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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Epitaph on two Bullfinches

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-59887](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-59887)

For me suffice, in Amptill's¹ groves,
 Cradle of Graces and of Loves,
 I first announc'd in artless page
 The glories of a rising age,
 And promis'd, where my Anna² shone,
 Three Offorys as bright as one.

E P I T A P H

ON TWO PIPING-BULLFINCHES OF LADY OSSORY'S, BURIED UNDER
 A ROSE-BUSH IN HER GARDEN.

ALL flesh is grass, and so are feathers too:
 Finches must die, as well as I and you.
 Beneath a damask rose, in good old age,
 Here lies the tenant of a noble cage.
 For forty moons he charm'd his lady's ear,
 And pip'd obedient oft as she drew near,
 Though now stretch'd out upon a clay-cold bier. }
 But when the last shrill flageolet shall sound,
 And raise all dickybirds from holy ground,
 His little corpse again its wings shall plume, }
 And sing eternally the self-same tune,
 From everlasting night to everlasting noon.

¹ Amptill-park in Bedfordshire, the seat of (youngest brother of the duke of Bedford),
 the earls of Offory. At this time, besides the each about five years old. H. W.
 Vernons, were there, lady Anne Fitzpatrick, the ² Anne Liddel countess of Offory, wife of
 earl's only child, and lord William Ruffel John the second earl.

ON THE OTHER BULLFINCH, BURIED IN THE SAME PLACE.

BENEATH the same bush rests his brother—
What serves for one will serve for t'other'.

In case this little *jeu d'esprit* should subject the author to misrepresentation, as touching with unbecoming levity upon serious subjects, an extract of a letter from Mr. Walpole to Mr. Mason, who it seems had thus misconceived his meaning, is here subjoined. It not only completely vindicates the innocent playfulness of his muse, but is a serious profession of serious opinions, which, it is presumed, all his readers will see with pleasure. E.

To Mr. MASON.

Nov. 1783.

— You amaze me by even supposing that the epitaph I sent you could allude to the immortality of the soul. Believe me, I think it as serious a subject as you do; nor, I am sure, did you ever hear me drop a hint of doubting it. The three last lines, which reasonably offended you, if you so interpreted them, were intended to laugh at that absurd idea of the beatified sitting on golden thrones, and chanting eternal hallelujahs to golden harps. When men ascribe their own puerile conceptions to the Almighty Author of every thing, what do they,

but prove that their system is of human invention?—What can be more ridiculous, than to suppose that Omnipotent Goodness and Wisdom created and selected the most virtuous of its creatures to sing his praises to all eternity? It is an idea that I should think could never have entered but into the head of a king, who might delight to hear them chant birth-day odes for ever.

Pray be assured that I never trifle on so solemn and dear an interest as the immortality of the soul, though I do not subscribe to every childish or fantastic employment that silly people have chalked out for it. There is no word in any language expressive enough of the adoration and gratitude we owe to the Author of all Good. An eternity of praises and thanks is due to him—but thence are we to infer, that that is the sole tribute in which he will delight, and the sole occupation he destines for beings, on whom he has bestowed thought and reason?

The epitaph did not deserve half a line to be said on it; but your criticism, indeed misconception of it, will excuse my saying so much in my own justification.—

A CARD