

Classic Poetry Series

John Gay

- poems -

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An Elegy on a Lap-dog

1 Shock's fate I mourn; poor Shock is now no more,
2 Ye Muses mourn, ye chamber-maids deplore.
3 Unhappy Shock! yet more unhappy fair,
4 Doom'd to survive thy joy and only care!
5 Thy wretched fingers now no more shall deck,
6 And tie the fav'rite ribbon round his neck;
7 No more thy hand shall smooth his glossy hair,
8 And comb the wavings of his pendent ear.
9 Yet cease thy flowing grief, forsaken maid;
10 All mortal pleasures in a moment fade:
11 Our surest hope is in an hour destroy'd,
12 And love, best gift of heav'n, not long enjoy'd.

13 Methinks I see her frantic with despair,
14 Her streaming eyes, wrung hands, and flowing hair
15 Her Mechlen pinnars rent the floor bestrow,
16 And her torn fan gives real signs of woe.
17 Hence Superstition, that tormenting guest,
18 That haunts with fancied fears the coward breast;
19 No dread events upon his fate attend,
20 Stream eyes no more, no more thy tresses rend.
21 Tho' certain omens oft forewarn a state,
22 And dying lions show the monarch's fate;
23 Why should such fears bid Celia's sorrow rise?
24 For when a lap-dog falls no lover dies.

25 Cease, Celia, cease; restrain thy flowing tears,
26 Some warmer passion will dispel thy cares.
27 In man you'll find a more substantial bliss,
28 More grateful toying, and a sweeter kiss.

29 He's dead. Oh lay him gently in the ground!
30 And may his tomb be by this verse renown'd.
31 Here Shock, the pride of all his kind, is laid;
32 Who fawn'd like man, but ne'er like man betray'd.

John Gay

Fable L: The Hare and Many Friends

1 Friendship, like love, is but a name,
2 Unless to one you stint the flame.
3 The child, whom many fathers share,
4 Hath seldom known a father's care;
5 'Tis thus in friendships; who depend
6 On many, rarely find a friend.

7 A hare, who, in a civil way,
8 Complied with ev'ry thing, like Gay,
9 Was known by all the bestial train,
10 Who haunt the wood, or graze the plain:
11 Her care was, never to offend,
12 And ev'ry creature was her friend.

13 As forth she went at early dawn
14 To taste the dew-besprinkled lawn,
15 Behind she hears the hunter's cries,
16 And from the deep-mouth'd thunder flies;
17 She starts, she stops, she pants for breath,
18 She hears the near advance of death,
19 She doubles, to mis-lead the hound,
20 And measures back her mazy round;
21 'Till, fainting in the public way,
22 Half dead with fear she gasping lay.

23 What transport in her bosom grew,
24 When first the horse appear'd in view!

25 'Let me,' says she, 'your back ascend,
26 And owe my safety to a friend,
27 You know my feet betray my flight,
28 To friendship ev'ry burthen's light.'

29 The horse replied, 'Poor honest puss,
30 It grieves my heart to see thee thus;
31 Be comforted, relief is near;
32 For all your friends are in the rear.'

33 She next the stately bull implor'd;
34 And thus reply'd the mighty lord.
35 'Since ev'ry beast alive can tell
36 That I sincerely wish you well,
37 I may, without offence, pretend
38 To take the freedom of a friend;
39 Love calls me hence; a fav'rite cow
40 Expects me near yon barley mow:
41 And when a lady's in the case,
42 You know, all other things give place.
43 To leave you thus might seem unkind;
44 But see, the goat is just behind.'

45 The goat remark'd her pulse was high,

46 Her languid head, her heavy eye;
47 'My back,' says he, 'may do you harm;
48 The sheep's at hand, and wool is warm.'

49 The sheep was feeble, and complain'd,
50 His sides a load of wool sustain'd,
51 Said he was slow, confess'd his fears;
52 For hounds eat sheep as well as hares.

53 She now the trotting calf address,
54 To save from death a friend distress.

55 'Shall I, says he, of tender age,
56 In this important care engage?
57 Older and abler pass'd you by;
58 How strong are those! how weak am I!
59 Should I presume to bear you hence,
60 Those friends of mine may take offence.
61 Excuse me then. You know my heart,
62 But dearest friends, alas, must part!
63 How shall we all lament! Adieu.
64 For see the hounds are just in view.'

John Gay

Sweet William's Farewell to Black-ey'd Susan: A Ballad

1 All in the Downs the fleet was moor'd,
2 The streamers waving in the wind,
3 When black-ey'd Susan came aboard.
4 Oh! where shall I my true love find!
5 Tell me, ye jovial sailors, tell me true,
6 If my sweet William sails among the crew.

