

**TABLE TALK, AND
OTHER POEMS**

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Table Talk, and Other Poems by William Cowper

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WILLIAM COWPER

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OTHER POEMS**

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AND

Other Poems.

BY

WILLIAM COWPER,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

Sicut aquæ tremulum lãbris ubi lumen abenis
Sole repercussum, aut radiantis imagine lunc,
Omnia pervolitat late loca, jamque sub æura
Frigitur, æmptique ferit inæquaria tecti.

Fig. Æt. viii.

So water, trembling in a polish'd vase,
Reflects the beam that plays upon its face;
The sportive light, uncertain where it falls,
Now strikes the roof, now flashes on the walls.

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M DCCC XVII.

TABLE TALK.

*Si se fortè mense gravis uret sarcina chartæ,
Abjicito—* *Hor. Lib. 1. Epist. 13.*

A. You told me, I remember, glory, built
On selfish principles, is shame and guilt;
The deeds that men admire as half divine,
Stark naught, because corrupt in their design.
Strange doctrine this! that without scruple tears
The laurel, that the very lightning spares;
Brings down the warrior's trophy to the dust,
And eats into his bloody sword like rust.

B. I grant that, men continuing what they are,
Fierce, avaricious, proud, there must be war;
And never meant the rule should be applied
To him, that fights with justice on his side.

Let laurels, drench'd in pure Parnassian dews,
Reward his mem'ry, dear to ev'ry muse,
Who, with a courage of unshaken root,
In Honour's field advancing his firm foot,
Plants it upon the line that Justice draws,
And will prevail or perish in her cause.

'Tis to the virtues of such men, man owes
 His portion in the good, that Heav'n bestows.
 And when recording History displays
 Feats of renown, though wrought in ancient days,
 Tells of a few stout hearts, that fought and died,
 Where duty plac'd them, at their country's side;
 The man, that is not mov'd with what he reads,
 That takes not fire at their heroic deeds,
 Unworthy of the blessings of the brave,
 Is base in kind, and born to be a slave.

But let eternal infamy pursue
 The wretch to nought but his ambition true,
 Who, for the sake of filling with one blast
 The post-horns of all Europe, lays her waste.
 Think yourself station'd on a tow'ring rock,
 To see a people scatter'd like a flock,
 Some royal mastiff panting at their heels,
 With all the savage thirst a tiger feels;
 Then view him self-proclaim'd in a gazette
 Chief monster, that has plagu'd the nations yet;
 The globe and sceptre in such hands misplac'd,
 Those ensigns of dominion, how disgrac'd!
 The glass, that bids man mark the fleeting hour,
 And Death's own scythe would better speak his pow'r;
 Then grace the bony phantom in their stead
 With the king's shoulder-knot and gay cockade;
 Clothe the twin brethren in each others dress,
 The same their occupation and success.

A. 'Tis your belief the world was made for man;
 Kings do but reason on the self-same plan;

Maintaining yours, you cannot theirs condemn,
 Who think, or seem to think, man made for them.

B. Seldom, alas! the pow'r of logic reigns
 With much sufficiency in royal brains;
 Such reas'ning falls like an inverted cone,
 Wanting its proper base to stand upon.
 Man made for kings! those optics are but dim,
 That tell you so—say, rather, they for him.
 That were indeed a king-ennobling thought,
 Could they, or would they, reason as they ought.
 The diadem, with mighty projects lin'd
 To catch renown by ruining mankind,
 Is worth, with all its gold and glitt'ring store,
 Just what the toy will sell for, and no more.
 Oh! bright occasions of dispensing good,
 How seldom us'd, how little understood!
 To pour in Virtue's lap her just reward;
 Keep Vice restrain'd behind a double guard;
 To quell the faction, that affronts the throne,
 By silent Magnanimity alone;
 To nurse with tender care the thriving arts;
 Watch ev'ry beam Philosophy imparts;
 To give Religion her unbridled scope,
 Nor judge by statute a believer's hope;
 With close fidelity and love unfeign'd
 To keep the matrimonial bond unstain'd;
 Covetous only of a virtuous praise;
 His life a lesson to the land he sways;
 To touch the sword with conscientious awe,
 Nor draw it but when duty bids him draw;

To sheath it in the peace-restoring close
 With joy beyond what victory bestows;
 Blest country, where these kingly glories shine!
 Blest England, if this happiness be thine!

