

# The Fool's Prayer

by Edward Rowland Sill

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!"

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.

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!"

"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!"

"'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.

"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.

"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!

"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.

"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!"

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!"