

## The Fool's Prayer

Edward R. Sill

*(Born April 29, 1841; Died February 27, 1887)*

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!” “‘Tis not by guilt the onward  
sweep

Of truth and right, O Lord, we stay;

Tis 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!”

(Roy J. Cook, 101 Famous Poems: With a Prose Supplement  
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