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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Epistle II. To the right honourable the Earl of Burlington

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EPISTLE II.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE

EARL of BURLINGTON.

A Journey to EXETER.

WHILE you, my Lord, bid ſtately piles aſcend,
Or in your Chiſwick bow'rs enjoy your friend;
Where Pope unloads the bows within his reach,
The purple vine, blue plum, and bluſhing peach;
I journey far—You knew fat bards might tire,
And, mounted, ſent me forth your truſty ſquire.
'Twas on the day when city-dames repair
To take their weekly doſe of Hide-park air;
When forth we trot: No carts the road infeſt,
For ſtill on Sundays country-horſes reſt.
Thy gardens, Kenſington, we leave unſeen;
Through Hammerſmith jog on to Turnhamgreen:
That Turnhamgreen, which dainty pigeons fed,
But feeds no more; for Solomon * is dead.

* A man lately famous for feeding pigeons at Turnhamgreen.

Three dusty miles reach Brentford's tedious town,
For dirty streets, and white-legg'd chickens known:
Thence o'er wide shrubby heaths, and furrow'd lanes,
We come, where Thames divides the meads of Stanes.
We ferry'd o'er; for late the winter's flood
Shook her frail bridge, and tore her piles of wood.
Prepar'd for war, now Bagshot-heath we cross,
Where broken gamesters oft repair their loss.
At Hartley-row the foaming bit we prest,
While the fat landlord welcom'd ev'ry guest.
Supper was ended, healths the glasses crown'd;
Our host extoll'd his wine at ev'ry round;
Relates the justices late meeting there,
How many bottles drank, and what their cheer;
What lords had been his guests in days of yore,
And prais'd their wisdom much, their drinking more.

Let travellers the morning vigils keep:
The morning rose, but we lay fast asleep.
Twelve tedious miles we bore the sultry sun,
And Popham-lane was scarce in sight by one:
The straggling village harbour'd thieves of old,
'Twas here the stage-coach'd lass resign'd her gold;
That gold which had in London purchas'd gowns,
And sent her home a belle to country towns.
But robbers haunt no more the neighb'ring wood:
Here unown'd infants find their daily food;
For should the maiden-mother nurse her son,
'Twould spoil her match when her good name is gone.
Our jolly hostess nineteen children bore,
Nor fail'd her breast to suckle nineteen more.

Be juſt, ye prudes, wipe off the long arrear:
Be virgins ſtill in town, but mothers here.
Sutton we paſs, and leave her ſpacious down,
And with the ſetting ſun reach Stockbridge town.
O'er our parch'd tongue the rich metheglin glides,
And the red dainty trout our knife divides.
Sad melancholy ev'ry viſage wears;
What, no election come in ſev'n long years!
† Of all our race of mayors, ſhall Snow alone
Be by Sir Richard's dedication known?
Our ſtreets no more with tides of ale ſhall float,
Nor coblers feaſt three years upon one vote.
Next morn, twelve miles led o'er th' unbounded plain,
Where the cloak'd ſhepherd guides his fleecy train.
No leafy bow'rs a noon-day ſhelter lend,
Nor from the chilly dews at night defend:
With wondrous art, he counts the ſtraggling flock,
And by the ſun informs you what's a clock.
How are our ſhepherds fallen from antient days!
No Amaryllis chaunts alternate lays;
From her no liſt'ning echoes learn to ſing,
Nor with his reed the jocund vallies ring.
Here ſheep the paſture hide, there harveſts bend,
See Sarum's ſteeple o'er yon hill aſcend;
Our horſes faintly trot beneath the heat,
And our keen ſtomachs know the hour to eat.

† Sir Richard Steel, member for Stockbridge, wrote a treatiſe, called The Importance of Dunkirk conſidered, and dedicated it to Mr John Snow, Bailiff of Stockbridge.

