Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

# Poems

Poems on several occasions

**Gay, John**

**Edinburgh, 1773**

Epistle I. To a lady

urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263885

Visual Library

# EPISTLE I.

## TO A LADY.

*Occaſioned by the Arrival of her* ROYAL HIGHNESS.

MADAM, to all your cenſures I ſubmit,
And frankly own I ſhould long ſince have writ:
You told me, ſilence would be thought a crime,
And kindly ſtrove to teaze me into rhyme;
No more let trifling themes your Muſe employ,
Nor laviſh verſe to paint a female toy:
No more on plains with rural damſels ſport,
But ſing the glories of the Britiſh court.
By your commands and inclination ſway'd,
I call'd th' unwilling Muſes to my aid;
Reſolv'd to write, the noble theme I choſe,
And to the Princeſs thus the poem roſe.
'Aid me, bright Phoebus; aid, ye ſacred Nine;
'Exalt my genius, and my verſe refine.
'My ſtrains with Carolina's name I grace,
'The lovely parent of our royal race.
'Breathe ſoft, ye winds, ye waves in ſilence ſleep;
'Let proſp'rous breezes wanton o'er the deep,
'Swell the white ſails, and with the ſtreamers play,
'To waſt her gently o'er the wat'ry way.'

Here I to Neptune form'd a pompous pray'r,
To reign the winds, and guard the royal fair;
Bid the blue Tritons ſound their twiſted ſhells,
And call the Nereids from their pearly cells.
Thus my warm zeal had drawn the Muſe along,
Yet knew no method to conduct her ſong:
I then reſolv'd ſome model to purſue,
Perus'd French critics, and began anew.
Long open panegyric drags at beſt,
And praiſe is only praiſe when well addreſs'd.
Straight Horace for ſome lucky ode I ſought;
And all along I trac'd him thought by thought:
This new performance to a friend I ſhow'd;
For ſhame, ſays he, what, imitate an ode!
I'd rather ballads write, and Grubſtreet-lays,
Than pillage Caeſar for my patron's praiſe:
One common fate all imitators ſhare,
To ſave mince-pies, and cap the grocer's ware.
Vex'd at the charge, I to the flames commit
Rhymes, ſimilies, lords names, and ends of wit;
In blotted ſtanzas ſcraps of odes expire,
And fuſtian mounts in pyramids of fire.
Ladies, to you I next inſcrib'd my lay,
And writ a letter in familiar way:
For ſtill impatient till the Princeſs came,
You from deſcription wiſh'd to know the dame.
Each day my pleaſing labour larger grew,
For ſtill new graces open'd to my view.
Twelve lines ran on to introduce the theme,
And then I thus purſu'd the growing ſcheme:
'Beauty and wit were ſure by nature join'd,
'And charms are emanations of the mind;

'The ſoul tranſpiercing through the ſhining frame,
'Forms all the graces of the princely dame;
'Benevolence her converſation guides,
'Smiles on her cheek, and in her eye reſides.
'Such harmony upon her tongue is found,
'As ſoftens Engliſh to Italian ſound:
'Yet in thoſe ſounds ſuch ſentiments appear,
'As charm the judgment, while they ſoothe the ear.
'Religion's chearful flame her boſom warms,
'Calms all her hours, and brightens all her charms.
'Henceforth, ye fair, at chapel mind your pray'rs,
'Nor catch your lover's eyes with artful airs;
'Reſtrain your looks, kneel more, and whiſper leſs,
'Nor moſt devoutly criticize on dreſs.
'From her, form all your characters of life,
'The tender mother, and the faithful wife.
'Oft have I ſeen her little infant train,
'The lovely promiſe of a future reign;
'Obſerv'd with pleaſure ev'ry dawning grace,
'And all the mother opening in their face;
'The ſon ſhall add new honours to the line,
'And early with paternal virtues ſhine;
'When he the tale of Audenard repeats,
'His little heart with emulation beats;
'With conqueſts yet to come his boſom glows,
'He dreams of triumphs, and of vanquiſh'd foes.
'Each year with arts ſhall ſtore his rip'ning brain,
'And from his grandſire he ſhall learn to reign.'
Thus far I'd gone: Propitious riſing gales
Now bid the ſailor hoiſt the ſwelling ſails,
Fair Carolina lands; the cannons roar,
White Albion's cliffs reſound from ſhore to ſhore.

