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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable XXIII

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When thus the fop with smiles of scorn :
 Are beards by civil nations worn ?
 Ev'n Muscovites have mow'd their chins.
 Shall we, like formal Capuchins,
 Stubborn in pride, retain the mode,
 And bear about the hairy load ?
 Whene'er we through the village stray,
 Are we not mock'd along the way ;
 Insulted with loud shouts of scorn,
 By boys our beards disgrac'd and torn ?
 Were you no more with goats to dwell,
 Brother, I grant you reason well,
 Replies a bearded chief. Beside,
 If boys can mortify thy pride,
 How wilt thou stand the ridicule
 Of our whole flock ? affected fool !
 Coxcombs, distinguish'd from the rest,
 To all but coxcombs are a jest.

F A B L E XXIII.

The OLD WOMAN and her CATS.

WHO friendship with a knave hath made,
 Is judg'd a partner in the trade.
 The matron who conducts abroad
 A willing nymph, is thought a bawd ;
 And if a modest girl is seen
 With one who cures a lover's spleen,

We guess her not extremely nice,
 And only wish to know her price.
 'Tis thus, that on the choice of friends
 Our good or evil name depends.

A wrinkled hag, of wicked fame,
 Beside a little smoky flame
 Sat hov'ring, pinch'd with age and frost;
 Her shrivell'd hands, with veins embost,
 Upon her knees her weight sustains,
 While palsy shook her crazy brains:
 She mumbles forth her backward prayers,
 An untam'd scold of fourscore years.
 About her swarm'd a num'rous brood
 Of cats, who lank with hunger mew'd.

Teaz'd with their cries, her cholera grew,
 And thus she sputter'd. Hence ye crew,
 Fool that I was, to entertain
 Such imps, such fiends, a hellish train!
 Had ye been never hous'd and nurs'd,
 I for a witch had ne'er been curs'd.
 To you I owe, that crouds of boys
 Worry me with eternal noise;
 Straws laid across my pace retard,
 The horse-shoe's nail'd (each threshold's guard);
 The stunted broom the wench's hide,
 For fear that I should up and ride;
 They stick with pins my bleeding feat,
 And bid me show my secret teat.

To hear you prate would vex a faint;
 Who hath most reason of complaint?
 Replies a cat. Let's come to proof.
 Had we ne'er starv'd beneath your roof,

We had, like others of our race,
 In credit liv'd, as beasts of chace.
 'Tis infamy to serve a hag ;
 Cats are thought imps, her broom a nag ;
 And boys against our lives combine,
 Because, 'tis said, your cats have nine.

F A B L E XXIV.

The BUTTERFLY and the SNAIL.

ALL upstarts, insolent in place,
 Remind us of their vulgar race.

As, in the sun-shine of the morn,
 A butterfly (but newly born)
 Sat proudly perking on a rose ;
 With pert conceit his bosom glows ;
 His wings, (all glorious to behold),
 Bedropt with azure, jet, and gold,
 Wide he displays ; the spangled dew
 Reflects his eyes, and various hue.

His now forgotten friend, a snail,
 Beneath his house, with slimy trail
 Crawls o'er the grass ; whom when he spies,
 In wrath he to the gard'ner cries :

What means yon peasant's daily toil,
 From choaking weeds to rid the soil ?