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Poems

Poems on several occasions

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The fan. A poem. Book I

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THE FAN,

A POEM.

BOOK I.

I SING that graceful toy, whoſe waving play
With gentle gales relieves the ſultry day;
Not the wide fan by Perſian dames diſplay'd,
Which o'er their beauty caſts a grateful ſhade;
Nor that long known in China's artful land,
Which, while it cools the face, fatigues the hand:
Nor ſhall the Muſe in Aſian climates rove,
To ſeek in Indoſtan ſome ſpicy grove,
Where ſtretch'd at eaſe the panting lady lies,
To ſhun the fervor of meridian ſkies,
While ſweating ſlaves catch ev'ry breeze of air,
And with wide-ſpreading fans refreſh the fair;
No buſy gnats her pleaſing dreams moleſt,
Inflame her cheek, or ravage o'er her breaſt;
But artificial Zephyrs round her fly,
And mitigate the fever of the ſky.

Nor ſhall Bermudas long the Muſe detain,
Whoſe fragrant foreſts bloom in Waller's ſtrain,
Where breathing ſweets from ev'ry field aſcend,
And the wild woods with golden apples bend;
Yet let me in ſome od'rous ſhade repoſe,
Whilſt in my verſe the fair Palmetto grows:

Like the tall pine it ſhoots its ſtately head,
From the broad top depending branches ſpread;
No knotty limbs the taper body bears,
Hung on each bough a ſingle leaf appears,
Which ſhrivell'd in its infancy remains,
Like a clos'd fan, nor ſtretches wide its veins,
But, as the ſeaſons in their circles run,
Opes its ribb'd ſurface to the nearer ſun:
Beneath this ſhade the weary peaſant lies,
Plucks the broad leaf, and bids the breezes riſe.
Stay, wand'ring Muſe, nor rove in foreign climes,
To thy own native ſhore confine thy rhimes.
Aſſiſt, ye Nine, your loftieſt notes employ,
Say what celeſtial ſkill contriv'd the toy:
Say how this inſtrument of love began,
And in immortal ſtrains diſplay the Fan.
Strephon had long confeſs'd his am'rous pain,
Which gay Corinna rally'd with diſdain:
Sometimes in broken words he ſigh'd his care,
Look'd pale, and trembled when he view'd the fair;
With bolder freedoms now the youth advanc'd,
He dreſs'd, he laugh'd, he ſung, he rhim'd, he dance'd:
Now call'd more pow'rful preſents to his aid,
And, to ſeduce the miſtreſs, brib'd the maid;
Smooth flatt'ry in her ſofter hours apply'd,
The ſureſt charm to bend the force of pride:
But ſtill unmov'd remains the ſcornful dame,
Inſults her captive, and derides his flame.
When Strephon ſaw his vows diſpers'd in air,
He ſought in ſolitude to loſe his care;

Relief in ſolitude he ſought in vain,
It ſerv'd, like muſic, but to feed his pain.
To Venus now the ſlighted boy complains,
And calls the goddeſs in theſe tender ſtrains.

O potent queen! from Neptune's empire ſprung,
Whoſe glorious birth admiring Nereids ſung,
Who 'midſt the fragrant plains of Cyprus rove,
Whoſe radiant preſence gilds the Paphian grove,
Where to thy name a thouſand altars riſe,
And curling clouds of incenſe hide the ſkies:
O beauteous goddeſs, teach me how to move,
Inſpire my tongue with eloquence of love,
If loſt Adonis e'er thy boſom warm'd,
If e'er his eyes, or godlike figure charm'd,
Think on thoſe hours when firſt you felt the dart,
Think on the reſtleſs fever of thy heart;
Think how you pin'd in abſence of the ſwain:
By thoſe uneaſy minutes know my pain.
Ev'n while Cydippe to Diana bows,
And at her ſhrine renews her virgin vows,
The lover, taught by thee, her pride o'ercame;
She reads his oaths, and feels an equal flame:
Oh, may my flame, like thine, Acontius, prove,
May Venus dictate, and reward my love.
When crouds of ſuitors Atalanta try'd,
She wealth and beauty, wit and fame defy'd;
Each daring lover with adventrous pace
Purſu'd his wiſhes in the dang'rous race;
Like the ſwift hind, the bounding damſel flies,
Strains to the goal, the diſtanc'd lover dies.
Hippomenes, O Venus! was thy care,
You taught the ſwain to ſtay the flying fair;

