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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Rural sports, a georgic

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RURAL SPORTS,

A GEORGIC.

INSCRIBED TO MR POPE.

———Securi praelia ruris
Pandimus.

NEMESIAN.

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RURAL SPORTS,

A GEORGIC.

To Mr POPE.

CANTO I.

YOU, who the ſweets of rural life have known,
Deſpiſe th' ungrateful hurry of the town;
In Windſor groves your eaſy hours employ,
And, undiſturb'd, yourſelf and Muſe enjoy:
Thames liſtens to thy ſtrains, and ſilent flows,
And no rude wind through ruſtling oſiers blows,
While all his wond'ring Nymphs around thee throng,
To hear the Syrens warble in thy ſong.
But I, who ne'er was bleſs'd by Fortune's hand,
Nor bright'ned plough-ſhares in paternal land,
Long in the noiſy town have been immur'd,
Reſpir'd its ſmoak, and all its cares endur'd,
Where news and politics divide mankind,
And ſchemes of ſtate involve th' uneaſy mind;
Faction embroils the world; and ev'ry tongue
Is mov'd by flatt'ry, or with ſcandal hung:
Friendſhip, for ſylvan ſhades, the palace flies,
Where all muſt yield to intereſt's dearer ties;

Each rival Machiavel with envy burns,
And honeſty forſakes them all by turns;
While calumny upon each party's thrown,
Which both promote, and both alike diſown.
Fatigu'd at laſt, a calm retreat I choſe,
And ſooth'd my harraſs'd mind with ſweet repoſe,
Where fields, and ſhades, and the refreſhing clime,
Inſpire the ſylvan ſong, and prompt my rhime.
My Muſe ſhall rove through flow'ry meads and plains,
And deck with rural ſports her native ſtrains,
And the ſame road ambitiouſly purſue,
Frequented by the Mantuan ſwain, and you.
'Tis not that rural ſports alone invite,
But all the grateful country breathes delight;
Here blooming Health exerts her gentle reign,
And ſtrings the ſinews of th' induſtrious ſwain.
Soon as the morning lark ſalutes the day,
Through dewy fields I take my frequent way,
Where I behold the farmer's early care,
In the revolving labours of the year.
When the freſh Spring in all her ſtate is crown'd,
And high luxuriant graſs o'erſpreads the ground,
The lab'rer with the bending ſcythe is ſeen,
Shaving the ſurface of the waving green,
Of all her native pride diſrobes the land,
And meads lays waſte before his ſweeping hand;
While with the mounting ſun the meadow glows,
The fading herbage round he looſely throws;
But if ſome ſign portend a laſting ſhow'r,
Th' experienc'd ſwain foreſees the coming hour,
His ſun-burnt hands the ſcatt'ring fork forſake,
And ruddy damſels ply the ſaving rake;

In rising hills the fragrant harvest grows,
And spreads along the field in equal rows.
Now when the height of heav'n bright Phoebus gains,
And level rays cleave wide the thirsty plains,
When heifers seek the shade and cooling lake,
And in the middle path-way basks the snake;
O lead me, guard me from the sultry hours,
Hide me, ye forests, in your closest bowers,
Where the tall oak his spreading arms entwines,
And with the beech a mutual shade combines;
Where flows the murm'ring brook, inviting dreams,
Where bord'ring hazle overhangs the streams,
Whose rolling current winding round and round,
With frequent falls makes all the wood resound;
Upon the mossy couch my limbs I cast,
And ev'n at noon the sweets of ev'ning taste.
Here I peruse the Mantuan Georgic strains,
And learn the labours of Italian swains;
In ev'ry page I see new landscapes rise,
And all Hesperia opens to my eyes.
I wander o'er the various rural toil,
And know the nature of each diff'rent soil;
This waving field is gilded o'er with corn,
That spreading trees with blushing fruit adorn:
Here I survey the purple vintage grow,
Climb round the poles, and rise in graceful row:
Now I behold the steed curvet and bound,
And paw with restless hoof the smoaking ground:
The dew-lap'd bull now chafes along the plain,
While burning love ferments in ev'ry vein;

His well-arm'd front againſt his rival aims,
And by the dint of war his miſtreſs claims:
The careful inſect 'midſt his works I view,
Now from the flow'rs exhauſt the fragrant dew;
With golden treaſures load his little thighs,
And ſtear his diſtant journey through the ſkies:
Some againſt hoſtile drones the hive defend;
Others with ſweets the waxen cells diſtend:
Each in the toil his deſtin'd office bears,
And in the little bulk a mighty ſoul appears.

