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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

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Introduction

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F A B L E S,

PART THE FIRST.

INTRODUCTION.

The SHEPHERD and the PHILOSOPHER.

REMOTE from cities liv'd a Swain,
Unvex'd with all the cares of gain ;
His head was silver'd o'er with age,
And long experience made him sage ;
In summer's heat and winter's cold
He fed his flock and penn'd the fold ;
His hours in chearful labour flew,
Nor envy nor ambition knew ;
His wisdom and his honest fame
Through all the country rais'd his name.

A deep Philosopher (whose rules
Of moral life were drawn from schools)

The Shepherd's homely cottage fought,
 And thus explor'd his reach of thought.
 Whence is thy learning? Hath thy toil
 O'er books consum'd the midnight-oil?
 Hast thou old Greece and Rome survey'd,
 And the vast sense of Plato weigh'd?
 Hath Socrates thy soul refin'd,
 And hast thou fathom'd Tully's mind?
 Or, like the wise Ulysses thrown
 By various fates on realms unknown,
 Hast thou through many cities stray'd,
 Their customs, laws, and manners weigh'd?

The Shepherd modestly reply'd,
 I ne'er the paths of learning try'd;
 Nor have I roam'd in foreign parts
 To read mankind, their laws and arts;
 For man is practis'd in disguise,
 He cheats the most discerning eyes:
 Who by that search shall wiser grow,
 When we ourselves can never know?
 The little knowledge I have gain'd,
 Was all from simple nature drain'd;
 Hence my life's maxims took their rise,
 Hence grew my settled hate to vice.

The daily labours of the bee
 Awake my soul to industry.
 Who can observe the careful ant,
 And not provide for future want?
 My dog (the truest of his kind)
 With gratitude inflames my mind:
 I mark his true, his faithful way,
 And in my service copy Tray.

In constancy, and nuptial love,
 I learn my duty from the dove.
 The hen, who from the chilly air
 With pious wing protects her care,
 And ev'ry fowl that flies at large,
 Instructs me in a parent's charge.
 From nature too I take my rule,
 To shun contempt and ridicule.
 I never with important air
 In conversation overbear.
 Can grave and formal pass for wise,
 When men the solemn owl despise?
 My tongue within my lips I rein;
 For who talks much, must talk in vain.
 We from the wordy torrent fly:
 Who listens to the chatt'ring pye?
 Nor would I, with felonious sleight,
 By stealth invade my neighbour's right.
 Rapacious animals we hate:
 Kites, hawks, and wolves deserve their fate.
 Do not we just abhorrence find
 Against the toad and serpent kind?
 But envy, calumny, and spite,
 Bear stronger venom in their bite.
 Thus ev'ry object of creation
 Can furnish hints to contemplation;
 And from the most minute and mean
 A virtuous mind can morals glean.
 Thy fame is just, the Sage replies;
 Thy virtue proves thee truly wise.
 Pride often guides the author's pen,
 Books as affected are as men?

But he who studies nature's laws,
From certain truth his maxims draws;
And those, without our schools, suffice
To make men moral, good, and wise.