Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Canto II

urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263885

Visual Library

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.