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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

A thought on eternity

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

T H O U G H T

O N

E T E R N I T Y.

ERE the foundations of the world were laid,
 Ere kindling light th' Almighty word obey'd,
 Thou wert; and when the subterraneous flame
 Shall burst its prison, and devour this frame,
 From angry Heaven when the keen lightning flies,
 When fervent heat dissolves the melting skies,
 Thou still shalt be; still as thou wert before,
 And know no change, when time shall be no more.
 O endless thought! divine eternity!
 Th' immortal soul shares but a part of thee;
 For thou wert present when our life began,
 When the warm dust shot up in breathing man.
 Ah! what is life? with ills encompass'd round,
 Amidst our hopes Fate strikes the sudden wound:
 To-day the statesman of new honour dreams,
 To-morrow Death destroys his airy schemes;
 Is mouldy treasure in thy chest confin'd?
 Think all that treasure thou must leave behind;
 Thy heir with smiles shall view thy blazon'd herse,
 And all thy hoards with lavish hand disperse.

Should certain fate th' impending blow delay,
 Thy mirth will sicken and thy bloom decay ;
 Then feeble age will all thy nerves difarm,
 No more thy blood its narrow channels warm.
 Who then would wish to stretch this narrow span,
 To suffer life beyond the date of man ?

The virtuous soul pursues a nobler aim,
 And life regards but as a fleeting dream :
 She longs to wake, and wishes to get free,
 To launch from earth into eternity.
 For while the boundless theme extends our thought,
 Ten thousand thousand rolling years are nought.

MY OWN EPITAPH.

LIFE is a jest, and all things show it :
 I thought so once, but now I know it.