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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Fable VI

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263877](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-263877)

Our skin supplies the wrangling bar,
It wakes their slumb'ring sons to war;
And well revenge may rest contented,
Since drums and parchment were invented.

F A B L E VI.

The MISER and PLUTUS.

THE wind was high, the window shakes;
With sudden start the Miser wakes.
Along the silent room he stalks;
Looks back, and trembles as he walks:
Each lock and ev'ry bolt he tries,
In every creck and corner pries;
Then opes the chest with treasure stor'd,
And stands in rapture o'er his hoard.
But now, with sudden qualms possess'd,
He wrings his hands, he beats his breast.
By conscience stung, he wildly stares;
And thus his guilty soul declares.

Had the deep earth her stores confin'd,
This heart had known sweet peace of mind.
But virtue's fold. Good gods! what price
Can recompense the pangs of vice!
O bane of good! seducing cheat!
Can man, weak man, thy power defeat?
Gold banish'd honour from the mind,
And only left the name behind;

Gold sow'd the world with ev'ry ill ;
 Gold taught the murd'rer's sword to kill :
 'Twas gold instructed coward-hearts,
 In treach'ry's more pernicious arts.
 Who can recount the mischiefs o'er ?
 Virtue resides on earth no more !

He spoke, and sigh'd. In angry mood,
 Plutus, his god, before him stood.
 The Miser trembling, lock'd his chest :
 The Vision frown'd, and thus address'd.

Whence is this vile ungrateful rant ?
 Each sordid rascal's daily cant.
 Did I, base wretch, corrupt mankind ?
 The fault's in thy rapacious mind.
 Because my blessings are abus'd,
 Must I be censur'd, curs'd, accus'd ?
 Ev'n virtue's self by knaves is made
 A cloak to carry on the trade ;
 And power (when lodg'd in their possession)
 Grows tyranny, and rank oppression.
 Thus, when the villain crams his chest,
 Gold is the canker of the breast ;
 'Tis av'rice, insolence, and pride,
 And ev'ry shocking vice beside.
 But when to virtuous hands 'tis given,
 It blesses, like the dews of Heaven :
 Like Heav'n it hears the orphan's cries,
 And wipes the tears from widows eyes.
 Their crimes on gold shall misers lay,
 Who pawn'd their sordid souls for pay ?
 Let bravo's then (when blood is spilt)
 Upbra'd the passive sword with guilt.