

B7 To whome shall cursed I my Case complaine

Notes. Though clearly composed after Raleigh's fall in 1603, this lengthy poem dwells in great detail on Raleigh's alleged betrayal of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, offering a detailed "confession" of Raleigh's plotting against Essex from the late 1590s until the Earl's disastrous rebellion and execution in 1601. In both known sources, this poem is immediately followed by "I speake to such if any such there bee".

"The dispairinge Complaite of wretched Rawleigh for his Trecheries wrought against the worthy Essex"

To whome shall cursed I my Case complaine

to move some Pitty of my wretched state

For though no other comferte doth remaine

yet pitty would my greife extenuate

For I towards God and man my selfe abused

and therefore am of God and man refused.

5

To heaven I dare not lifte my wretched eies

nor aske God pardon for my wretched deedes

For I his word and service did despise

esteeminge them of no more worth then weedes¹

For which most vile conceytes these woes proceedes

For now I find and finding feare to rue

There is a God who is both just and true

10

And unto man I likewise am afraide

To make Complaite of this my gnawinge greife

Lest they (as well they may) should me upbraid

With scorne and pride which in mee were most reefe²

And therefore man will yeelde me no releife

Thus wretched I which everie man did scorne

Am now my selfe of every man forlorne.

15

20

What shall I doe in this perplexed plighte
Fearinge to move or God or man for grace
shall I to heavenly Saintes my woes recite
And hope that they will moane my wretched Case
O no it is their office and their place 25
 To judge such giultie sinfull soules as I
 And therefore no releife may come thereby

Yet one there is of that Celestiall sorte
whoe sure I thinke would pittie my distresse
For when he lived heere in earthly Porte 30
He was the Patterne of all gentlenesse
Ah but gainst him I greatlie did transgresse
 Then Traytor vile how canst thou hope for grace
 From him whom thou by Treason didst displace

O yes I know his virtues heere were such 35
he did abhorre to beare revenginge minde
and beinge there they better are by much
Because he lives remote from fleshie kinde
In perfecte joy to blessed Saintes assignde
 A Worthy Essex but for feare of shame 40
 I would invoke thy honorable name

But ere I can expect Commiseracion
I must intreate forgivenes hartilie
And ere forgivenes can have Confirmacion
I must Confesse how I have injurde thee 45
For it with Reason rightly doth agree
 That such a wrongfull wicked wretch as I
 Should first confesse and then for pardon cry

Wherefore I will my Clogged conscience Cleere
by true confession of my Treachery 50
That God and Angells Saintes & men may heare
how I thine honor wrongd most shamefullie
which on my selfe is lighted suddenly

For these my due deserts now falne on mee
plainly declares my Treason wrought gainst thee 55

For when thy soveraigne³ did thee well respecte
As well thou didst deserve to be respected
I then with falshood did thy truth infecte
wherby her princelie judgment was infected
and thou by her most causleslie rejected 60

Then I which on occasion did attend
omitted naught which might thee more offend

For then with open throate I did not spare
To taxe the⁴ virtues most reproachfullie
Thy valour was Ambition I would sweare 65
Thy curteous Bounty hope of Soveraigntie
Thy Justice malice and extremetie

And thy religious zeale I ofte would call
Dissimulation to deceave withall

Thus with detraction did I first assaile thee 70
Whoe did effect what shee did undertake
Then Envy wrought that nothings might availe thee
Thou⁵ Truth thy just Apologie⁶ did make
Then framed Treason brought thee to the stake

Thus to assaile thee with these furies fell 75
I pawnd my soule to fetch them out of hell

I also had assistance in this worke
whose helping handes were in as deepe as mine
though some of them aloofe now slylie lurke
as if their Consciencs were sole divine 80
yet in a league with mee they did combine

 Thee to destroy by Treasons pollicy
 which wee effected to our infamy⁷

But some of my Confederates in this Acte
whose dates of mischeife did with mine expire 85
are fallen with me in this pretended facte⁸
prepard to pay our due deserved hier
now if it were not sin I would desier

 That all which wrought with me in thy disgrace
 Might stand with me in this my wretched case 90

But what should I neede doubt or stand in feare
That they shall scape revenge more cleere then I
Since he⁹ whoe hath entrapt me in this snare
Can Traverse them in their owne pollicy
and will no doubt when he due time doth see 95

 For he will punish every Trecherous case
 either in this or in a worser place

And therefore though they florish for a tyme
in Grace Authoritie and honors greate¹⁰
which may perswade them they may easilie Climbe 100
upp to the highest stepp of fortunes seate
yet is there one whoe can their hopes defeate

 For when they thinke themselves in highst respect
 Then suddenlie he can them soone dejecte

Wittnesse my selfe who thought my selfe as sure 105
as any one of my associates all