Or when the ploughman leaves the taſk of day,
And trudging homeward whiſtles on the way;
When the big-udder'd cows with patience ſtand,
Waiting the ſtroakings of the damſel's hand;
No warbling chears the woods; the feather'd choir
To court kind ſlumbers to their ſprays retire;
When no rude gale diſturbs the ſleeping trees,
Nor aſpen leaves confeſs the gentleſt breeze;
Engag'd in thought, to Neptune's bounds I ſtray,
To take my farewell of the parting day;
Far in the deep the ſun his glory hides,
A ſtreak of gold the ſea and ſky divides;
The purple clouds their amber linings ſhow,
And edg'd with flame rolls ev'ry wave below:
Here penſive I behold the fading light,
And o'er the diſtant billow loſe my ſight.

Now night in ſilent ſtate begins to riſe,
And twinkling orbs beſtrow th' uncloudy ſkies;
Her borrow'd luſtre growing Cynthia lends,
And on the main a glitt'ring path extends;
Millions of worlds hang in the ſpacious air,
Which round their ſuns their annual circle ſteer.

Sweet contemplation elevates my ſenſe,
While I ſurvey the works of providence.
O could the Muſe in loftier ſtrains rehearſe,
The glorious Author of the univerſe,
Who reins the winds, gives the vaſt ocean bounds,
And circumſcribes the floating worlds their rounds,
My ſoul ſhould overflow in ſongs of praiſe,
And my Creator's name inſpire my lays!
As in ſucceſſive courſe the ſeaſons roll,
So circling pleaſures recreate the ſoul.
When genial ſpring a living warmth beſtows,
And o'er the year her verdant mantle throws,
No ſwelling inundation hides the grounds,
But cryſtal currents glide within their bounds;
The finny brood their wonted haunts forſake,
Float in the ſun, and ſkim along the lake,
With frequent leap they range the ſhallow ſtreams,
Their ſilver coats reflect the dazzling beams.
Now let the fiſherman his toils prepare,
And arm himſelf with ev'ry wat'ry ſnare;
His hooks, his lines peruſe with careful eye,
Increaſe his tackle, and his rode retie.
When floating clouds their ſpongy fleeces drain,
Troubling the ſtreams with ſwift-deſcending rain,
And waters tumbling down the mountain's ſide,
Bear the looſe ſoil into the ſwelling tide;
Then, ſoon as vernal gales begin to riſe,
And drive the liquid burden through the ſkies,
The fiſher to the neighb'ring current ſpeeds,
Whoſe rapid ſurface purls, unknown to weeds;
Upon a riſing border of the brook
He ſits him down, and ties the treach'rous hook;

Now expectation chears his eager thought,
His bosom glows with treasures yet uncaught,
Before his eyes a banquet seems to stand,
Where ev'ry guest applauds his skilful hand.
Far up the stream the twisted hair he throws,
Which down the murm'ring current gently flows;
When if or chance or hunger's pow'rful sway
Directs the roving trout this fatal way,
He greedily sucks in the twining bait,
And tugs and nibbles the fallacious meat:
Now, happy fisherman, now twitch the line!
How thy road bends! behold, the prize is thine!
Cast on the bank, he dies with gasping pains,
And trickling blood his silver mail distains.
You must not ev'ry worm promiscuous use,
Judgment will tell thee proper bait to chuse;
The worm that draws a long immod'rate size
The trout abhors, and the rank morsel flies;
And if too small, the naked fraud's in sight,
And fear forbids, while hunger does invite.
Those baits will best reward the fisher's pains,
Whose polish'd tails a shining yellow stains:
Cleanse them from filth, to give a tempting gloss,
Cherish the sully'd reptile race with moss;
Amid the verdant bed they twine, they toil,
And from their bodies wipe their native soil.
But when the sun displays his glorious beams,
And shallow rivers flow with silver streams,
Then the deceit the scaly breed survey,
Bask in the sun, and look into the day.
You now a more delusive art must try,
And tempt their hunger with the curious fly.