Thy golden present caught the virgin's eyes,
She stoops: He rushes on, and gains the prize.
Say, Cyprian deity, what gift, what art,
Shall humble into love Corinna's heart?
If only some bright toy can charm her sight,
Teach me what present may suspend her flight.
Thus the desponding youth his flame declares:
The goddess with a nod his passion hears.

Far in Cythera stands a spacious grove,
Sacred to Venus and the God of Love;
Here the luxuriant myrtle rears her head,
Like the tall oak the fragrant branches spread;
Here Nature all her sweets profusely pours,
And paints th' enamell'd ground with various flow'rs;
Deep in the gloomy glade a grotto bends,
Wide through the craggy rock an arch extends;
The rugged stone is cloth'd with mantling vines,
And round the cave the creeping woodbine twines.

Here busy Cupids, with pernicious art,
Form the stiff bow, and forge the fatal dart;
All share the toil; while some the bellows ply,
Others with feathers teach the shafts to fly:
Some with joint force whirl round the stony wheel,
Where streams the sparkling fire from temper'd steel;
Some point their arrows with the nicest skill,
And with the warlike store their quivers fill.

A diff'rent toil another forge employs;
Here the loud hammer fashions female toys:
Hence is the fair with ornament supply'd,
Hence sprung the glitt'ring implements of pride;

Each trinket that adorns a modern dame,
First to these little artists ow'd its frame.
Here an unfinish'd diamond crosslet lay,
To which soft lovers adoration pay;
There was the polish'd crystal bottle seen,
That with quick scents revives the modish spleen:
Here the yet rude unjointed snuff-box lies,
Which serves the railly'd fop for smart replies;
There piles of paper rose in gilded reams,
The future records of the lover's flames;
Here clouded canes 'midst heaps of toys are found,
And inlaid tweezer-cases strow the ground.
There stands the toilette, nursery of charms,
Compleatly furnish'd with bright beauty's arms;
The patch, the powder-box, pulville, perfumes,
Pins, paint, a flatt'ring glass, and black lead-combs.
The toilsome hours in diff'rent labour slide,
Some work the file, and some the graver guide;
From the loud anvil the quick blow rebounds,
And their rais'd arms descend in tuneful sounds.
Thus when Semiramis, in ancient days,
Bade Babylon her mighty bulwarks raise;
A swarm of lab'rers diff'rent tasks attend!
Here pullies make the pond'rous oak ascend,
With echoing strokes the craggy quarry groans;
While there the chissel forms the shapeless stones;
The weighty mallet deals resounding blows,
Till the proud battlements her tow'rs inclose.
Now Venus mounts her car, she shakes the reins,
And steers her turtles to Cythera's plains;

Strait to the grot with graceful ſtep ſhe goes,
Her looſe ambroſial hair behind her flows:
The ſwelling bellows heave for breath no more,
All drop their ſilent hammers on the floor;
In deep ſuſpenſe the mighty labour ſtands,
While thus the goddeſs ſpoke her mild commands.
Induſtrious Loves, your preſent toils forbear,
A more important taſk demands your care;
Long has the ſcheme employ'd my thoughtful mind,
By judgment ripen'd, and by time refin'd.
That glorious bird have ye not often ſeen
Who draws the car of the celeſtial queen?
Have ye not oft ſurvey'd his varying dyes,
His tail all gilded o'er with Argus' eyes?
Have ye not ſeen him in the ſunny day
Unfurl his plumes, and all his pride diſplay,
Then ſuddenly contract his dazzling train,
And with long-trailing feathers ſweep the plain?
Learn from this hint, let this inſtruct your art;
Thin taper ſticks muſt form one center part:
Let theſe into the quadrant's form divide,
The ſpreading ribs with ſnowy paper hide;
Here ſhall the pencil bid its colours flow,
And make a miniature creation grow.
Let the machine in equal foldings cloſe,
And now its plaited ſurface wide diſpoſe.
So ſhall the fair her idle hand employ,
And grace each motion with the reſtleſs toy,
With various play bid grateful Zephyrs riſe,
While love in ev'ry grateful Zephyr flies.
The Maſter Cupid traces out the lines,
And with judicious hand the draught deſigns;

