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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Saturday; or, the flights

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SATURDAY;

OR, THE

FLIGHTS.

BOUZYBEUS.

SUBLIMER ſtrains, O ruſtic Muſe, prepare;
Forget a while the barn and dairy's care;
Thy homely voice to loftier numbers raiſe,
The drunkard's flights require ſonorous lays;
With Bouzybeus' ſongs exalt thy verſe,
While rocks and woods the various notes rehearſe.
'Twas in the ſeaſon when the reapers toil
Of the ripe harveſt 'gan to rid the ſoil;
Wide through the field was ſeen a goodly rout,
Clean damſels bound the gather'd ſheaves about;
The lads with ſharpen'd hook, and ſweating brow,
Cut down the labours of the winter plow.
To the near hedge young Suſan ſteps aſide,
She feign'd her coat or garter was unty'd:
Whate'er ſhe did, ſhe ſtoop'd adown unſeen,
And merry reapers, what they liſt, will ween.

Soon ſhe roſe up, and cry'd with voice ſo ſhrill
That Echo anſwer'd from the diſtant hill;
The youths and damſels ran to Suſan's aid,
Who thought ſome adder had the laſs diſmay'd.
When faſt aſleep they Bouzybeus ſpy'd,
His hat and oaken ſtaff lay cloſe beſide:
That Bouzybeus who could ſweetly ſing,
Or with the roſin'd bow torment the ſtring:
That Bouzybeus who with finger's ſpeed
Could call ſoft warblings from the breathing reed:
That Bouzybeus who with jocund tongue,
Ballads, and roundelays, and catches ſung.
They loudly laugh to ſee the damſel's fright,
And in diſport ſurround the drunken wight.
Ah Bouzybee, why didſt thou ſtay ſo long?
The mugs were large, the drink was wond'rous ſtrong!
Thou ſhould'ſt have left the fair before 'twas night,
But thou ſat'ſt toping till the morning light.
Cic'ly, briſk maid, ſteps forth before the rout,
And kiſs'd with ſmacking lips the ſnoring lout;
For cuſtom ſays, *Whoe'er this venture proves,*
For ſuch a kiſs demands a pair of gloves.
By her example, Dorcas bolder grows,
And plays a tickling ſtraw within his noſe;
He rubs his noſtril, and in wonted joke
The ſneering ſwains with ſtamm'ring ſpeech beſpoke:
To you, my lads, I'll ſing my carols o'er;
As for the maids—I've ſomething elſe in ſtore.
No ſooner 'gan he raiſe his tuneful ſong,
But lads and laſſes round about him throng.
Not ballad-ſinger, plac'd above the crowd,
Sings with a note ſo ſhrilling, ſweet, and loud;

Nor parish-clerk, who calls the psalm so clear,
Like Bouzybeus soothes th' attentive ear.
Of Nature's laws his carols first begun †,
Why the grave owl can never face the sun;
For owls, as swains observe, detest the light,
And only sing and seek their prey by night.
How turnips hide their swelling heads below,
And how the closing colworts upward grow;
How Will-a-wisp misleads night-faring clowns,
O'er hills, and sinking bogs, and pathless downs.
Of stars he told that shoot with shining trail,
And of the glow-worm's light that gilds his tail.
He sung where woodcocks in the summer feed,
And in what climates they renew their breed;
Some think to northern coasts their flight they tend,
Or to the moon in midnight hours ascend.
Where swallows in the winter's season keep,
And how the drowsy bat and dormouse sleep.
How nature does the puppy's eyelid close,
Till the bright sun has nine times set and rose;
For huntsmen by their long experience find,
That puppies still nine rolling suns are blind.
Now he goes on, and sings of fairs and shows,
For still new fairs before his eyes arose.
How pedlars stalls with glitt'ring toys are laid,
The various fairings of the country-maid.
Long silken laces hang upon the twine,
And rows of pins and amber bracelets shine;

† Our swain had possibly read Tusser, from whence he might have collected these philosophical observations.

How the tight lafs knives, combs, and feiffars fpies,
And looks on thimbles with defiring eyes.
Of lott'ries next with tuneful note he told,
Where filver fpoons are won, and rings of gold.
The lads and laffes trudge the ftreet along,
And all the fair is crowded in his fong.
The mountebank now treads the ftage, and fells
His pills, his balfams, and his ague-fpells;
Now o'er and o'er the nimble tumbler fprings,
And on the rope the vent'rous maiden fwings;
Jack Pudding, in his party-colour'd jacket,
Toffes the glove, and jokes at ev'ry packet.
Of raree-fhows he fung, and Punch's fates,
Of pockets pick'd in crowds, and various cheats.

Then fad he fung, *The children in the wood*,
Ah, barb'rous uncle, ftain'd with infant blood!
How blackberries they pluck'd in defarts wild,
And, fearlefs, at the glitt'ring faulchion fmil'd;
Their little corps the Robin-red-breaft found,
And ftrow'd with pious bill the leaves around.
Ah, gentle birds! if this verfe lafts fo long,
Your names fhall live for ever in my fong.

For buxom Joan he fung the doubtful ftrife *,
How the fly failor made the maid a wife.

To louder ftrains he rais'd his voice, to tell
What woful wars in Chevy-chace befel,
When *Piercy drove the deer with hound and horn,*
Wars to be wept by children yet unborn!

* A fong in the comedy of Love for Love, beginning, A foldier and a failor, &c.

Ah With'rington, more years thy life had crown'd,
If thou hadſt never heard the horn or hound!
Yet ſhall the ſquire who fought on bloody ſtumps,
By future bards be wail'd in doleful dumps.
All in the land of Eſſex next he chaunts *,
How to ſleek mares ſtarch quakers turn gallants:
How the brave brother ſtood on bank ſo green,
Happy for him if mares had never been.
Then he was ſeiz'd with a religious qualm,
And on a ſudden ſung the hundredth pſalm.
He ſung of Taffey Welch, and Sawney Scot,
Lilybullero, and the Iriſh Trot.
Why ſhould I tell of Bateman, or of Shore †,
Or Wantley's dragon, ſlain by valiant Moore,
The bower of Roſamond, or Robin Hood,
And how the *graſs now grows where Troy town ſtood*?
His carols ceas'd: The liſt'ning maids and ſwains
Seem ſtill to hear ſome ſoft imperfect ſtrains.
Sudden he roſe; and, as he reels along,
Swears kiſſes ſweet ſhould well reward his ſong.
The damſels laughing fly: The giddy clown
Again upon a wheat-ſheaf drops a-down;
The pow'r that guards the drunk his ſleep attends,
Till, ruddy, like his face, the ſun deſcends.

* A ſong of Sir J. Denham's. See his poems.
† Old Engliſh ballads.