To frame the little animal, provide
All the gay hues that wait on female pride:
Let nature guide thee; ſometimes golden wire
The ſhining bellies of the fly require;
The peacock's plumes thy tackle muſt not fail,
Nor the dear purchaſe of the ſable's tail.
Each guady bird ſome ſlender tribute brings,
And lends the growing inſect proper wings:
Silks of all colours muſt their aid impart,
And ev'ry fur promote the fiſher's art.
So the gay lady, with expenſive care,
Borrows the pride of land, of ſea, and air;
Furs, pearls, and plumes, the glitt'ring thing diſ-
plays,
Dazzles our eyes, and eaſy hearts betrays.
Mark well the various ſeaſons of the year,
How the ſucceeding inſect-race appear;
In this revolving moon one colour reigns,
Which in the next the fickle trout diſdains.
Oft have I ſeen a ſkilful angler try
The various colours of the treach'rous fly;
When he with fruitleſs pain hath ſkim'd the brook,
And the coy fiſh rejects the ſkipping hook,
He ſhakes the boughs that on the margin grow,
Which o'er the ſtream a waving foreſt throw;
When if an inſect fall, (his certain guide)
He gently takes him from the whirling tide:
Examines well his form with curious eyes,
His gaudy veſt, his wings, his horns and ſize.
Then round his hook the choſen fur he winds,
And on the back a ſpectled feather binds;

So the juſt colours ſhine through ev'ry part,
That nature ſeems to live again in art.
Let not thy wary ſteps advance too near,
While all thy hope hangs on a ſingle hair:
The new-form'd inſect on the water moves,
The ſpeckled trout the curious ſnare approves;
Upon the curling ſurface let it glide,
With nat'ral motion from thy hand ſupply'd,
Againſt the ſtream now gently let it play,
Now in the rapid eddy roll away.
The ſcaly ſhoals float by, and, ſeiz'd with fear,
Behold their fellows toſs'd in thinner air;
But ſoon they leap, and catch the ſwimming bait,
Plunge on the hook, and ſhare an equal fate.

When a briſk gale againſt the current blows,
And all the wat'ry plain in wrinkles flows,
Then let the fiſherman his art repeat,
Where bubbling eddies favour the deceit.
If an enormous ſalmon chance to ſpy
The wanton errors of the floating fly,
He lifts his ſilver gills above the flood,
And greedily ſucks in th' unfaithful food;
Then downward plunges with the fraudful prey,
And bears with joy the little ſpoil away.
Soon in ſmart pain he feels the dire miſtake,
Laſhes the wave, and beats the foamy lake:
With ſudden rage he now aloft appears,
And in his eye convulſive anguiſh bears;
And now again, impatient of the wound,
He rolls and wreathes his ſhining body round;
Then headlong ſhoots beneath the daſhing tide,
The trembling fins the boiling wave divide;

Now hope exalts the fiſher's beating heart,
Now he turns pale, and fears his dubious art;
He views the tumbling fiſh with longing eyes;
While the line ſtretches with th' unwieldy prize;
Each motion humours with his ſteady hands,
And one ſlight hair the mighty bulk commands:
Till tir'd at laſt, deſpoil'd of all his ſtrength,
The game athwart the ſtream unfolds his length.
He now, with pleaſure, views the gaſping prize
Gnaſh his ſharp teeth, and roll his blood-ſhot eyes;
Then draws him to the ſhore with artful care,
And lifts his noſtrils in the ſick'ning air:
Upon the burden'd ſtream he floating lies,
Stretching his quiv'ring fins, and gaſping dies.

Would you preſerve a num'rous finny race?
Let your fierce dogs the rav'nous otter chaſe;
Th' amphibious monſter ranges all the ſhores,
Darts through the waves, and ev'ry haunt explores:
Or let the gin his roving ſteps betray,
And ſave from hoſtile jaws the ſcaly prey.

I never wander where the bordering reeds
O'erlooks the muddy ſtream, whoſe tangling weeds
Perplex the fiſher; I, nor chuſe to bear
The thieviſh nightly net, nor barbed ſpear;
Nor drain I ponds the golden carp to take,
Nor trowle for pikes, diſpeoplers of the lake.
Around the ſteel no tortur'd worm ſhall twine,
No blood of living inſect ſtain my line;
Let me, leſs cruel, caſt the feather'd hook,
With pliant rod athwart the pebbled brook,
Silent along the mazy margin ſtray,
And with the fur-wrought fly delude the prey.

CANTO II.