7 William, who high upon the yard,
8 Rock'd with the billow to and fro,
9 Soon as her well-known voice he heard,
10 He sigh'd, and cast his eyes below:
11 The cord slides swiftly through his glowing hands,
12 And, (quick as lightning) on the deck he stands.

13 So the sweet lark, high pois'd in air,
14 Shuts close his pinions to his breast,
15 (If, chance, his mate's shrill call he hear)
16 And drops at once into her nest.
17 The noblest captain in the British fleet,
18 Might envy William's lip those kisses sweet.

19 'O Susan, Susan, lovely dear,
20 My vows shall ever true remain;
21 Let me kiss off that falling tear,
22 We only part to meet again.
23 Change, as ye list, ye winds; my heart shall be
24 The faithful compass that still points to thee.

25 'Believe not what the landmen say,
26 Who tempt with doubts thy constant mind:
27 They'll tell thee, sailors, when away,
28 In ev'ry port a mistress find.
29 Yes, yes, believe them when they tell thee so,
30 For thou art present wheresoe'er I go.

31 'If to far India's coast we sail,
32 Thy eyes are seen in di'monds bright,
33 Thy breath is Afric's spicy gale,
34 Thy skin is ivory, so white.
35 Thus ev'ry beauteous object that I view,
36 Wakes in my soul some charm of lovely Sue.

37 'Though battle call me from thy arms
38 Let not my pretty Susan mourn;
39 Though cannons roar, yet safe from harms,
40 William shall to his dear return.
41 Love turns aside the balls that round me fly,
42 Lest precious tears should drop from Susan's eye'.

43 The boatswain gave the dreadful word,
44 The sails their swelling bosom spread,
45 No longer must she stay aboard:

46 They kiss'd, she sigh'd, he hung his head.
47 Her less'ning boat, unwilling rows to land:
48 'Adieu', she cries! and wav'd her lily hand.

John Gay

The Beggar's Opera (excerpts)

Air I. An old woman clothed in gray, &c. 1-

Through all the employments of life

-

Each neighbour abuses his brother;

-

Whore and rogue they call husband and wife:

-

All professions be-rogue one another.

-

The priest calls the lawyer a cheat,

-

The lawyer be-knaves the divine;

-

And the statesman, because he's so great,

-

Thinks his trade as honest as mine. Air XI. A Soldier and a Sailor 2-

A fox may steal your hens, sir,

-

A whore your health and pence, sir,

-

Your daughter rob your chest, sir,

-

Your wife may steal your rest, sir,

-

A thief your goods and plate.

-

-

But this is all but picking,

-

With rest, pence, chest and chicken;

-

It ever was decreed, sir,

-

If lawyer's hand is fee'd, sir,

-

-

He steals your whole estate. Air XXII. Cotillon 3-

Youth's the season made for joys,

-

Love is then our duty,

-

She alone who that employs,

-

Well deserves her beauty.

-

Let's be gay,

-

While we may,

-

Beauty's a flower, despised in decay. CHORUS. 3-

Youth's the season, &c. Cotillon 3-

Let us drink and sport to-day,

-

Ours is not to-morrow.

-

Love with youth flies swift away,

-

Age is nought but sorrow.

-

Dance and sing,

-

Time's on the wing,

-

Life never knows the return of spring.CHORUS.3-

Let us drink, &c.Air XXVI.4-

Courtiers, Courtiers think it no harm, &c.4-

Man may escape from rope and gun;

-

Nay, some have out-liv'd the doctor's pill;

-

Who takes a woman must be undone,

-

That basilisk is sure to kill.

-

The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,

-

So he that tastes woman, woman, woman,

-

He that tastes woman, ruin meets.

John Gay

The Shepherd's Week (excerpt)

MONDAY, OR, THE SQUABBLE
Lobbin Clout, Cuddy, CloddipoleCUDDY

Hold, witless Lobbin Clout, I thee advise,
Lest blisters sore on thy own tongue arise.
Lo yonder Cloddipole, the blithesome swain,
The wisest lout of all the neighbouring plain!
From Cloddipole we learnt to read the skies,
To know when hail will fall, or winds arise.
He taught us erst the heifer's tail to view,
When stuck aloft, that show'rs would straight ensue;
He first that useful secret did explain,
That pricking corns foretold the gath'ring rain.
When swallows fleet soar high and sport in air,
He told us that the welkin would be clear.
Let Cloddipole then hear us twain rehearse,
And praise his sweetheart in alternate verse.
I'll wager this same oaken staff with thee,
That Cloddipole shall give the prize to me. LOBBIN CLOUT

