John Gay, â??Fable I: The Lion, the Tiger, and the Travellerâ?•

Description

JOHN GAY

â??Fable I: *The* Lion, *the* Tiger, *and the* Travellerâ?•

Accept, young PRINCE, the moral lay,
And in these tales mankind survey;
With early virtues plant your breast,
The specious arts of vice detest.
Princes, like Beauties, from their youth,
Are strangers to the voice of truth:
Learn to contemn all praise betimes;
For flatteryâ??s the nurse of crimes;
Friendship by sweet reproof is shewn,
(A virtue never near a throne;)
In courts such freedom must offend,
There none presumes to be a friend,
To those of your exalted station
Each courtier is a dedication;
Must I too flatter like the rest,
And turn my morals to a jest?
The muse disdains to steal from those,
Who thrive in courts by fulsome prose.
But shall I hide your real praise,
Or tell you what a nation says?
They in your infant bosom trace
The virtues of your Royal race,
In the fair dawning of your mind,
Discern you genâ??rous, mild and kind,
They see you grieve and hear distress,
And pant already to redress.
Go on, the height of good attain,
Nor let a nation hope in vain.
For hence we justly may presage
The virtues of a riper age.
True courage shall your bosom fire,
And future Actions own your Sire.
Cowards are cruel; but the brave
Love mercy, and delight to save.
A Tiger, roaming for his prey,

Sprung on a Travâ??ler in the way;
The prostrate game a Lion spies,
And on the greedy tyrant flies:
With mingle roar resounds the wood,
Their teeth, their claws distill with blood,
Till, vanquishâ??d by the Lionâ??s strength,
The spotted foe extends his length.
The Man besought the shaggy lord,
And on his knees for life implorâ??d;
His life the genâ??rous hero gave.
Together walking to his Cave,
The Lion thus bespoke his guest.

What hardy beast shall dare contest
My matchless strength? You saw the fight,
And must attest my powâ??r and right.
Forcâ??d to forego their native home
My starving slaves at distance roam,
Within these woods I reign alone,
The boundless forest is my own;
Bears, wolves, and all the savage brood
Have dyâ??d the regal den with blood;
These carcases on either hand,
Those bones that whiten all the land
My former deeds and triumphs tell,
Beneath these jaws what number fell.
True, says the Man, the strength I saw
Might well the brutal nation awe;
But shall a monarch, brave like you,
Place glory in so false a view?
Robbers invade their neighborâ??s right.
Be lovâ??d. Let justice bound your might.
Mean are ambitious heroes boasts
Of wasted lands and slaughterâ??d hosts;
Pirates their power by murders gain,
Wise kings by love and mercy reign;
To me your clemency hath shewn
The virtue worthy of a throne;
Heavâ??n gives you power above the rest,
Like Heavâ??n to succour the distrest.
The case is plain, the Monarch said;
False glory hath my youth mis-led,
For beasts of prey, a servile train,
Have been the flattâ??rers of my reign.
You reason well. Yet tell me, friend,
Did ever you in courts attend?
For all my fawning rogues agree
That human heroes rule like me.

NOTES:

1 *lay* â??The way, position, or direction in which something is laid or lies (*esp.* said of country); disposition or arrangement with respect to somethingâ?• (*OED*).

4 *specious* â??Apparent, as opposed to realâ?• (*OED*); *vice* â??Depravity or corruption of morals; evil, immoral, or wicked habits or conduct; indulgence in degrading pleasures or practicesâ?? (*OED*); *detest* â??To feel abhorrence of; to hate or dislike intensely; to abhor, abominateâ?• (*OED*).

7 *contemn* â??To treat as of small value, treat or view with contempt; to despise, disdain, scorn, slightâ?• (*OED*).

9 *reproof* â??A second or further proof (in various senses)â?• (*OED*).

13 *exalted* â??Raised or set up on high; elevatedâ?• (*OED*).

17 *muse* One of the many goddesses of poetry, art, and philosophy that are depended on by humans for the creation of their work (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*).

18 *fulsome* â??Offensive or objectionable owing to excess or lack of moderation; *esp.* excessively effusive or complimentary; too lavish, overdoneâ?• (*OED*).

29 *presage* â??An indication or foreshadowing of a future eventâ?• (*OED*).

32 *sire* â??One who exercises dominion or rule; a lord, master, or sovereignâ?? (*OED*).

37 *prostrate* â??Of a person: lying with the face to the ground, in token of submission or humility, as in adoration, worship, or supplicationâ?• (*OED*).

50 *attest* â??Evidence, testimony, witnessâ?• (*OED*).

71 *clemency* â??Mercy, leniencyâ?• (*OED*).

74 *succour* â??Aid, help, assistanceâ?• (*OED*).

77 *servile* â??Of a person: that behaves like a slaveâ?• (*OED*).

81 *rogue* â??Chiefly *depreciative*. A servantâ?? (*OED*).

Source: *Fables, volume 1* (London, 1727), pp. 20-25. [Google Books]

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