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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable XI

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The bookfeller, who heard him speak,
 And saw him turn a page of Greek,
 Thought, what a genius have I found!
 Then thus address'd with bow profound,

Learn'd Sir, if you'd employ your pen
 Against the senseless sons of men,
 Or write the history of Siam,
 No man is better pay than I am;
 Or, since you're learn'd in Greek, let's see
 Something against the Trinity.

When wrinkling with a sneer his trunk,
 Friend, quoth the elephant, you're drunk;
 E'en keep your money, and be wise:
 Leave man on man to criticise;
 For that you ne'er can want a pen
 Among the senseless sons of men.
 They unprovok'd will court the fray;
 Envy's a sharper spur than pay.
 No author ever spar'd a brother;
 Wits are game-cocks to one another.

F A B L E XI.

The PEACOCK, the TURKEY, and the GOOSE.

IN beauty faults conspicuous grow;
 The smallest speck is seen on snow.

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As near a barn, by hunger led,
 A peacock with the poultry fed;
 All view'd him with an envious eye,
 And mock'd his gaudy pageantry.
 He, conscious of superior merit,
 Contemns their base reviling spirit;
 His state and dignity assumes,
 And to the sun displays his plumes;
 Which, like the heav'n's o'er-arching skies,
 Are spangled with a thousand eyes.
 The circling rays, and varied light,
 At once confound their dazzled sight:
 On ev'ry tongue detraction burns,
 And malice prompts their spleen by turns.

Mark, with what insolence and pride
 The creature takes his haughty stride,
 'The turkey cries, Can spleen contain?
 Sure never bird was half so vain!
 But, were intrinsic merit seen,
 We turkeys have the whiter skin.

From tongue to tongue they caught abuse;
 And next was heard the hissing goose.
 What hideous legs! what filthy claws!
 I scorn to censure little flaws.
 Then what a horrid squaling throat!
 Ev'n owls are frighted at the note.

True. Those are faults, the peacock cries;
 My scream, my thanks you may despise:
 But such blind critics rail in vain.
 What, overlook my radiant train!
 Know, did my legs (your scorn and sport)
 The turkey or the goose support,

And did ye scream with harsher sound,
 Those faults in you had ne'er been found:
 To all apparent beauties blind,
 Each blemish strikes an envious mind.

Thus in assemblies have I seen
 A nymph of brightest charms and mien,
 Wake envy in each ugly face;
 And buzzing scandal fills the place.

F A B L E XII.

CUPID, HYMEN, and PLUTUS.

AS Cupid in Cythera's grove
 Employ'd the lesser powers of love;
 Some shape the bow, or fit the string;
 Some give the taper shaft its wing,
 Or turn the polish'd quiver's mold,
 Or head the darts with temper'd gold:
 Amidst their toil and various care,
 Thus Hymen, with assuming air,
 Address'd the god. Thou purblind chit,
 Of aukward and ill-judging wit,
 If matches are no better made,
 At once I must forswear my trade.
 You send me such ill-coupled folks,
 That 'tis a shame to sell them yokes.
 They squabble for a pin, a feather,
 And wonder how they came together.