See this tobacco-pouch that's lin'd with hair,
Made of the skin of sleekest fallow deer.
This pouch, that's tied with tape of reddest hue,
I'll wager, that the prize shall be my due. CUDDY

Begin thy carols then, thou vaunting slouch,
Be thine the oaken staff, or mine the pouch. LOBBIN CLOUT

My Blouzelinda is the blithest lass,
Than primrose sweeter, or the clover-grass.
Fair is the king-cup that in meadow blows,
Fair is the daisy that beside her grows,
Fair is the gillyflow'r, of gardens sweet,
Fair is the marigold, for pottage meet.
But Blouzelind's than gillyflow'r more fair,
Than daisy, marigold, or king-cup rare. CUDDY

My brown Buxoma is the featest maid,
That e'er at Wake delightsome gambol play'd.
Clean as young lambkins or the goose's down,
And like the goldfinch in her Sunday gown.
The witless lamb may sport upon the plain,
The frisking kid delight the gaping swain,
The wanton calf may skip with many a bound,
And my cur Tray play deftest feats around;
But neither lamb nor kid, nor calf nor Tray,
Dance like Buxoma on the first of May. LOBBIN CLOUT

Sweet is my toil when Blouzelind is near,
Of her bereft 'tis winter all the year.
With her no sultry summer's heat I know;
In winter, when she's nigh, with love I glow.

Come, Blouzelinda, ease thy swain's desire,
My summer's shadow and my winter's fire!CUDDY

As with Buxoma once I work'd at hay,
Ev'n noon-tide labour seem'd a holiday;
And holidays, if haply she were gone,
Like worky-days I wish'd would soon be done.
Eftsoons, O sweet-heart kind, my love repay,
And all the year shall then be holiday.LOBBIN CLOUT

As Blouzelinda in a gamesome mood,
Behind a haycock loudly laughing stood,
I slily ran, and snatch'd a hasty kiss,
She wip'd her lips, nor took it much amiss.
Believe me, Cuddy, while I'm bold to say,
Her breath was sweeter than the ripen'd hay.CUDDY

As my Buxoma in a morning fair,
With gentle finger strok'd her milky care,
I quaintly stole a kiss; at first, 'tis true,
She frown'd, yet after granted one or two.
Lobbin, I swear, believe who will my vows,
Her breath by far excell'd the breathing cows.LOBBIN CLOUT

Leek to the Welsh, to Dutchmen butter's dear,
Of Irish swains potato is the cheer;
Oats for their feasts, the Scottish shepherds grind,
Sweet turnips are the food of Blouzelind.
While she loves turnips, butter I'll despise,
Nor leeks nor oatmeal nor potato prize.CUDDY

In good roast-beef my landlord sticks his knife,
The capon fat delights his dainty wife,
Pudding our parson eats, the squire loves hare,
But white-pot thick is my Buxoma's fare.
While she loves white-pot, capon ne'er shall be,
Nor hare, nor beef, nor pudding, food for me.
....CLODDIPOLE

Forbear, contending louts, give o'er your strains,
An oaken staff each merits for his pains.
But see the sun-beams bright to labour warn,
And gild the thatch of goodman Hodges' barn.
Your herds for want of water stand adry,
They're weary of your songs--and so am I.

John Gay

Trivia; or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London (excer

Thus far the Muse has trac'd in useful lays
The proper implements for wintry ways;
Has taught the walker, with judicious eyes,
To read the various warnings of the skies.
Now venture, Muse, from home to range the town,
And for the public safety risk thy own.

For ease and for dispatch, the morning's best;
No tides of passengers the street molest.
You'll see a draggled damsel, here and there,
From Billingsgate her fishy traffic bear;
On doors the sallow milk-maid chalks her gains;
Ah! how unlike the milk-maid of the plains!
Before proud gates attending asses bray,
Or arrogate with solemn pace the way;
These grave physicians with their milky cheer,
The love-sick maid and dwindling beau repair;
Here rows of drummers stand in martial file,
And with their vellum thunder shake the pile,
To greet the new-made bride. Are sounds like these
The proper prelude to a state of peace?
Now industry awakes her busy sons,
Full charg'd with news the breathless hawker runs:
Shops open, coaches roll, carts shake the ground,
And all the streets with passing cries resound.

