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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

The tea-table. A town eclogue

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THE

TEA-TABLE.

A TOWN ECLOGUE.

DORIS and MELANTHE.

SAint James's noon-day bell for pray'rs had toll'd,
And coaches to the patron's levee roll'd,
When Doris rose. And now through all the room
From flow'ry tea exhales a fragrant fume.
Cup after cup they sipt, and talk'd by fits,
For Doris here, and there Melanthe sits.
Doris was young, a laughter-loving dame,
Nice of her own alike and others fame;
Melanthe's tongue could well a tale advance,
And sooner gave, than sunk a circumstance:
Lock'd in her mem'ry, secrets never dy'd;
Doris begun, Melanthe thus reply'd.

DORIS.

Sylvia the vain fantastic fop admires,
The rake's loose gallantry her bosom fires;
Sylvia like that is vain, like this she roves,
In liking them she but herself approves.

MELANTHE.

Laura rails on at men, the ſex reviles,
Their vice condemns, or at their folly ſmiles.
Why ſhould her tongue in juſt reſentment fail,
Since men at her with equal freedom rail?

DORIS.

Laſt maſquerade was Sylvia nymph-like ſeen,
Her hand a crook ſuſtain'd, her dreſs was green;
An am'rous ſhepherd led her through the croud,
The nymph was innocent, the ſhepherd vow'd;
But nymphs their innocence with ſhepherds truſt;
So both withdrew, as nymph and ſhepherd muſt.

MELANTHE.

Name but the licence of the modern ſtage,
Laura takes fire, and kindles into rage;
The whining tragic love ſhe ſcarce can bear,
But nauſeous comedy ne'er ſhock'd her ear;
Yet in the gallery mobb'd ſhe ſits ſecure,
And laughs at jeſts that turn the box demure.

DORIS.

Truſt not, ye ladies, to your beauty's pow'r;
For beauty withers like a ſhrivell'd flow'r;
Yet thoſe fair flow'rs that Sylvia's temples bind,
Fade not with ſudden blights or winter's wind;
Like thoſe her face defies the rolling years,
For art her roſes and her charms repairs.

MELANTHE.

Laura deſpiſes ev'ry outward grace,
The wanton ſparkling eye, the blooming face;
The beauties of the ſoul are all her pride,
For other beauties nature has deny'd;

If affectation ſhow a beauteous mind,
Lives there a man to Laura's merit blind?

DORIS.

Sylvia be ſure defies the town's reproach,
Whoſe *diſhabille* is ſoil'd in hackney coach;
What though the ſaſh was clos'd, muſt we conclude,
That ſhe was yielding, when her ſop was rude?

MELANTHE.

Laura learnt caution at too dear a coſt:
What fair could e'er retrieve her honour loſt?
Secret ſhe loves; and who the nymph can blame,
Who durſt not own a footman's vulgar flame?

DORIS.

Though Laura's homely taſte deſcends ſo low;
Her footman well may vie with Sylvia's beau.

MELANTHE.

Yet why ſhould Laura think it a diſgrace,
When proud Miranda's groom wears Flander's lace?

DORIS.

What, though for muſic Cynthio boaſts an ear?
Robin, perhaps, can hum an opera air.
Cynthio can bow, takes ſnuff, and dances well,
Robin talks common ſenſe, can write and ſpell:
Sylvia's vain fancy-dreſs and ſhow admires,
But 'tis the man alone whom Laura fires.

MELANTHE.

Plato's wiſe morals Laura's ſoul improve:
And this, no doubt, muſt be Platonic love!
Her ſoul to gen'rous acts was ſtill inclin'd;
What ſhows more virtue than a humble mind?

DORIS.

What though young Sylvia love the Park's cool ſhade,
And wander in the duſk the ſecret glade?
Maſqu'd and alone (by chance ſhe met her ſpark);
That innocence is weak which ſhuns the dark.

MELANTHE.

But Laura for her flame has no pretence;
Her footman is a footman too in ſenſe.
All prudes I hate, and thoſe are rightly curſt,
With ſcandal's double load, who cenſure firſt.

DORIS.

And what if Cynthio Sylvia's garter ty'd!
Who ſuch a foot and ſuch a leg would hide;
When crook-kneed Phillis can expoſe to view
Her gold-clock'd ſtocking, and her tawdry ſhoe?

MELANTHE.

If pure devotion center in the face,
If cens'ring others ſhew intrinſic grace,
If guilt to public freedoms be confin'd,
Prudes (all muſt own) are of the holy kind!

DORIS.

Sylvia diſdains reſerve, and flies conſtraint:
She neither is, nor would be thought a ſaint.

MELANTHE.

Love is a trivial paſſion, Laura cries,
May I be bleſs'd with friendſhip's ſtricter ties;
To ſuch a breaſt all ſecrets we commend;
Sure the whole drawing-room is Laura's friend.

DORIS.

At marriage Sylvia rails; who men would truſt?
Yet huſbands jealouſies are ſometimes juſt.

Her favours Sylvia ſhares among mankind,
Such gen'rous love ſhould never be confin'd.
As thus alternate chat employ'd their tongue,
With thund'ring raps the brazen knocker rung.
Laura and Sylvia came; the nymphs ariſe:
This unexpected viſit, Doris cries,
Is doubly kind! Melanthe Laura led;
Since I was laſt ſo bleſs'd my dear, ſhe ſaid,
Sure 'tis an age! they ſat; the hour was ſet;
And all again that night at ombre met.