

The Fool's Prayer

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The royal feast was done; the King Sought some new sport to banish care, And to his jester cried: "Sir Fool, Kneel now, and make for us a prayer!"

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The jester doffed his cap and bells, And stood the mocking court before; They could not see the bitter smile Behind the painted grin he wore.

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He bowed his head, and bent his knee Upon the Monarch's silken stool; His pleading voice arose: "O Lord, Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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"No pity, Lord, could change the heart From red with wrong to white as wool; The rod must heal the sin: but Lord, Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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"'T is not by guilt the onward sweep Of truth and right, O Lord, we stay; 'T is by our follies that so long We hold the earth from heaven away.

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"These clumsy feet, still in the mire, Go crushing blossoms without end; These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust Among the heart-strings of a friend.

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"The ill-timed truth we might have kept-- Who knows how sharp it pierced and stung? The word we had not sense to say-- Who knows how grandly it had rung!

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"Our faults no tenderness should ask. The chastening stripes must cleanse them all; But for our blunders -- oh, in shame

Before the eyes of heaven we fall.

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"Earth bears no balsam for mistakes; Men crown the knave, and scourge the tool That did his will; but Thou, O Lord, Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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The room was hushed; in silence rose The King, and sought his gardens cool, And walked apart, and murmured low, "Be merciful to me, a fool!"

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Edward Rowland Sill (1841-1887)