the circle neigh'd applause.
 When, lo! with grave and solemn pace,
 A steed advanc'd before the race,
 With age and long experience wise;
 Around he cast his thoughtful eyes,
 And, to the murmurs of the train,
 Thus spoke the Nestor of the plain.
 When I had health and strength, like you,
 The toils of servitude I knew.
 Now grateful man rewards my pains,
 And gives me all these wide domains.
 At will I crop the year's increase;
 My latter life is rest and peace.
 I grant to man we lend our pains,
 And aid him to correct the plains.
 But doth not he divide the care,
 Through all the labours of the year?

How many thousand structures rise,
 To fence us from inclement skies!
 For us he bears the fultry day,
 And stores up all our winter's hay:
 He sows, he reaps the harvest's gain;
 We share the toil, and share the grain.
 Since ev'ry creature was decreed
 To aid each other's mutual need,
 Appease your discontented mind,
 And act the part by Heav'n assign'd.
 The tumult ceas'd. The colt submitted,
 And, like his ancestors, was bitted,

F A B L E XLIV.

The HOUND and the HUNTSMAN.

Impertinence at first is born
 With heedless slight, or smiles of scorn;
 Teaz'd into wrath, what patience bears
 The noisy fool who perseveres?

The morning wakes, the Huntsman sounds,
 At once rush forth the joyful hounds,
 They seek the wood with eager pace,
 Through bush, through brier explore the chase,
 Now scatter'd wide, they try the plain,
 And snuff the dewy turf in vain.