If cloth'd in black, you tread the busy town
Or if distinguish'd by the rev'rend gown,
Three trades avoid; oft in the mingling press,
The barber's apron soils the sable dress;
Shun the perfumer's touch with cautious eye,
Nor let the baker's step advance too nigh;
Ye walkers too that youthful colours wear,
Three sullying trades avoid with equal care;
The little chimney-sweeper skulks along,
And marks with sooty stains the heedless throng;
When small-coal murmurs in the hoarser throat,
From smutty dangers guard thy threaten'd coat:
The dust-man's cart offends thy clothes and eyes,
When through the street a cloud of ashes flies;
But whether black or lighter dyes are worn,
The chandler's basket, on his shoulder borne,
With tallow spots thy coat; resign the way,
To shun the surly butcher's greasy tray,
Butcher's, whose hands are dy'd with blood's foul stain,
And always foremost in the hangman's train.

Let due civilities be strictly paid.
The wall surrender to the hooded maid;
Nor let thy sturdy elbow's hasty rage
Jostle the feeble steps of trembling age;
And when the porter bends beneath his load,

And pants for breath, clear thou the crowded road.
But, above all, the groping blind direct,
And from the pressing throng the lame protect.
You'll sometimes meet a fop, of nicest tread,
Whose mantling peruke veils his empty head;
At ev'ry step he dreads the wall to lose,
And risks, to save a coach, his red-heel'd shoes;
Him, like the miller, pass with caution by,
Lest from his shoulder clouds of powder fly.
But when the bully, with assuming pace,
Cocks his broad hat, edg'd round with tarnish'd lace,
Yield not the way; defy his strutting pride,
And thrust him to the muddy kennel's side;
He never turns again, nor dares oppose,
But mutters coward curses as he goes.

If drawn by bus'ness to a street unknown,
Let the sworn porter point thee through the town;
Be sure observe the signs, for signs remain,
Like faithful land-marks to the walking train.
Seek not from prentices to learn the way,
Those fabling boys will turn thy steps astray;
Ask the grave tradesman to direct thee right,
He ne'er deceives, but when he profits by 't.

Where fam'd St. Giles's ancient limits spread,
An inrail'd column rears its lofty head,
Here to sev'n streets sev'n dials count the day,
And from each other catch the circling ray.
Here oft the peasant, with enquiring face,
Bewilder'd, trudges on from place to place;
He dwells on ev'ry sign with stupid gaze,
Enters the narrow alley's doubtful maze,
Tries ev'ry winding court and street in vain,
And doubles o'er his weary steps again.
Thus hardy Theseus with intrepid feet,
Travers'd the dang'rous labyrinth of Crete;
But still the wand'ring passes forc'd his stay,
Till Ariadne's clue unwinds the way.
But do not thou, like that bold chief, confide
Thy vent'rous footsteps to a female guide;
She'll lead thee with delusive smiles along,
Dive in thy fob, and drop thee in the throng.

When waggish boys the stunted besom ply
To rid the slabby pavement, pass not by
E'er thou hast held their hands; some heedless flirt
Will over-spread thy calves with spatt'ring dirt.
Where porters hogsheads roll from carts aslope,
Or brewers down steep cellars stretch the rope,
Where counted billets are by carmen tost,
Stay thy rash steps, and walk without the post....

When rosemary, and bays, the poet's crown,
Are bawl'd in frequent cries through all the town,
Then judge the festival of Christmas near,
Christmas, the joyous period of the year.
Now with bright holly all your temples strow,
With laurel green and sacred mistletoe.
Now, heav'n-born Charity, thy blessings shed;
Bid meagre Want uprear her sickly head:
Bid shiv'ring limbs be warm; let plenty's bowl
In humble roofs make glad the needy soul.
See, see, the heav'n-born maid her blessings shed;
Lo! meagre Want uprears her sickly head;
Cloth'd are the naked, and the needy glad,
While selfish Avarice alone is sad.

Proud coaches pass, regardless of the moan
Of infant orphans, and the widow's groan;
While Charity still moves the walker's mind,
His lib'ral purse relieves the lame and blind.
Judiciously thy half-pence are bestow'd,
Where the laborious beggar sweeps the road.
Whate'er you give, give ever at demand,
Nor let old age long stretch his palsy'd hand.
Those who give late are importun'd each day,
And still are teas'd because they still delay.
If e'er the miser durst his farthings spare,
He thinly spreads them through the public square,
Where, all beside the rail, rang'd beggars lie,
And from each other catch the doleful cry;
With heav'n, for two-pence, cheaply wipes his score,
Lifts up his eyes, and hastes to beggar more.

Where the brass knocker, wrapt in flannel band,
Forbids the thunder of the footman's hand;
Th' upholder, rueful harbinger of death,
Waits with impatience for the dying breath;
As vulture, o'er a camp, with hov'ring flight,
Snuff up the future carnage of the fight.
Here canst thou pass, unmindful of a pray'r,
That heav'n in mercy may thy brother spare?

John Gay