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Poems On Several Occasions

Gay, John

London, 1745

Prologue, design'd for the Pastoral Tragedy of Dione.

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PROLOGUE,

Design'd for the Pastoral Tragedy of DIONE.

THERE was a time (Oh 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 consenting language of the heart.
 Love uncontroul'd! insipid 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 power 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.

To-night we treat you with such country fare,
 Then for your lovers 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 *Calisto* 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 foldier from her bleeding heart;
 He, foolish bard! nor pomp or 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.

