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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Epistle V. To her grace Henrietta, dutches of Marlborough

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EPISTLE V.

TO HER GRACE

HENRIETTA,

DUTCHESS of MARLBOROUGH.

EXCUSE me, Madam, if, amidſt your tears,
A Muſe intrudes, a Muſe who feels your cares;
Numbers, like muſic, can ev'n grief controul,
And lull to peace the tumults of the ſoul.
If partners in our woes the mind relieve,
Conſider for your loſs ten thouſand grieve.
Th' affliction burdens not your heart alone;
When Marlbro' dy'd, a nation gave a groan.
Could I recite the dang'rous toils he choſe,
To bleſs his country with a fix'd repoſe,
Could I recount the labours he o'ercame,
To raiſe his country to the pitch of fame,
His councils, ſieges, his victorious fights,
To ſave his country's laws and native rights,

No father (ev'ry gen'rous heart muſt own)
Has ſtronger fondneſs to his darling ſhown.
Britannia's ſighs a double loſs deplore,
Her father and her hero is no more!
Does Britain only pay her debt of tears?
Yes. Holland ſighs, and for her freedom fears.
When Gallia's monarch pour'd his waſteful bands,
Like a wide deluge, o'er her level lands,
She ſaw her frontier tow'rs in ruin lie,
Ev'n Liberty had prun'd her wings to fly;
Then Marlbro' came, defeated Gallia fled,
And ſhatter'd Belgia rais'd her languid head,
In him ſecure, as in her ſtrongeſt mound,
That keeps the raging ſea within its bound.
O Germany, remember Hockſtet's plain,
Where proſtrate Gallia bled at ev'ry vein!
Think on the reſcue of th' imperial throne,
Then think on Marlbro's death without a groan!
Apollo kindly whiſpers me: 'Be wiſe,
'How to his glory ſhall thy numbers riſe?
'The force of verſe another theme might raiſe,
'But here the merit muſt tranſcend the praiſe.
'Haſt thou, preſumptuous bard, that godlike flame
'Which with the ſun ſhall laſt, and Marlbro's
'fame?
'Then ſing the man. But who can boaſt this fire?
'Reſign the taſk, and ſilently admire.'
Yet, ſhall he not in worthy lays be read?
Raiſe Homer, call up Virgil from the dead.
But he requires not the ſtrong glare of verſe,
Let punctual hiſtory his deeds rehearſe,

Let truth in native purity appear,
You'll find Achilles and Æneas there.
Is this the comfort which the Muſe beſtows?
I but indulge and aggravate your woes.
A prudent friend, who ſeeks to give relief,
Ne'er touches on the ſpring that mov'd the grief.
Is it not barb'rous to the ſighing maid
To mention broken vows and nymphs betray'd?
Would you the ruin'd merchant's ſoul appeaſe,
With talk of ſands, and rocks, and ſtormy ſeas?
Ev'n while I ſtrive on Marlbro's fame to riſe,
I call up ſorrow in a daughter's eyes.
Think on the laurels that his temples ſhade,
Laurels that (ſpite of time) ſhall never fade;
Immortal Honour has enroll'd his name,
Detraction's dumb, and Envy put to ſhame;
Say, who can ſoar beyond his eagle flight?
Has he not reach'd to glory's utmoſt height?
What could he more, had Heav'n prolong'd his date?
All human pow'r is limited by fate.
Forbear. 'Tis cruel further to commend;
I wake your ſorrow, and again offend.
Yet ſure your goodneſs muſt forgive a crime,
Which will be ſpread through ev'ry age and clime;
Though in your life ten thouſand ſummers roll,
And though you compaſs earth from pole to pole,
Where'er men talk of war and martial fame,
They'll mention Marlborough's and Caeſar's name.
But vain are all the counſels of the Muſe,
A ſoul, like yours, could not a tear refuſe:

Could you your birth and filial love forego,
Still ſighs muſt riſe, and gen'rous ſorrow flow;
For when from earth ſuch matchleſs worth re-
moves,
A great mind ſuffers. Virtue virtue loves.

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