NOW, ſporting Muſe, draw in the flowing reins,
Leave the clear ſtreams a while for ſunny plains.
Should you the various arms and toils rehearſe,
And all the fiſherman adorn thy verſe;
Should you the wide encircling net diſplay,
And in its ſpacious arch encloſe the ſea,
Then haul the plunging load upon the land,
And with the ſoal and turbot hide the ſand;
It would extend the growing theme too long,
And tire the reader with the wat'ry ſong.
Let the keen hunter from the chaſe refrain,
Nor render all the ploughman's labour vain,
When Ceres pours out plenty from her horn,
And clothes the fields with golden ears of corn.
Now, now, ye reapers, to your taſk repair,
Haſte, ſave the product of the bounteous year:
To the wide-gathering hook long furrows yield,
And riſing ſheaves extend through all the field.
Yet if for ſylvan ſports thy boſom glow,
Let thy fleet greyhound urge his flying ſoe.
With what delight the rapid courſe I view!
How does my eye the circling race purſue!
He ſnaps deceitful air with empty jaws,
The ſubtle hare darts ſwift beneath his paws;
She flies, he ſtretches, now with nimble bound
Eager he preſſes on, but overſhoots his ground;
She turns, he winds, and ſoon regains the way,
Then tears with goary mouth the ſcreaming prey.

What various ſports does rural life afford!
What unbought dainties heap the wholeſome board!
Nor leſs the ſpaniel, ſkilful to betray,
Rewards the fowler with the feather'd prey.
Soon as the lab'ring horſe with ſwelling veins,
Hath ſafely hous'd the farmer's doubtful gains,
To ſweet repaſt th' unwary partridge flies,
With joy amid the ſcatter'd harveſt lies;
Wand'ring in plenty, danger he forgets,
Nor dreads the ſlav'ry of entangling nets.
The ſubtle dog ſcours with ſagacious noſe
Along the field, and ſnuffs each breeze that blows;
Againſt the wind he takes his prudent way,
While the ſtrong gale directs him to the prey;
Now the warm ſcent aſſures the covey near,
He treads with caution, and he points with fear;
Then (leſt ſome centry-fowl the fraud deſcry,
And bid his fellows from the danger fly)
Cloſe to the ground in expectation lies,
Till in the ſnare the flutt'ring covey riſe.
Soon as the bluſhing light begins to ſpread,
And glancing Phoebus gilds the mountain's head,
His early flight th' ill-fated partridge takes,
And quits the friendly ſhelter of the brakes:
Or when the ſun caſts a declining ray,
And drives his chariot down the weſtern way,
Let your obſequious ranger ſearch around,
Where yellow ſtubble withers on the ground;
Nor will the roving ſpy direct in vain,
But num'rous coveys gratify thy pain.
When the meridian ſun contracts the ſhade,
And friſking heifers ſeek the cooling glade;

Or when the country floats with ſudden rains,
Or driving miſts deface the moiſten'd plains;
In vain his toils th' unſkilful fowler tries,
While in thick woods the feeding partridge lies.
Nor muſt the ſporting verſe the gun forbear,
But what's the fowler's be the Muſe's care.
See how the well-taught pointer leads the way:
The ſcent grows warm; he ſtops; he ſprings the prey;
The flutt'ring coveys from the ſtubble riſe,
And on ſwift wing divide the ſounding ſkies;
The ſcatt'ring lead purſues the certain ſight,
And death in thunder overtakes their flight.
Cool breathes the morning air, and Winter's hand
Spreads wide her hoary mantle o'er the land;
Now to the copſe thy leſſer ſpaniel take,
Teach him to range the ditch, and force the brake;
Not cloſeſt coverts can protect the game:
Hark! the dog opens; take thy certain aim;
The woodcock flutters; how he wav'ring flies!
The wood reſounds: He wheels, he drops, he dies.
The tow'ring hawk let future poets ſing,
Who terror bears upon his ſoaring wing:
Let them on high the frighted hern ſurvey,
And lofty numbers paint their airy fray.
Nor ſhall the mounting lark the Muſe detain,
That greets the morning with his early ſtrain;
When, midſt his ſong, the twinkling glaſs betrays;
While from each angle flaſh the glancing rays,
And in the ſun the tranſient colours blaze,
Pride lures the little warbler from the ſkies:
The light-enamour'd bird deluded dies.

