

B3 Come all you Farmers out of the Countrey

Notes. This poem responds to James I's July 1603 orders that all those worth £40 per year should present themselves to be knighted at his coronation. The orders prompted bitter comments about the debasement of the title. Sir Thomas Tresham, for instance, feared that some of those who qualified for the title were "landless, many base and dosser headed [i.e. foolish] clowns, and not one among forty worthy of that degree" (qtd. in Stone, Crisis 75).

"Verses upon the Order for making Knights of such Persons who had 40 pounds per annum in King James I. Time."

Come all you Farmers out of the Countrey,
Carter, Plowmen, Hedgers¹ & all;
Tome, Dick, & Will, Raph, Roger & Humfrey,
Leave of your Gestures rusticall.
Bidd all your Home-sponne Russetts² adue,
And sute yourselves in Fashions new:
Honour invits you to Delights:
Come all to Court, & be made Knights.

5

He that hath fortie Pounds per Annum,
Shalbe promoted from the Plowe:
His Wife shall take the Wall of her Grannam:³
Honour is sould soe Dog-cheeap now.
Though thow hast neither good Birth nor Breeding,
If thow hast Money, thow art sure of speeding.

10

Knighthood in old Time was counted an Honour,
Which the best Spiritts did not disdayne:
But now it is us'd in soe base a manner,
That it's noe Creditt, but rather a Staine.
Tush, it's noe Matter what People doe say!
The Name of a Knight a whole village will sway.

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Shepherds, leave singing your Pastorall Sonnetts,
And to learne Complements shew your Endeavours:
Cast of for ever your twoe Shillings Bonnetts;
Cover your Coxcombs⁴ with three Pounds Beavers.⁵
Sell Carte & Tarrboxe⁶ new Coaches to buy: 25
Then, Good your worshipp, the Vulgar will cry.

And thus unto Worshipp being advanced,
Keepe all your Tenants in Awe with your Frownes;
And lett your Rents be yearly inhaunced,
To buy your new-moulded Maddams new Gownes. 30
Joan, Sisse, & Nell shalbe all Ladified:
Instead of Hay-Carts, in Coaches shall ryde.

What ever you doe, have a Care of Expenses:
In Hospitality doe not exceed:
Greatnes of Followers belongeth to Princes: 35
A Coachman & Footman are all that you need:
And still observe this, let your Servants Meate lacke,
To keepe brave Apparell upon your Wives Backe.

Now to conclud, & shute upp my Sonnett:
Leave of your Cartwhipp, Hedgbill & Flayle.⁷ 40
This is my Councell: think well upon it:
Knighthood & Honour are now putt to Saile
Then make Haste quickly, & lett out your Farmes,
And I will hereafter emblazen your Armes.⁸

Source. BL Add. MS 5832, fol. 206r-v

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, fol. 185r

- ¹ *Hedgers*: men who repair hedges.
 - ² *Russetts*: plain-coloured clothing typically worn by peasants.
 - ³ *take the Wall of her Grannam*: to take the place of honour ahead of her grandmother.
 - ⁴ *Coxcombs*: heads (derogatory colloquialism).
 - ⁵ *Beavers*: hats made of beaver pelts.
 - ⁶ *Tarrboxe*: tarbox; a container of salve shepherds carried to treat their sheep.
 - ⁷ *Hedgbill & Flayle*: agricultural tools.
 - ⁸ *emblazen your Armes*: to emblazon (set-up, or portray) your coat-of-arms.
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