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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

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Trivia. Book I

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T R I V I A.

B O O K I.

Of the Implements for walking the Streets, and Signs of the Weather.

THROUGH winter ſtreets to ſteer your courſe aright,
How to walk clean by day, and ſafe by night,
How joſtling crowds with prudence to decline,
When to aſſert the wall, and when reſign,
I ſing: Thou, Trivia, goddeſs, aid my ſong,
Through ſpacious ſtreets conduct thy bard along;
By thee tranſported, I ſecurely ſtray
Where winding alleys lead the doubtful way,
The ſilent court, and op'ning ſquare explore,
And long perplexing lanes untrod before.
To pave thy realm, and ſmooth thy broken ways,
Earth from her womb a flinty tribute pays;
For thee the ſturdy paviour thumps the ground,
Whilſt ev'ry ſtroke his lab'ring lungs reſound;
For thee the ſcavenger bids kennels glide
Within their bounds, and heaps of dirt ſubſide.
My youthful boſom burns with thirſt of fame,
From the great theme to build a glorious name,

To tread in paths to ancient bards unknown,
And bind my temples with a civic crown;
But more, my country's love demands the lays,
My country's be the profit, mine the praiſe.
When the black youth at choſen ſtands rejoice,
And *Clean your ſhoes* reſounds from ev'ry voice;
When late their miry ſides ſtage-coaches ſhow,
And their ſtiff horſes through the town move ſlow;
When all the Mall in leafy ruin lies,
And damſels firſt renew their oyſter cries:
Then let the prudent walker ſhoes provide,
Not of the Spaniſh or Morocco hide;
The wooden heel may raiſe the dancer's bound,
And with the ſcallop'd top his ſtep be crown'd:
Let firm, well-hammer'd ſoles protect thy feet
Through freezing ſnows, and rains, and ſoaking ſleet.
Should the big laſt extend the ſhoes too wide,
Each ſtone will wrench th' unwary ſtep aſide:
The ſudden turn may ſtretch the ſwelling vein,
Thy cracking joint unhinge, or ancle ſprain;
And when too ſhort the modiſh ſhoes are worn,
You'll judge the ſeaſons by your ſhooting corn.
Nor ſhould it prove thy leſs important care,
To chuſe a proper coat for winter's wear.
Now in thy trunk thy D'Oily habit fold,
The ſilken drugget ill can fence the cold;
The freeze's ſpungy nap is ſoak'd with rain,
And ſhow'rs ſoon drench the camlet's cockled grain.
True Witney * broad-cloth, with its ſhag unſhorn,
Unpierc'd is in the laſting tempeſt worn:

* A town in Oxfordſhire.

Be this the horſeman's fence; for who would wear
Amid the town the ſpoils of Ruſſia's bear?
Within the roquelaure's claſp thy hands are pent,
Hands, that ſtretch'd forth invading harms prevent.
Let the loop'd bavaroy the fop embrace,
Or his deep cloak beſpatter'd o'er with lace.
That garment beſt the winter's rage defends,
Whoſe ample form without one plait depends;
By various * names in various counties known,
Yet held in all the true Surtout alone;
Be thine of Kerſey firm, though ſmall the coſt,
Then brave unwet the rain, unchill'd the froſt.
If the ſtrong cane ſupport thy walking hand,
Chairmen no longer ſhall the wall command:
Ev'n ſturdy carmen ſhall thy nod obey,
And rattling coaches ſtop to make thee way:
This ſhall direct thy cautious tread aright,
Though not one glaring lamp enliven night.
Let beaus their canes with amber tipt produce,
Be theirs for empty ſhow, but thine for uſe.
In gilded chariots while they loll at eaſe,
And lazily inſure a life's diſeaſe;
While ſofter chairs the tawdry load convey
To court, to White's †, aſſemblies, or the play;
Roſy-complexion'd health thy ſteps attends,
And exerciſe thy laſting youth defends.
Imprudent men heav'n's choiceſt gifts profane;
Thus ſome beneath their arm ſupport the cane:

* A joſeph, wrap-raſcal, &c.
† White's chocolate-houſe in St James's ſtreet.

