

Fable

"THE LADY AND THE WASP"

By

John Gay

*What whispers must the beauty bear!
What hourly nonsense haunts her ear!
Where'er her eyes dispense their charms,
Impertinence around her swarms.
Did not the tender nonsense strike,
Contempt and scorn might soon dislike.
Forbidding airs might thin the place,
The slightest flap a fly can chase.
But who can drive the numerous breed?
Chase one, another will succeed.*

*Who knows a fool, must know his brother;
One fop will recommend another:
And with this plague she's rightly curs'd,
Because she listened to the first.
As Doris, at her toilet's duty,
Sat meditating on her beauty,
She now was pensive, now was gay,
And lolled the sultry hours away.
As thus in indolence she lies,
A giddy wasp around her flies.*

*He now advances, now retires,
Now to her neck and cheek aspires.
Her fan in vain defends her charms;
Swift he returns, again alarms;
For by repulse he bolder grew,
Perched on her lip, and sipp'd the dew.
She frowns, she frets. 'Good God!' she cries,
'Protect me from these teasing flies!
Of all the plagues that heaven hath sent,
A wasp is most impertinent.'*

*The hovering insect thus complained:
'Am I then slighted, scorned, disdained?*

*Can such offence your anger wake?
'Twas beauty caused the bold mistake.
Those cherry lips that breathe perfume,
That cheek so ripe with youthful bloom,
Made me with strong desire pursue
The fairest peach that ever grew.'
'Strike him not, Jenny,' Doris cries,
'Nor murder wasps like vulgar flies:*

*For though he's free (to do him right)
The creature's civil and polite.'
In ecstasies away he posts;
Where'er he came, the favour boasts;
Braggs how her sweetest tea he sips,
And shows the sugar on his lips.
The hint alarmed the forward crew;
Sure of success, away they flew.
They share the dainties of the day,
Round her with airy music play;*

*And now they flutter, now they rest,
Now soar again, and skim her breast.
Nor were they banished, till she found
That wasps have stings, and felt the wound.*