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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Fable I

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TO HIS HIGHNESS,

WILLIAM Duke of Cumberland.

F A B L E I.

The LION, the TYGER, and the TRAVELLER.

A CCEPT, young PRINCE, the moral lay,
And in these tales mankind survey;
With early virtues plant your breast,
The specious arts of vice detest.
Princes, like beauties, from their youth
Are strangers to the voice of truth.
Learn to condemn all praise betimes;
For flattery's the nurse of crimes:
Friendship by sweet reproof is shown,
(A virtue never near a throne).
In courts such freedom must offend,
There none presumes to be a friend.
To those of your exalted station
Each courtier is a dedication:
Must I too flatter like the rest,
And turn my morals to a jest?
The Muse disdains to steal from those,
Who thrive in courts by fulsome profes

VOL. II.

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But shall I hide your real praise,
 Or tell you what a nation says?
 They in your infant-bosom trace
 The virtues of your Royal race;
 In the fair dawning of your mind
 Discern you gen'rous, mild, and kind:
 They see you grieve to hear distress,
 And pant already to redress.
 Go on, the height of good attain,
 Nor let a nation hope in-vain.
 For hence we justly may presage
 The virtues of a riper age.
 True courage shall your bosom fire,
 And future actions own your fire.
 Cowards are cruel; but the brave
 Love mercy, and delight to save.

A Tyger, roaming for his prey,
 Sprung on a Trav'ler in the way;
 The prostrate game a Lion spies,
 And on the greedy tyrant flies.
 With mingled roar resounds the wood,
 Their teeth, their claws distil with blood;
 Till, vanquish'd by the Lion's strength,
 The spotted foe extends his length.
 The man besought the shaggy lord,
 And on his knees for life implor'd.
 His life the gen'rous hero gave.
 Together walking to his cave,
 The Lion thus bespoke his guest.
 What hardy beast shall dare contest

My matchless strength! You saw the fight,
 And must attest my pow'r and right,
 Forc'd to forego their native home,
 My starving slaves at distance roam;
 Within these woods I reign alone,
 The boundless forest is my own.
 Bears, wolves, and all the savage brood,
 Have dy'd the regal den with blood.
 These carcases on either hand,
 Those bones that whiten all the land,
 My former deeds and triumphs tell,
 Beneath these jaws what numbers fell.

True, says the man, the strength I saw
 Might well the brutal nation awe:
 But shall a monarch, brave like you,
 Place glory in so false a view?
 Robbers invade their neighbour's right,
 Be lov'd: Let justice bound your might,
 Mean are ambitious heroes boasts
 Of wasted lands and slaughter'd hosts,
 Pirates their power by murders gain,
 Wise kings by love and mercy reign:
 To me your clemency hath shown
 The virtue worthy of a throne.
 Heav'n gives you power above the rest,
 Like Heav'n to succour the distress.

The case is plain, the monarch said,
 False glory hath my youth misled;
 For beasts of prey, a servile train,
 Have been the flatt'ers of my reign.
 You reason well. Yet tell me, friend,
 Did ever you in courts attend?

For all my fawning rogues agree
That human heroes rule like me.

F A B L E II.

The SPANIEL and the CAMELEON.

A Spaniel, bred with all the care
That waits upon a fav'rite heir,
Ne'er felt correction's rigid hand;
Indulg'd to disobey command,
In pamper'd ease his hours were spent:
He never knew what learning meant.
Such forward airs, so pert, so smart,
Were sure to won his lady's heart:
Each little mischief gain'd him praise.
How pretty were his fawning ways!

The wind was south, the morning fair,
He ventures forth to take the air,
He ranges all the meadow round,
And rolls upon the softest ground:
When near him a Cameleon seen,
Was scarce distinguish'd from the green.

Dear emblem of the flatt'ring host;
What, live with clowns! a genius lost!
To cities and the court repair;
A fortune cannot fail thee there!