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Poems

Poems and fables

Gay, John

Edinburgh, 1773

To my ingenious and worthy friend William Lownds, Esq;

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To my ingenious and worthy friend

WILLIAM LOWNDS, Esq;

Author of that celebrated Treatise in Folio called the
Land tax Bill.

WHEN poets print their works, the scribbling
crew

Stick the bard o'er with bays, like Christmas pew :
Can meagre poetry such fame deserve ?
Can poetry, that only writes to starve ?
And shall no laurel deck that famous head,
In which the senate's annual law is bred ?
That hoary head, which greater glory fires,
By nobler *ways* and *means* true fame acquires.
O had I Virgil's force to sing the man,
Whose learned lines can millions raise *per ann.*
Great Lownds his praise should swell the trump of
fame,

And rapes and Wapentakes resound his name.
If the blind poet gain'd a long renown
By singing ev'ry Grecian chief and town ;
Sure Lownds his prose much greater fame requires,
Which sweetly counts five thousand knights and
squires,
Their seats, their cities, parishes and shires.

Thy copious preamble so smoothly runs ;
 Taxes no more appear like legal duns,
 Lords, knights, and squires, th' assessor's power obey,
 We read with pleasure, though with pain we pay.

Ah why did C—— thy works defame!
 That author's long harangue betrays his name ;
 After his speeches can his pen succeed ?
 Though forc'd to hear, we're not oblig'd to read.

Under what science shall thy works be read ?
 All know thou wert not poet born and bred ;
 Or dost thou boast th' historian's lasting pen,
 Whose annals are the acts of worthy men ?
 No. Satire is thy talent ; and each lash
 Makes the rich miser tremble o'er his cash ;
 What on the drunkard can be more severe,
 Than direful taxes on his ale and beer ?

Ev'n Button's wits are nought compar'd to thee,
 Who ne'er were known or prais'd but o'er his tea,
 While Thou thro' Britain's distant isle shall spread,
 In ev'ry Hundred and Division read.
 Critics in classics oft' interpolate,
 But ev'ry word of thine is fix'd as Fate.
 Some works come forth at morn, but die at night,
 In blazing fringes round a tallow light ;
 Some may perhaps to a whole week extend,
 Like S—— (when unassisted by a friend),
 But thou shalt live a year in spite of fate :
 And where's your author boasts a longer date ?
 Poets of old had such a wondrous power,
 That with their verses they could raise a tower
 But in thy prose a greater force is found ;
 What poet ever rais'd ten thousand pound ?

Cadmus, by sowing dragon's teeth, we read,
Rais'd a vast army from the pois'nous seed.
Thy labours, Lownds, can greater wonders do,
Thou raisest armies, and canst pay them too.
Truce with thy dreaded pen; thy annals cease;
Why need we armies when the land's in peace?
Soldiers are perfect devils in their way;
When once they're rais'd, they're curs'd hard to lay.