Mary Leapor, â??The Fox and the Hen. A Fableâ?•

Description

MARY LEAPOR

â??The Fox and the Hen. *A* Fableâ?•

â??Twas on a fair and healthy Plain,
There livâ??d a poor but honest Swain,
Had to his Lot a little Ground,
Defended by a quick-set Mound:
â??Twas there he milkâ??d his brindled Kine,
And there he fed his harmless Swine:
His Pigeons flutterâ??d to and fro,
And baskâ??d his Poultry in a Row:
Much we might say of each of these,
As how his Pigs in Consort wheeze;
How the sweet Hay his Heifers chew,
And how the Pigeons softly coo:
But we shall wave this motley Strain,
And keep to one thatâ??s short and plain:
Nor paint the Dunghillâ??s featherâ??d King,
For of the Hen we mean to sing.

A Hen there was, a strange one too,
Couâ??d sing (believe me, it is true)
Or rather (as you may persume)
Wouâ??d prate and cackle in a Tune:
This quickly spread the Pulletâ??s Fame,
And Birds and Beasts together came:
All mixt in one promiscuous Throng,
To visit Partlet and her Song.
It chancâ??d there came amongst the Crew,
Of witty Foxes not a few:
But one more smart than all the rest,
His serious Neighbour thus addrest:
â??What think you of this Partlet here?
â??Tis true her Voice is pretty clear:
Yet without pausing I can tell,
In what much more she wouâ??d excel:
Methinks sheâ??d eat exceeding well.â?•
This heard the listâ??ning Hen, as she
Sat perchâ??d upon a Maple-tree.

The shrewd Proposal gallâ??d her Pride,
And thus to *Reynard* she replyâ??d:
â??Sir , youâ??re extremely right I vow,
But how will you come at me now?
You dare not mount this lofty Tree,
So there Iâ??m pretty safe, you see.
From long ago, (or Record lies)
You Foxes have been counted wise:
But sure this Story donâ??t agree
With your Device of eating me.
For you, Dame Fortune still intends
Some coarser Food than singing Hens:
Besides eâ??er you can reach so high.
Remember you must learn to fly.

I own â??tis but a scurvy way,
You have as yet to seize your Prey,
By sculking from the Beams of Light,
And robbing Hen-roosts in the Night:
Yet you must keep this vulgar Trade
Of thieving till your Wings are made.

Had I the keeping of you thoâ??,
Iâ??d make your subtle Worship know,
We Chickens are your Betters due,
Not fatted up for such as you:
Shut up in Cub with rusty Chain,
Iâ??d make you lick your Lips in vain:
And take a special Care, be sure,
No Pullet shouâ??d come near your Door:
But try if you couâ??d feed or no,
Upon a Kite or Carrion Crow.â•
Here ceasâ??d the Hen. The bafflâ??d Beast
Marchâ??d off without his promisâ??d Feast.

NOTES:

4 *quick-set Mound* Likely a raised boundary â??formed of living plants, esp. thorny ones such as hawthorneâ•(*OED*).

15 *the Dunghillâ??s featherâ??d King* A rooster, or â??cock.â•

21 *Pullet* â??A young domestic henâ•(*OED*).

23 *Throng* â??A large densely packed gathering of people or animalsâ•(*OED*).

24 *Partlet* â??A name traditionally applied to a henâ•(*OED*).

37 *Reynard* â??A proper name applied traditionally (chiefly in literature) to a foxâ•(*OED*).

59 *Cub* â??A stall, pen, or shedâ?• for farm animals (*OED*).

64 *Kite* â??A bird of preyâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London, 1748), pp. 97-100. [*Google Books*]

Edited by Josh Hernandez