

Alexander Pennecuik, "A Tale of a Muir-Cock"

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ALEXANDER PENNECUIK

"A Tale of a Muir-Cock"

From antient nest did spring a droll muir-cock,
Who gravely preach'd to all the feathr'd flock;
Though he was known to be no bird of brains,
By lusty lungs he pick'd up wholesome grains.
The idiot birds did round their pastor throng, 5
And listen'd to his heather-blitter song.
Two nests he had, from whence he'd weekly preach,
By law secur'd, and out of danger's reach.
Had not he said, that title to the crown
The eagle had, was just as bad's his own; 10
Which being join'd with an excessive drouth,
The sanhedrim of birds shut up his mouth.
Such was his drouth, he could have drunk the sea,
Though birds of grace should always sober be.
He never preach'd save at a river's brink, 15
Daub'd in his beak, and guzled down the drink.
He lost his text when on a naked rock,
But liquor put fresh spirits in the cock.
So lost his stipends, almost lost his breath,
For he lay hungry on the naked heath: 20
But driving wedlock with a sly muir-hen,
Who cunning had amongst the most of men;
She was related to the birds of grandeur,
And beensh'd and peensh'd, to each bush did wander;
And cry'd and ly'd, till her rich friends did give 25
Fund for herself, and cock and pout to live:
Whilst he through want and infamy was cross'd,
Still thinking on the happy nests he lost;
Sending addresses to the sacred train,
That they'd repone him to these nests again, 30
Which they rejected with a cold disdain.
At last he plots with resolution stout
A way to get rich a husband to the pout;

Intic'd a witless, young well feather'd bird,
With many a silken and a sugar'd word, 35
Till fuddl'd with intoxicated streams,
His head's a-float with airy am'rous dreams;
Feeding and feasting on the pout's fair face,
Said, reverend cock, pronounce the rights of grace;
Who, like a grave and venerable cock, 40
Did say the grace, and made them married folk;
Blest the young birds, and all the drunken gossips:
Fistula dulce canit, volucrem decipit auceps.

NOTES:

Title *Muir-Cock* "The male of the red grouse" (*Dictionaries of the Scots Language*).

1 *droll* "Intentionally facetious, amusing, comical" (*OED*).

6 *heather-blitter* Heather-bleater; a kind of songbird (*OED*).

11 *drouth* "The condition or quality of being dry" (*OED*).

12 *sanhedrim* "The name applied to the highest court of justice and supreme council at Jerusalem, and in a wider sense also to lower courts of justice" (*OED*).

16 *Daub'd* "To peck" (*Dictionaries of the Scots Language*).

19 *stipends* In this context, a reference to a minister's salary.

24 *beensh'd* Scots phonetic of "banished;" *peensh'd* Scots phonetic of "penalised."

26 *pout* "A young fowl" (*Dictionaries of the Scots Language*).

30 *repone* "To restore to office, or to rights formerly held, to reinstate (*Dictionary of the Scots Language*).

43 *Fistula dulce canit, volucrem decipit auceps* "The fowlers flute sings sweetly to deceive the bird" (*Distichs of Cato*, 1.27). Translation mine.

SOURCE: *A Collection of Scots Poems on Several Occasions* (Edinburgh, 1769), pp. 47-48. [Google Books]

Edited by Daisy Downie