Who can forſake thy walls, and not admire
The proud cathedral, and the lofty ſpire?
What ſempſtreſs has not prov'd thy ſciſſars good?
From hence firſt came th' intriguing riding-hood.
Amid three boarding-ſchools *, well ſtock'd with
miſſes,
Shall three knight-errants ſtarve for want of kiſſes?
O'er the green turf the miles ſlide ſwift away,
And Blandford ends the labours of the day.
The morning roſe; the ſupper reck'ning paid,
And our due fees diſcharg'd to man and maid,
The ready oſtler near the ſtirrup ſtands,
And as we mount, our half-pence load his hands.
Now the ſteep hill fair Dorcheſter o'erlooks,
Border'd by meads, and waſh'd by ſilver brooks.
Here ſleep my two companions eyes ſuppreſt,
And, propt in elbow-chairs, they ſnoring reſt:
I weary ſit, and with my pencil trace
Their painful poſtures, and their eyeleſs face;
Then dedicate each glaſs to ſome fair name,
And on the ſaſh the diamond ſcrawls my flame.
Now o'er true Roman way our horſes ſound,
Graevius would kneel, and kiſs the ſacred ground.
On either ſide low fertile vallies lie,
The diſtant proſpects tire the travelling eye.
Through Bridport's ſtony lanes our rout we take,
And the proud ſteep deſcend to Morcombe's lake.
As hearſes paſs'd, our landlord robb'd the pall,
And with the mournful 'ſcutcheon hung his hall.

* There are three boarding ſchools in this town.

On unadulterate wine we here regale,
And ſtrip the lobſter of his ſcarlet mail.
We climb'd the hills, when ſtarry night aroſe,
And Axminſter affords a kind repoſe.
The maid ſubdu'd by fees, her trunk unlocks,
And gives the cleanly aid of dowlas ſmokes.
Mean time our ſhirts her buſy fingers rub,
While the ſoap lathers o'er the foaming tub.
If womens' geer ſuch pleaſing dreams incite,
Lend us your ſmocks, ye damſels, ev'ry night!
We riſe, our beards demand the barber's art;
A female enters, and performs the part.
The weighty golden chain adorns her neck,
And three gold rings her ſkilful hand bedeck:
Smooth o'er our chin her eaſy fingers move,
Soft as when Venus ſtroak'd the beard of Jove.
Now from the ſteep, 'midſt ſcatter'd farms and groves,
Our eye through Honiton's fair valley roves.
Behind us ſoon the buſy town we leave,
Where fineſt lace induſtrious laſſes weave.
Now ſwelling clouds roll'd on; the rainy load
Stream'd down our hats, and ſmok'd along the road;
When (O bleſs'd ſight!) a friendly ſign we ſpy'd,
Our ſpurs are ſlacken'd from the horſes ſide;
For ſure a civil hoſt the houſe commands,
Upon whoſe ſign this courteous motto ſtands;
This is the ancient hand, and eke the pen;
Here is for horſes hay, and meat for men.
How rhyme would flouriſh, did each ſon of fame
Know his own genius, and direct his flame!

Then he, that could not epic flights rehearſe,
Might ſweetly mourn in elegiac verſe.
But were his muſe for elegy unfit,
Perhaps a diſtich might not ſtrain his wit;
If epigram offend, his harmleſs lines
Might in gold letters ſwing on ale-houſe ſigns.
Then Hobbinol might propagate his bays,
And Tuttlefields record his ſimple lays;
Where rhymes like theſe might lure the nurſes eyes,
While gaping infants ſquall for farthing pies:
Treat here, ye ſhepherds blithe, ye damſels ſweet,
For pies and cheeſecakes are for damſels meet.
Then Maurus in his proper ſphere might ſhine,
And theſe proud numbers grace great William's ſign:
* *This is the man, this the Naſſovian, whom*
I nam'd the brave deliverer to come.
But now the driving gales ſuſpend the rain,
We mount our ſteeds, and Devon's city gain.
Hail happy native land!—but I forbear,
What other counties muſt with envy hear.

* Blackmore's Prince Arthur, Book V.