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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

Prologue, designed for the pastoral tragedy of Dione

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P R O L O G U E,

Designed for the Pastoral Tragedy of *DIONE*.

THERE was a time (O were those days renew'd!)
Ere tyrant laws had woman's will subdu'd;
Then nature rul'd, and love, devoid of art,
Spoke the contenting language of the heart,
Love uncontroll'd! inspid, poor delight!
'Tis the restraint that whets our appetite.
Behold the beasts who range the forests free;
Behold the birds who fly from tree to tree;
In their amours see nature's pow'r appear!
And do they love? Yes—one month in the year.
Were these the pleasures of the golden reign?
And did free nature thus instruct the swain?
I envy not, ye nymphs, your am'rous bowers:
Such harmless swains!—I'm ev'n content with ours,
But yet there's something in these sylvan scenes
That tells our fancy what the lover means;
Name but the mossy bank, and moon-light grove,
Is there a heart that does not beat with love?

To night we treat you with such country-fare,
Then for your lover's sake our author spare.
He draws no Hemskirk-boors; or home-bred clowns,
But the soft shepherds of Arcadia's downs,

When Paris on the three his judgment pass'd;
I hope you'll own the shepherd show'd his taste:

And Jove, all know, was a good judge of beauty,
 Who made the nymph Calista break her duty;
 Then was the country-nymph no aukward thing.
 See what strange revolutions time can bring!

Yet still methinks our author's fate I dread,
 Were it not safer beaten paths to tread
 Of tragedy; than o'er wide heaths to stray,
 And, seeking strange adventures, lose his way?
 No trumpet's clangor makes his heroine start,
 And tears the soldier from her bleeding heart;
 He, foolish bard! nor pomp nor show regards.
 Without the witness of a hundred guards,
 His lovers sigh their vows.—If sleep should take ye,
 He has no battle, no loud drum to wake ye.
 What, no such shifts? there's danger in't, 'tis true;
 Yet spare him, as he gives you something new.

B.

III