Behold the bright original appear
All praiſe is faint when Carolina's near.
Thus to the nation's joy, but poet's coſt,
The Princeſs came, and my new plan was loſt.
Since all my ſchemes were baulk'd, my laſt reſort,
I left the Muſes, to frequent the court;
Penſive each night, from room to room I walk'd,
To one I bow'd, and with another talk'd;
Inquir'd what news, or ſuch a lady's name,
And did the next day, and the next, the ſame.
Places, I found, were daily given away,
And yet no friendly gazette mention'd Gay.
I aſk'd a friend what method to purſue;
He cry'd, I want a place as well as you.
Another aſk'd me, why I had not writ;
A poet owes his fortune to his wit.
Straight I reply'd, With what a courtly grace,
Flows eaſy verſe from him that has a place!
Had Virgil ne'er at court improv'd his ſtrains,
He ſtill had ſung of flocks and homely ſwains;
And had not Horace ſweet preferment found,
The Roman lyre had never learnt to ſound.
Once ladies fair in homely guiſe I ſung,
And with their names wild woods and mountains rung:
Oh teach me now to ſtrike a ſofter ſtrain!
The court refines the language of the plain.
You muſt, cries one, the miniſtry rehearſe,
And with each patriot's name prolong your verſe.
But ſure this truth to poets ſhould be known,
That praiſing all alike, is praiſing none.

Another told me, If I wiſh'd ſucceſs,
To ſome diſtinguiſh'd lord I muſt addreſs;
One whoſe high virtues ſpeak his noble blood,
One always zealous for his country's good;
Where valour and ſtrong eloquence unite,
In council cautious, reſolute in fight;
Whoſe gen'rous temper prompts him to defend,
And patronize the man that wants a friend.
You have, 'tis true, the noble patron ſhown;
But I, alas! am to Argyle unknown.
Still ev'ry one I met in this agreed,
That writing was my method to ſucceed;
But now preferments ſo poſſeſs'd my brain,
That ſcarce I could produce a ſingle ſtrain:
Indeed I ſometimes hammer'd out a line,
Without connection, as without deſign.
One morn upon the Princeſs this I writ,
An epigram that boaſts more truth than wit.
'The pomp of titles eaſy faith might ſhake,
'She ſcorn'd an empire for religion's ſake:
'For this, on earth the Britiſh crown is giv'n,
'And an immortal crown decreed in heav'n.'
Again, while GEORGE's virtues rais'd my thought,
The following lines prophetic fancy wrought.
'Methinks I ſee ſome bard, whoſe heav'nly rage
'Shall riſe in ſong, and warm a future age;
'Look back thro' time, and, rapt in wonder, trace,
'The glorious ſeries of the Brunſwick race.
'From the firſt George the godlike kings deſcend,
'A line which only with the world ſhall end.
'The next a gen'rous prince renown'd in arms,
'And bleſs'd, long bleſs'd in Carolina charms;

'From these the rest. 'Tis thus secure in peace,
'We plow the fields, and reap the year's increase:
'Now Commerce, wealthy goddess, rears her head,
'And bids Britannia's fleets their canvas spread;
'Unnumber'd ships the peopled ocean hide,
'And wealth returns with each revolving tide.'

Here paus'd the sullen Muse, in haste I dress'd,
And through the croud of needy courtiers press'd;
Though unsuccessful, happy whilst I see
Those eyes that glad a nation, shine on me.