â??Posthumus,â?• â??The Partridges: an elegyâ?•

Description

â??Posthumusâ?•

â??The Partridges: an elegy. ***Written on the 31st of August, 1788â?•***

Ill-Fated birds, for whom I raise the strain,
To tell my lively sorrow for your fates;
Ye little know, ere morn shall gild the plain,
What drear destruction all your race awaits.

While innocently basking in the ray,
That throws the lengthenâ??d shadows oâ??er the lawn,
Unconscious you behold the parting day,
Nor feel a fear to meet the morrowâ??s dawn.

Could man like you thus wait the ills of life,
Nor eâ??er anticipate misfortuneâ??s blow,
Heâ??d shun a complicated load of strife,
Greater than real evils can bestow.

Evâ??n now the sportsman, anxious for his fame,
Prepares the tube so fatal to your race;
He pants already for the *glorious* game,
And checks the lingering hoursâ?? tardy pace.

Rapturâ??d heâ??ll hie him, at the dawn of day,
With treacherous caution tread your haunts around,
Exulting rout his poor defenceless prey,
Then bring the fluttering victims to the ground.

Yes! while he gives the meditated blow,
And sees around the struggling covey bleed,
His iron heart a barbarous joy shall know,
And plume itself upon the bloody deed.

For shame! Can men who boast a polishâ??d mind,
And feelings too, these savage pastimes court?
In such inhuman acts a pleasure find,
And call the cruel desolationâ??sport?

Thousands that graze the fields must daily bleed,
Necessity compelsâ??for man they die
But no excuse necessity can plead,

To kill those harmless tenants of the sky.

By heaven privilegâ??d they build the nest,
They take the common bounty nature yields,
No property with vicious force molest,
But pick the refuse of the open fields.

Then why, if God this privilege has given,
Should we pervert great natureâ??s bounteous plan?
For happiness is sure the end of heaven,
As well to bird and insect as to man.

Like us they move within their narrow sphere,
Each various passion of the mind confess;
And joy and sorrow, love and hope and fear,
Alternate pain them, and alternate bless.

Yes! they can pine in griefâ??with rapture glow
Their little hearts, to every feeling true:
Like us conceive affection, and the blow
That kills the offspring, wounds the mother too.

Then bid your breasts for nobler pastimes burn!
Let not such cruelty your actions stain!
Humanity should teach mankind to spurn
The pleasures purchasâ??d by anotherâ??s pain.

NOTES:

Author â??POSTHUMUSâ?• appears at the conclusion of the poem followed by â??Canterbury.â?• â??POSTHUMUSâ?• is most likely the authorâ??s pseudonym, while â??Canterburyâ?• is most likely where the author had lived.

1 *raise the strain* Here the phrase means something like â??write this poem.â?• Possibly also an allusion to the hymn â??Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strainâ?• by St. John Damascus.

17 *hie* â??To cause to hasten; to hasten, urge on, bring quicklyâ?• (*OED*).

19 *rout* â??Of a person: to cry out; to roar, bellow, to shoutâ?• (*OED*).

22 *covey* â??A brood or hatch of partridges; a family of partridges keeping together during the first seasonâ?• (*OED*).

Source: *The Gentlemanâ??s Magazine*, vol. 63 (February 1788), p. 824.

Edited by Amanda Boyer