The dirty point oft checks the careless pace,
And miry spots thy clean cravat disgrace:
O! may I never such misfortune meet,
May no such vicious walkers croud the street,
May providence o'ershade me with her wings,
While the bold muse experienc'd dangers sings.
Not that I wander from my native home,
And (tempting perils) foreign cities roam.
Let Paris be the theme of Gallia's muse,
Where slav'ry treads the streets in wooden shoes;
Nor do I rove in Belgia's frozen clime,
And teach the clumsy boor to skate in rhime,
Where, if the warmer clouds in rain descend,
No miry ways industrious steps offend,
The rushing flood from sloping pavements pours,
And blackens the canals with dirty show'rs.
Let others Naples smoother streets rehearse,
And with proud Roman structures grace their verse,
Where frequent murders wake the night with groans,
And blood in purple torrents dyes the stones;
Nor shall the muse through narrow Venice stray,
Where Gondolas their painted oars display.
O happy streets, to rumbling wheels unknown,
No carts, no coaches shake the floating town!
Thus was of old Britannia's city bless'd,
Ere pride and luxury her sons possess'd:
Coaches and chariots yet unfashion'd lay,
Nor late invented chairs perplex'd the way:
Then the proud lady trip'd along the town,
And tuck'd up petticoats secur'd her gown,
Her rosy cheek with distant visits glow'd,
And exercise unartful charms bestow'd:

But ſince in braided gold her foot is bound,
And a long trailing mantua ſweeps the ground,
Her ſhoe diſdains the ſtreet; the lazy fair
With narrow ſteps affects a limping air.
Now gaudy pride corrupts the laviſh age,
And the ſtreets flame with glaring equipage;
The tricking gameſter inſolently rides,
With Loves and Graces on his chariot ſides;
In ſaucy ſtate the griping broker ſits,
And laughs at honeſty, and trudging wits:
For you, O honeſt men! theſe uſeful lays
The muſe prepares; I ſeek no other praiſe.

When ſleep is firſt diſturb'd by morning cries;
From ſure prognoſtics learn to know the ſkies,
Leſt you of rheums and coughs at night complain;
Surpris'd in dreary fogs, or driving rain.
When ſuffocating miſts obſcure the morn,
Let thy worſt wig, long us'd to ſtorms, be worn;
This knows the powder'd footman, and with care,
Beneath his flapping hat ſecures his hair.
Be thou, for every ſeaſon, juſtly dreſt,
Nor brave the piercing froſt with open breaſt;
And when the burſting clouds a deluge pour,
Let thy ſurtout defend the drenching ſhow'r.

The changing weather certain ſigns reveal,
Ere winter ſheds her ſnow, or froſts congeal.
You'll ſee the coals in brighter flame aſpire,
And ſulphur tinge with blue the riſing fire:
Your tender ſhins the ſcorching heat decline,
And at the dearth of coals the poor repine;
Before her kitchen hearth, the nodding dame
In flannel mantle wrapt, enjoys the flame;

Hov'ring, upon her feeble knees ſhe bends,
And all around the grateful warmth aſcends.
Nor do leſs certain ſigns the town adviſe,
Of milder weather, and ſerener ſkies.
The ladies gaily dreſs'd, the Mall adorn
With various dyes, and paint the ſunny morn:
The wanton fawns with friſking pleaſure range,
And chirping ſparrows greet the welcome change:
Not that their minds with greater ſkill are fraught,
Endu'd by inſtinct, or by reaſon taught,
The ſeaſons operate on ev'ry breaſt;
'Tis hence that fawns are briſk, and ladies dreſs'd.
When on his box the nodding coachman ſnores,
And dreams of fancy'd fares; when tavern-doors
The chairmen idly croud; then ne'er refuſe
To truſt thy buſy ſteps in thinner ſhoes.
But when the ſwinging ſigns your ears offend
With creaking noiſe, then rainy floods impend;
Soon ſhall the kennels ſwell with rapid ſtreams,
And ruſh in muddy torrents to the Thames.
The bookſeller, whoſe ſhop's an open ſquare,
Foreſees the tempeſt, and with early care
Of learning ſtrips the rails; the rowing crew,
To tempt a fair, cloath all their tilts in blue:
On hoſiers poles depending ſtockings ty'd,
Flag with the ſlacken'd gale from ſide to ſide;
Church-monuments foretel the changing air;
Then Niobe diſſolves into a tear,
And ſweats with ſecret grief: You'll hear the ſounds
Of whiſtling winds, ere kennels break their bounds;
Ungrateful odours common-ſhores diffuſe,
And dropping vaults diſtil unwholeſome dews,