A. Guard what you say; the patriotic tribe
 Will sneer, and charge you with a bribe.—*B.* A bribe?
 The worth of his three kingdoms I defy,
 To lure me to the baseness of a lie:
 And, of all lies (be that one poet's boast),
 The lie that flatters I abhor the most.
 Those arts be theirs, who hate his gentle reign,
 But he that loves him has no need to feign.

A. Your smooth eulogium to one crown address'd
 Seems to imply a censure on the rest.

B. Quevedo, as he tells his sober tale,
 Ask'd, when in Hell, to see the royal jail;
 Approv'd their method in all other things;
 But where, good sir, do you confine your kings?
 There—said his guide—the group is full in view.
 Indeed!—replied the don—there are but few.
 His black interpreter the charge disdain'd—
 Few, fellow!—there are all that ever reign'd.
 Wit, undistinguishing, is apt to strike
 The guilty and not guilty both alike.
 I grant the sarcasm is too severe,
 And we can readily refute it here;
 While Alfred's name, the father of his age,
 And the Sixth Edward's grace th' historic page.

A. Kings then at last have but the lot of all:
 By their own conduct they must stand or fall,

B. True. While they live the courtly laureat pays
His quit-rent ode, his peppercorn of praise;
And many a dunce, whose fingers itch to write,
Adds, as he can, his tributary mite;
A subject's faults a subject may proclaim,
A monarch's errors are forbidden game!
Thus free from censure, overaw'd by fear,
And prais'd for virtues that they scorn to wear,
The fleeting forms of majesty engage
Respect, while stalking o'er life's narrow stage;
Then leave their crimes for History to scan,
And ask with busy scorn, Was this the man?

I pity kings, whom Worship waits upon
Obsequious from the cradle to the throne;
Before whose infant eyes the flatt'rer bows,
And binds a wreath about their baby brows;
Whom Education stiffens into state,
And Death awakens from that dream too late.
Oh! if Servility with supple knees,
Whose trade it is to smile, to crouch, to please;
If smooth Dissimulation, skill'd to grace
A devil's purpose with an angel's face;
If smiling pecesses, and simp'ring pouts,
Encompassing his throne a few short years;
If the gilt carriage and the pamper'd steed,
That wants no driving, and disdains the lead;
If guards, mechanically form'd in ranks,
Playing, at beat of drum, their martial pranks,
Should'ring and standing as if stuck to stone,
While condescending majesty looks on;

If monarchy consist in such base things,
Sighing, I say again, I pity kings!

To be suspected, thwarted, and withstood,
Ev'n when he labours for his country's good,
To see a band, call'd patriot for no cause,
But that they catch at popular applause,
Careless of all th' anxiety he feels,
Hook disappointment on the public wheels;
With all their sippant fluency of tongue,
Most confident, when palpably most wrong;
If this be kingly, then farewell for me
All kingship; and may I be poor and free!

To be the Table Talk of clubs up stairs,
To which th' unwash'd artificer repairs,
T' indulge his genius after long fatigue,
By diving into cabinet intrigue;
(For what kings deem a toll, as well they may,
To him is relaxation and mere play)
To win no praise when well-wrought plans prevail,
But to be rudely censur'd when they fail;
To doubt the love his fav'rites may pretend,
And in reality to find no friend;
If he indulge a cultivated taste,
His gall'ries with the works of art well grac'd,
To hear it call'd extravagance and waste;
If these attendants, and if such as these,
Must follow royalty, then welcome ease;
However humbled and confin'd the sphere,
Happy the state that has not these to fear.