

John Gay, “Fable IV: The Eagle, and the Assembly of Animals”

Description

JOHN GAY

“Fable IV: The Eagle, and the Assembly of Animals”

As Jupiter’s all-seeing eye
Survey’d the worlds beneath the sky,
From this small speck of earth were sent
Murmurs and sounds of discontent;
For ev’ry thing alive complain’d 5
That he the hardest life sustain’d.

Jove calls his Eagle. At the word
Before him stands the royal bird.
The bird, obedient, from heav’n’s height
Downward directs his rapid flight; 10
Then cited ev’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: 15
For just are Jove’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! 20
While I, with weary step and slow,
O’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, 25
My game is lost, or caught in view,
Beyond my sight the prey’s secure:
The hound is slow, but always sure.
And, had I his sagacious scent,
Jove ne’er had heard my discontent. 30

The Lion crav’d the fox’s art;
The Fox, the lion’s force and heart;
The Cock implor’d the pigeon’s flight,
Whose wings were rapid, strong, and light;
The Pigeon strength of wing despis’d, 35

And the cock's matchless valour priz'd:
 The Fishes wish'd to graze the plain,
 The Beasts to skim beneath the main.
 Thus, envious of another's fate,
 Each blam'd the partial hand of Fate. 40
 The bird of heav'n then cry'd aloud—
 Jove bids disperse the murm'ring crowd:
 The God rejects your idle pray'rs.
 Would ye, rebellious mutineers,
 Entirely change your name and nature, 45
 And be the very envy'd creature?
 What, silent all, and none consent!
 Be happy then, and learn content.
 Nor imitate the restless mind,
 And proud ambition, of mankind. 50

NOTES:

1 *Jupiter* “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 thunderbolt” (*OED*).

7 *Jove* “A poetical equivalent of *Jupiter*, name of the highest deity of the ancient Romans” (*OED*); *Eagle* “It is said that the Eagle only is never smitten with Lightning; and therefore it is judged that she serveth *Jupiter* as his Armour-bearer” (Pliny’s *Natural History*, Book X, Chapter III).

8 *the royal bird* A reference to the eagle which “served as Jupiter’s personal messenger” (Asuni, Michele. “Jupiter and Eagle.” *Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum*).

29 *sagacious* “Acute in perception, esp. by the sense of smell” (*OED*).

38 *skim* To move “lightly along or close to a surface” (*OED*); *main* “The open sea” (*OED*).

41 *bird of heav'n* Another reference to Jupiter’s eagle.

44 *mutineers* People “who [revolt] against or openly [resist] the authority of a superior or a governing body” (*OED*).

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

Edited by Sara Contreras