But ſtill the chaſe, a pleaſing taſk, remains;
The hound muſt open in theſe rural ſtrains.
Soon as Aurora drives away the night,
And edges eaſtern clouds with roſy light,
The healthy huntſman, with the chearful horn,
Summons the dogs, and greets the dappled morn;
The jocund thunder wakes th' enliven'd hounds,
They rouſe from ſleep, and anſwer ſounds for ſounds;
Wide through the ſurzy field their rout they take,
Their bleeding boſoms force the thorny brake:
The flying game their ſmoaking noſtrils trace,
No bounding hedge obſtructs their eager pace;
The diſtant mountains echo from afar,
And hanging woods reſound the flying war:
The tuneful noiſe the ſprightly courſer hears,
Paws the green turf, and pricks his trembling ears;
The ſlacken'd rein now gives him all his ſpeed,
Back flies the rapid ground beneath the ſteed;
Hills, dales, and foreſts far behind remain,
While the warm ſcent draws on the deep-mouth'd train.
Where ſhall the trembling hare a ſhelter find?
Hark! death advances in each guſt of wind!
New ſtratagems, and doubling wiles ſhe tries,
Now circling turns, and now at large ſhe flies;
Till ſpent at laſt, ſhe pants, and heaves for breath,
Then lays her down, and waits devouring death.
But ſtay, advent'rous Muſe, haſt thou the force
To wind the twiſted horn, to guide the horſe?
To keep thy ſeat unmov'd haſt thou the ſkill,
O'er the high gate, and down the headlong hill?

Can'ſt thou the ſtag's laborious chace direct?
Or the ſtrong fox through all his arts detect?
The theme demands a more experienc'd lay:
Ye mighty hunters, ſpare this weak eſſay.

O happy plains, remote from war's alarms,
And all the ravages of hoſtile arms!
And happy ſhepherds, who ſecure from fear,
On open downs preſerve your fleecy care!
Whoſe ſpacious barns groan with increaſing ſtore,
And whirling flails disjoint the cracking floor:
No barb'rous ſoldier, bent on cruel ſpoil,
Spreads deſolation o'er your fertile ſoil;
No trampling ſteed lays waſte the ripen'd grain,
Nor crackling fires devour the promis'd gain:
No flaming beacons caſt their blaze afar,
The dreadful ſignal of invaſive war;
No trumpet's clangor wounds the mother's ear,
And calls the lover from his ſwooning fair.

What happineſs the rural maid attends,
In chearful labour while each day ſhe ſpends!
She gratefully receives what heav'n has ſent,
And, rich in poverty, enjoys content:
(Such happineſs, and ſuch unblemiſh'd fame
Ne'er glad the boſom of the courtly dame)
She never feels the ſpleen's imagin'd pains,
Nor melancholy ſtagnates in her veins;
She never loſes life in thoughtleſs eaſe,
Nor on the velvet couch invites diſeaſe;
Her home-ſpun dreſs in ſimple neatneſs lies,
And for no glaring equipage ſhe ſighs:
Her reputation, which is all her boaſt,
In a malicious viſit ne'er was loſt:

No midnight maſquerade her beauty wears,
And health, not paint, the fading bloom repairs.
If love's ſoft paſſion in her boſom reign,
An equal paſſion warms her happy ſwain;
No homebred jars her quiet ſtate controul,
Nor watchful jealouſy torments her ſoul;
With ſecret joy ſhe ſees her little race
Hang on her breaſt, and her ſmall cottage grace:
The fleecy ball their buſy fingers cull,
Or from the ſpindle draw the lengthning wool:
Thus flow her hours with conſtant peace of mind,
Till age the lateſt thread of life unwind.

Ye happy fields, unknown to noiſe and ſtrife,
The kind rewarders of induſtrious life;
Ye ſhady woods, where once I us'd to rove,
Alike indulgent to the Muſe and love;
Ye murm'ring ſtreams that in meanders roll,
The ſweet compoſers of the penſive ſoul,
Farewel—The city calls me from your bow'rs;
Farewel amuſing thoughts and peaceful hours.

No midnight masquerade her beauty wears,
And health, not paint, the fading bloom repairs.
If love's soft passion in her bosom reign,
An equal passion warms her happy swain;
No homebred jars her quiet state controul,
Nor watchful jealousy torments her soul;
With secret joy the fees her little race
Hang on her breast, and her small cottage grace:
The fleecy ball their busy fingers cull,
Or from the spindle draw the lengthning wool:
Thus flow her hours with constant peace of mind,
Till age the latest thread of life unwind.

Ye happy fields, unknown to noise and strife,
The kind rewarders of industrious life;
Ye shady woods, where once I us'd to rove,
Alike indulgent to the Muse and love;
Ye murm'ring streams that in meanders roll,
The sweet composers of the pensive soul,
Farewel—The city calls me from your bow'rs;
Farewel amusing thoughts and peaceful hours.