John Gay, â??Fable XXXI: The Universal Apparitionâ?•

Description

JOHN GAY

â??Fable XXXI: *The* Universal Apparitionâ?•

A RAKE, by evâ??ry passion rulâ??d,
With evâ??ry vice his youth had coolâ??d;
Disease his tainted blood assails,
His spirits droop, his vigour fails;
With secret ills at home he pines,
And, like infirm old age, declines.
As twingâ??d with pain, he pensive sits,
And raves, and prays, and swears, by fits,
A ghastly phantom, lean and wan,
Before him rose, and thus beganâ??
    My name perhaps hath reachâ??d your ear;
Attend, and be advisâ??d by care.
Nor love, nor honour, wealth, nor powâ??r,
Can give the heart a cheerful hour,
When health is lost.â?? Be timely wise:
With health all taste of pleasure flies.
    Thus said, the phantom disappears.
The wary counsel wakâ??d his fears.
He now from all excess abstains,
With physic purifies his veins;
And, to procure a sober life,
Resolves to venture on a wife.
    But now again the sprite ascends,
Whereâ??er he walks his ear attends;
Insinuates that beautyâ??s frail,
That perseverance must prevail;
With jealousies his brain inflames,
And whispers all her loversâ?? names.
In other hours she represents
His household charge, his annual rents,
Increasing debts, perplexing duns,
And nothing for his younger sons.
    Straight all his thought to gain he turns,
And with the thirst of lucre burns.
But, when possest of fortuneâ??s store,

The spectre haunts him more and more;
Sets want and misery in view,
Bold thieves, and all the murdâ??ring crew,
Alarms him with eternal frights,
Infests his dream, or wakes his nights.
How shall he chase this hideous guest?
Powâ??r may perhaps protect his rest;
To powâ??r he rose. Again the sprite
Besets him morning, noon, and night;
Talks of ambitionâ??s tottâ??ring seat,
How envy persecutes the great,
Of rival hate, of treachâ??rous friends,
And what disgrace his fall attends.
The court he quits to fly from Care,
And seeks the peace of rural air.
His groves, his fields, amusâ??d his hours;
He prunâ??d his trees, he raisâ??d his flowâ??rs:
But Care again his steps pursues;
Warns him of blasts, of blighting dews,
Of plundâ??ring insects, snails, and rains,
And droughts, that starve the labourâ??d plains.
Abroad, at home, the spectreâ??s there;
In vain we seek to fly from Care.
At length he thus the ghost addrestâ??
Since thou must be my constant guest,
Be kind, and follow me no more,
For Care by right should go before.

NOTES:

1 *Rake â??*Fashionable or stylish man of promiscuous habitsâ?• *(OED).*

4 *spirits â??*The animating or vital principle in man which gives lifeâ?• *(OED).*

9 *wan* â??gloomyâ?• *(OED).*

20 *physic â??*A medical substance or purgativeâ?• *(OED).*

22 *venture â??*An occasion of trying ones chanceâ?• *(OED).*

23 *sprite â??*Incorporeal beingâ?• *(OED); ascend â??*To riseâ?• *(OED).*

24 *attends â??*To turn oneâ??s ear to listen toâ?• *(OED).*

27 *inflames* â??The Showing of anger, passion, or zealâ?• *(OED).*

31 *duns â??*Persistent demands for moneyâ?• *(OED).*

34 *lucre* â??Acquisition of something profitableâ?• *(OED).*

44 *besets â??*To assail on all sidesâ?• *(OED).*

54 *blasts â??*Strong gusts of windâ?• *(OED).*

SOURCE: ***Fables, volume 1*** **(London, 1793), pp. 138 â?? 141. [J. Paul Leonard Library]**

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