Mary Leapor, â??The Death of Abelâ?•

Description

MARY LEAPOR

â??The Death of Abelâ?•

When from the Shade of *Edenâ??s* blissful Bowâ??rs,
Its Fruit ambrosial and immortal Flowâ??rs,
Our genâ??ral Mother (who too soon rebellâ??d,)
Was, with the Partner of her Crime, expellâ??d
To Fields less fruitful â?? where the rugged Soil
With Thorns and Thistles often paid their Toil;
Where the pale Flowâ??rs soon lost their chearful Hue,
And rushing Tempests oâ??er the Mountains flew:
Two Sons the Matron in her Exile bore,
Unlike in Feature but their Natures more;
The eldest Youth for Husbandry renownâ??d,
Tore up the Surface of the steril Ground;
His nervous Arms for rugged Tasks were formâ??d;
His Cheek but seldom with a Smile adornâ??d;
Drops raisâ??d by Labour down his Temples run,
His Temples tarnishâ??d by the mid-day Sun,
Robust of Body, and of Soul severe,
Unknown to Pity, and the like to Fear.

Not so his brother, cast in fairer Mold
Was he â?? and softer than his fleecy Fold;
Fair were his Cheeks that blushâ??d with rosy Dye,
Peace dwelt for ever in his chearful Eye,
Nor Guilt, nor Rage his gentle Spirit knew;
Sweet were his Slumbers, for his Cares were few;
Those were to feed and watch the tender Lamb,
And seek fresh Pasture for its bleating Dam,
From burning Suns his thirsty Flocks to hide,
And seek the Vales where limpid Rivers glide.

â??Twas ere rude Hands had reapâ??d the waving Grain,
When Plenty triumphâ??d on the fertile Plain,
That to the Centre of a pleasant Down,
Where half was Pasture, half a plenteous Brown:
These Youths repairâ??d both emulous of Fame,
And raisâ??d an Altar to *Jehovah*â??s Name,
With Heart elate and self-presuming Eye,
First to the Pile unhappy *Cain* drew nigh.

Choice was his Offâ??ring, yet no Sign appearâ??d,
No Flame was seen, nor Voice celestial heard:
Astonishâ??d stood the late presumptuous Man,
Then came his Brother with a trembling Lamb;
His God accepts the Sacrifice sincere;
The Flames propitious round the Slain appear;
The curling Smoke ascended to the Skies:
This *Cain* beheld, and rollâ??d his glowing Eyes.
Stung to the Soul, he with his frantick Hand
A Stone up-rooted from the yielding Sand,
Nor spoke â?? for Rage had stopâ??d his failing Tongue;
This heavy Death impetuous whirlâ??d along:
This *Abel* met â?? his Heart receivâ??d the Wound;
Amazâ??d he fell, and graspâ??d the bloody Ground.
The gentle Spirit sprung to endless Day,
And left behind her Case of beauteous Clay;
Pale stood the Brother â?? to a Statue chillâ??d,
A conscious Horror through his Bosom thrillâ??d:
His frighted Eyes abhorrâ??d the Beams of Light,
And longâ??d to find a never-ceasing Night.

Shockâ??d at the Sight of Murder first begun,
Down the steep Heavens rollâ??d the radiant Sun,
Old Night assuming her appointed Sway,
Stretchâ??d her black Mantle oâ??er the Face of Day:
Now for their Leader mournâ??d the bleating Lambs,
That rovâ??d neglected by their pensive Dams;
The careful Parents search the Fields around;
They call â?? the Woods roll back an empty Sound.

Within a Forestâ??s solitary Gloom,
Slept gentle *Abel* in a secret Tomb,
And there (beneath a Cypressâ?? Shade reclinâ??d)
Cain breathâ??d his Sorrows to the rushing Wind:
That in the Branches made a doleful Sound;
â??Twas Silence else, and horrid Darkness round,
When lo ! a sudden and a piercing Ray
Oâ??er-spread the Forest with a Blaze of Day,
And then descended on the hallowâ??d Ground,
A Seraph with empyreal Glory crownâ??d:
Afflicted *Cain* (that knew not where to fly)
Gazâ??d on the Vision with distracted Eye:
When thus the Angel â?? Why these mournful Cries,
These loud Complaints that pierce the nightly Skies.
Lye not to Heaven, but directly say,
Where roves thy Brother, where does *Abel* stray.
He said â?? and thus the guilty Wretch returnâ??d;
O sacred Guardian, I for *Abel* mournâ??d:

I neâ??er beheld him since the Day began, â??-
But why this Visit to a simple Man?
Thus the Celestial â??- Wretch, canst thou presume,
Thy Brotherâ??s Blood may slumber in its Tomb:
Or thou mayâ??st ward off Vengeance with a Lye,
And dare attempt deceiving God most high;
But now thy Doom, O wretched Mortal hear;
The fleeting Hours nor the rolling Year,
To thee nor Joy, nor chearful Ease shall bring:
Alike to thee the Winter and the Spring,
Still vexâ??d with Woe, thy heavy Days shall fly
Beneath a radiant or a gloomy Sky:
Cursâ??d shalt thou be amidst thy vagrant Band,
And cursâ??d the Labours of thy guilty Hand:
He ceasâ??d â?? But *Cain* all prostrate on the Ground,
Still in his Ears retainâ??d the dreadful Sound:
At length he rose, and trembling thus began;
This is too much â?? too much for Mortal Man:
The mighty Debt, O let me quickly pay,
And sweep me instant from the Beams of Day:
The yet unborn, that I am cursâ??d, shall know,
And all shall hate me to augment the Blow:
Evâ??n my own Sons, if such are givâ??n to be
The Death of *Abel*, shall revenge on me:
Thus he to change the dreadful Sentence tryâ??d,
Thus the seraphick Messenger replyâ??d;
This Mark, O *Cain*, I fix upon thy Brow:
And thus by Heavâ??nâ??s mighty Monarch vow,
Who sheds thy Blood, that Criminal shall be
Cursâ??d â?? Sevâ??n times cursâ??d, and wretched more than thee.
Thus be that Mortal who shall tear the Rod
Of scorching Vengeance from the Hand of God;
That Man may learn to fear the King of Kings:
He said â?? and waving his immortal Wings,
That instant mingled with the starry Train,
And Darkness wrapâ??d the silent Shades again.

NOTES:

3 *Our genâ??ral Mother* Eve.

4 *the Partner of her Crime* Adam.

9 *Two Sons* Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, and Abel, his younger brother (*OCB*).

34 *Jehovah* â??Name of Godâ?• (*OCB*).

40 *Lamb* A typical sacrificial animal in Ancient Egypt, often symbolically associated with Jesus (*OCB*).

74 *Seraph* A supernatural being associated with the presence of God (*OCB*).

109 *This Mark* See Genesis 4:15; the exact nature of Cainâ??s mark is mysterious, but Leapor follows the tradition that associates the mark with divine protection.

SOURCE: *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London, 1748), pp. 232-237. [Google Books]

Edited by Lourdes Alcala-Guerrero