Th' expecting Loves with joy the model view,
And the joint labour eagerly purſue.
Some ſlit their arrows with the niceſt art,
And into ſticks convert the ſhiver'd dart;
The breathing bellows wake the ſleeping fire,
Blow off the cinders, and the ſparks aſpire;
Their arrow's point they ſoften in the flame,
And ſounding hammers break its barbed frame:
Of this, the little pin they neatly mold,
From whence their arms the ſpreading ſticks unfold:
In equal plaits they now the paper bend,
And at juſt diſtance the wide ribs extend,
Then on the frame they mount the limber ſkreen,
And finiſh inſtantly the new machine.

The goddeſs pleas'd, the curious work receives,
Remounts her chariot, and the grotto leaves;
With the light fan ſhe moves the yielding air,
And gales, till then unknown, play round the fair.

Unhappy lovers, how will you withſtand,
When theſe new arms ſhall grace your charmer's hand?
In ancient times, when maids in thought were pure,
When eyes were artleſs, and the look demure,
When the wide ruff the well-turn'd neck inclos'd,
And heaving breaſts within the ſtays repos'd,
When the cloſe hood conceal'd the modeſt ear,
Ere black lead-combs diſown'd the virgin's hair;
Then in the muff unactive fingers lay,
Nor taught the fan in fickle forms to play.

How are the ſex improv'd in am'rous arts,
What new-found ſnares they bait for human hearts!

When kindling war the ravag'd globe ran o'er,
And fatten'd thirſty plains with human gore,
At firſt, the brandiſh'd arm the jav'lin threw,
Or ſent wing'd arrows from the twanging yew;
In the bright air the dreadful faulchion ſhone,
Or whiſtling ſlings diſmiſs'd th' uncertain ſtone.
Now men thoſe leſs deſtructive arms deſpiſe,
Wide-waſteful death from thund'ring cannon flies;
One hour with more battalions ſtrows the plain,
Than were of yore in weekly battles ſlain.
So love with fatal airs the nymph ſupplies,
Her dreſs diſpoſes, and directs her eyes.
The boſom now its panting beauties ſhews,
Th' experienc'd eye reſiſtleſs glances throws;
Now vary'd patches wander o'er the face,
And ſtrike each gazer with a borrow'd grace;
The fickle head-dreſs ſinks, and now aſpires
A tow'ry front of lace on branching wires.
The curbing hair in tortur'd ringlets flows,
Or round the face in labour'd order grows.

How ſhall I ſoar, and on unweary wing
Trace varying habits upward to their ſpring!
What force of thought, what numbers can expreſs
Th' inconſtant equipage of female dreſs?
How the ſtrait ſtays the ſlender waiſt conſtrain?
How to adjuſt the mantua's ſweeping train?
What fancy can the petticoat ſurround,
With the capacious hoop of whalebone bound?
But ſtay, preſumptuous Muſe, nor boldly dare
The toilette's ſacred myſteries declare;
Let a juſt diſtance be to beauty paid;
None here muſt enter but the truſty maid.

Should you the wardrobe's magazine rehearſe,
And gloſſy mantuas ruſtle in my verſe;
Should you the rich brocaded ſuit unfold,
Where riſing flow'rs grow ſtiff with froſted gold,
The dazzled Muſe would from her ſubject ſtray,
And in a maze of faſhions loſe her way.