John Gay, â??Fable IV: The Eagle, and the Assembly of Animalsâ?•

Description

JOHN GAY

â??Fable IV: The Eagle, and the Assembly of Animalsâ?•

As Jupiterâ??s all-seeing eye
Surveyâ??d the worlds beneath the sky,
From this small speck of earth were sent
Murmurs and sounds of discontent;
For evâ??ry thing alive complainâ??d
That he the hardest life sustainâ??d.
    Jove calls his Eagle. At the word
Before him stands the royal bird.
The bird, obedient, from heavâ??nâ??s height
Downward directs his rapid flight;
Then cited evâ??ry living thing,
To hear the mandates of his king.
    Ungrateful creatures, whence arise
These murmurs which offend the skies;
Why this disorder? say the cause:
For just are Joveâ??s eternal laws.
Let each his discontent reveal.
To yon sour dog I first appeal.
    Hard is my lot, the Hound replies.
On what fleet nerves the greyhound flies!
While I, with weary step and slow,
Oâ??er plains, and vales, and mountains, go;
The morning sees my chase begun,
Nor ends it till the setting sun.
    When, says the Greyhound, I pursue,
My game is lost, or caught in view,
Beyond my sight the preyâ??s secure:
The hound is slow, but always sure.
And, had I his sagacious scent,
Jove neâ??er had heard my discontent.
    The Lion cravâ??d the foxâ??s art;
The Fox, the lionâ??s force and heart;
The Cock implorâ??d the pigeonâ??s flight,
Whose wings were rapid, strong, and light;
The Pigeon strength of wing despisâ??d,

And the cockâ??s matchless valour prizâ??d:
The Fishes wishâ??d to graze the plain,
The Beasts to skim beneath the main.
Thus, envious of anotherâ??s fate,
Each blamâ??d the partial hand of Fate.
The bird of heavâ??n then cryâ??d aloudâ??
Jove bids disperse the murmâ??ring crowd:
The God rejects your idle prayâ??rs.
Would ye, rebellious mutineers,
Entirely change your name and nature,
And be the very envyâ??d creature?
What, silent all, and none consent!
Be happy then, and learn content.
Nor imitate the restless mind,
And proud ambition, of mankind.

NOTES:

1 *Jupiter* â??The supreme deity of the ancient Romans, corresponding to the Greek Zeus; the ruler of gods and men, and the god of the heavens, whose weapon was the thunderboltâ?• (*OED*).

7 *Jove* â??A poetical equivalent of *Jupiter*, name of the highest deity of the ancient Romansâ?• (*OED*); *Eagle* â??It is said that the Eagle only is never smitten with Lightning; and therefore it is judged that she serveth *Jupiter* as his Armour-bearerâ?• (Plinyâ??s *Natural History*, Book X, Chapter III).

8 *the royal bird* A reference to the eagle which â??served as Jupiterâ??s personal messengerâ?• (Asuni, Michele. â??Jupiter and Eagle.â?• *Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum*).

29 *sagacious* â??Acute in perception, esp. by the sense of smellâ?• (*OED*).

38 *skim* To move â??lightly along or close to a surfaceâ?• (*OED*); *main* â??The open seaâ?• (*OED*).

41 *bird of heavâ??n* Another reference to Jupiterâ??s eagle.

44 *mutineers* People â??who [revolt] against or openly [resist] the authority of a superior or a governing bodyâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Fables* (London, 1793), pp. 21-24. [J. Paul Leonard Library]

Edited by Sara Contreras