

A11 England thy early prime is gone, good Knight

Notes. This poem clearly refers to the execution of the Earl of Essex on 25 February 1601. In addition to the pun on “good knight”/“good night” and its contrast with “prime”, it seems to reflect the blow to England’s aristocracy dealt by the fall of Essex in its truncation of “knight” to “k.”. The reference to “Thy cheife Nobilitie is now a K.” is surely intended to suggest that Cecil—a mere knight—now lords it over the nobility despite his inferior social status.

“On Essex”

England thy early prime¹ is gone, good Knight

Thy cheife Nobilitie is now a K.²

Source. “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 28

A11

¹ *prime*: the first hour of the day, usually taken as sunrise or 6 a.m.; more generally, the period of greatest vigour.

² *K.*: the abbreviation of “knight” here is perhaps intended to imply that Cecil was not even worthy to be called a proper knight. It is also possible that “K.” alludes to “Kay the Jackdaw”, the bird of borrowed feathers (cf. “I.C.U.R.”).