Ere the tiles rattle with the ſmoaking ſhow'r,
And ſpouts on heedleſs men their torrents pour.
All ſuperſtition from thy breaſt repel.
Let cred'lous boys, and pratt'ling nurſes tell,
How, if the feſtival of Paul be clear,
Plenty from lib'ral horn ſhall ſtrow the year;
When the dark ſkies diſſolve in ſnow or rain,
The lab'ring hind ſhall yoke the ſteer in vain;
But if the threat'ning winds in tempeſts roar,
Then War ſhall bathe her waſteful ſword in gore.
How, if on Swithin's feaſt the welkin lours,
And ev'ry pent-houſe ſtreams with haſty ſhow'rs,
Twice twenty days ſhall clouds their fleeces drain,
And waſh the pavements with inceſſant rain.
Let no ſuch vulgar tales debaſe thy mind;
Nor Paul nor Swithin rule the clouds and wind.
If you the precepts of the muſe deſpiſe,
And ſlight the faithful warning of the ſkies,
Others you'll ſee, when all the town's afloat,
Wrapt in th' embraces of a kerſey coat,
Or double-bottom'd freeze; their guarded feet
Defy the muddy dangers of the ſtreet,
While you, with hat unloop'd, the fury dread
Of ſpouts high-ſtreaming, and with cautious tread
Shun ev'ry daſhing pool; or idly ſtop,
To ſeek the kind protection of a ſhop.
But bus'neſs ſummons; now with haſty ſcud
You juſtle for the wall; the ſpatter'd mud
Hides all thy hoſe behind; in vain you ſcow'r,
Thy wig, alas! uncurl'd, admits the ſhow'r.
So fierce Alecto's ſnaky treſſes fell,
When Orpheus charm'd the rig'rous power of hell,

Or thus hung Glaucus' beard, with briny dew
Clotted and ſtrait, when firſt his am'rous view
Surpris'd the bathing fair; the frighted maid
Now ſtands a rock, transform'd by Circe's aid.
Good houſewives all the winter's rage deſpiſe,
Defended by the riding-hood's diſguiſe:
Or underneath th' umbrella's oily ſhed,
Safe through the wet on clinking pattens tread.
Let Perſian dames th' umbrella's ribs diſplay,
To guard their beauties from the ſunny ray;
Or ſweating ſlaves ſupport the ſhady load,
When eaſtern monarchs ſhow their ſtate abroad;
Britain in winter only knows its aid,
To guard from chilly ſhow'rs the walking maid.
But, O! forget not, Muſe, the patten's praiſe,
That female implement ſhall grace thy lays;
Say from what art divine th' invention came,
And from its origin deduce its name.
Where Lincoln wide extends her fenny ſoil,
A goodly yeoman liv'd, grown white with toil;
One only daughter bleſs'd his nuptial bed,
Who from her infant hand the poultry fed:
Martha (her careful mother's name) ſhe bore,
But now her careful mother was no more.
Whilſt on her father's knee the damſel play'd,
Patty he fondly call'd the ſmiling maid;
As years increas'd her ruddy beauty grew,
And Patty's fame o'er all the village flew.
Soon as the grey-ey'd morning ſtreaks the ſkies,
And in the doubtful day the woodcock flies,
Her cleanly pale the pretty houſewife bears,
And, ſinging, to the diſtant field repairs:

And when the plains with ev'ning dews are ſpread,
The milky burden ſmoaks upon her head,
Deep through a miry lane ſhe pick'd her way;
Above her ankle roſe the chalky clay.

Vulcan by chance the blooming maiden ſpies,
With innocence and beauty in her eyes:
He ſaw, he lov'd; for yet he ne'er had known
Sweet innocence and beauty meet in one.
Ah, Muſciber! recal thy nuptial vows,
Think on the graces of thy Paphian ſpouſe;
Think how her eyes dart unexhauſted charms;
And canſt thou leave her bed for Patty's arms?

The Lemnian pow'r forſakes th' realms above,
His boſom glowing with terreſtrial love:
Far in the lane a lonely hut he found,
No tenant ventur'd on th' unwholeſome ground;
Here ſmoaks his forge, he bares his ſinewy arm,
And early ſtrokes the ſounding anvil warm:
Around his ſhop the ſteelly ſparkles flew,
As for the ſteed he ſhap'd the bending ſhoe.

When blue-ey'd Patty near his window came,
His anvil reſts, his forge forgets to flame.
To hear his ſoothing tales ſhe feigns delays;
What woman can reſiſt the force of praiſe?

At firſt ſhe coyly ev'ry kiſs withſtood,
And all her cheek was fluſh'd with modeſt blood:
With headleſs nails he now ſurrounds her ſhoes,
To ſave her ſteps from rains and piercing dews:
She lik'd his ſoothing tales, his preſents wore,
And granted kiſſes, but would grant no more.
Yet winter chill'd her feet, with cold ſhe pines,
And on her cheek the fading roſe declines;

No more her humid eyes their luſtre boaſt,
And in hoarſe ſounds her melting voice is loſt.
This Vulcan ſaw, and in his heav'nly thought,
A new machine mechanic fancy wrought,
Above the mire her ſhelter'd ſteps to raiſe,
And bear her ſafely through the wint'ry ways.
Strait the new engine on his anvil glows,
And the pale virgin on the patten roſe.
No more her lungs are ſhook with drooping rheums,
And on her cheek reviving beauty blooms.
The god obtain'd his ſuit; though flatt'ry fail,
Preſents with female virtue muſt prevail.
The patten now ſupports each frugal dame,
Which from the blue-ey'd Patty takes the name.