But now I finde Treason cannot endure

Insultinge Pride shall likewise have a fall

For such Offences doe for vengeance call

And he which is the Remedier of Wronge 110

hath said his vengeance shall not tarry longe

Which by experience I have found most true

For in the selfe same kinde that I offended

He justlie hath repaied to me my due

his justice therefore needes must be commended 115

which hath it selfe so equallie extended

usinge the meanes of my owne fowle offence

to give to mee a righteous recompence

For as by letters I procurde thy bane

which of a Perjurde villaine I did buy 120

who for Commoditie had stolne the same

From her to whom thou sentst them faithfullie

Conteyninge nought but Truth and Modestie

Yet I which knew they would me much infest

did spare no cost till I had them possest¹¹ 125

So I through Letters of Contrary kinde

to those of thine am now adjudgde my meede¹²

For when all other promises did faile

me to offend in this pretended deede

my Opposites more stricklie did proceede 130

And then a letter did gainst me produce¹³

For which my cuninge lackes a cleane excuse

And thus as I by letters thee offended
by letters now my owne offence was provd
vile Traytor I that ill gainst thee intended 135
who for desert I rather should have lov'd
Pride Spight and Mischeife thee unto me mov'd

And now methinks Dispayre doth me surprise
setting thy wronge before my wretched eyes

For when I heard my selfe exclaimde upon 140
by him whose mouth most mastive¹⁴ like revilde thee
Then thought I how I laughing stood by one
Whose rancorde harte brake out and much defild thee
and still wee laught to thinke how wee beguild thee

I then did praise the Barkers mouth for spendinge 145
But now he hath me plagugd for then offendinge¹⁵

And now I find it doth my Conscience gall
that wee subbornd a Judas to betray thee
who told thee when the Councell did thee call
that I and Cobham by the way would stay thee 150
advising thee therfor at home to stay thee

And thus by fraude we forcde thee to offend
by disobeyinge when the Lordes did send¹⁶

It likewise now doth greive me though too late
that wee procurde the Prince thee to imploy¹⁷ 155
whilst in thy absence wee might worke thy hate
by urginge: thou didst purpose to annoy
thy lovinge Countrey and thy Prince destroy

And more to feare her with that foule intent
we rayسد force thy Comminge to prevent¹⁸ 160

But well we knew thy meaninge was not such
though wee pretended so thee to abuse
hopinge thereby we might encrease so much
thy soveraignes hate that wee should quite refuse
to heare thee speake with truth this to excuse 165

And sure were wee should our purpose gaine
if from her presence shee would thee restraine

When falsly thus wee had the Queene possest
with this Conceite that thou hadst plotted Treason
we likewise then our pollicies addrest 170
To traine the over¹⁹ by some subtill reason
wherof our Consultacions were not geason²⁰

For I have herd though here it may seeme grosse
holies the Church where Sathan beares the Crosse

Then did we blowe abroad the Prince is dead 175
thinking therby to further our intente
for then we hopte thou sure wouldst gather head
and come with speede invasion to prevente
For wee before of cunninge purpose sent

That Spanish expedition was in hand 180
the which we know thou stronglie wouldst withstand

But here our expectacion somewhat faded
because thou didst not come when wee expected
nor in that manner as wee had perswaded
thou mentst to come when first thou wast detected 185
Yet wee so wrought that quite thou wast rejected

And eke restrained of thy libertie
the which we labourd most incessantlie²¹

Now when wee thus our wishes had obtained
we left noe time nor mischeife to devise 190
for then false articles wee forgd & fayned
wherewith we dimbd²² thy soverainges Princelie eies
and then did everie one against thee rise

Like as a single hound by Curres²³ orematched
once beinge downe of every Curre is snatched 195

Then for Starchamber²⁴ did wee worke apace
pretendinge thou shouldst present there appeare
and there by order answere face to face
such articles as should concerne thee neare
but this was never ment the case is cleare 200

For well we knew if thou shouldst there have spoken
our knott of Treachery might have bin broken

But wee a farr more cleerer shifte devised
then that thou shouldst have answered our objection
For we procurde thy faults to be surmisde 205
thou being absent (o vile lawes infection)
and Censured as wee have given direction

for wee so wrought thy Prince by subtle sawes
that what we wild²⁵ was of more force then lawes

The yce was broken then wee grew more bold 210
In Course of violence forward to proceede
For then all offices which thou didst hold
wee purgde thee of as wee before decreede²⁶
therby more discontent in thee to breede

Thus when wee had occasion stirde to Ire 215
wee gave thee scope that we might kindle fire

But when we saw occasion nought prevailed
with furious blast the fier to inflame
but as the more she wrought the more shee failed
because coole Patience still the heate orecame 220
For juyce of Herbegrace²⁷ was on the same
wee then another Strategem devised
by which thou wast most cunninglie surprised

And this was sly and subtle subboration
with promises of very large extent 225
which gaind us one with thee in estimacion
and in thy private favour resident
of him we made our working instrument
Thee to perswade to gaine thy former grace
by usinge meanes thy hinderers to displace²⁸ 230

But when hee told us thou wast well contented
to live a private life remote from care
the modell of a projecte we invented
wherin he might his love to thee declare
by givinge helpe thy state for to repaire 235
To which when he had gotten thy consent
we had our purpose and our whole intent

For then wee doubted not to pricke thee on
by subtle force of forged instigation
which wee alreadie had resolvde upon 240
to stirre thee upp to secret consultation
For resolution and determination
For meanes and times of present execution
Lo thus wee wrought thy utter desolution

Yet this my true detestable confession 245
Is but the abstracte of my villany
for I have wrought more trecherous transgression
against thy Honnour Truth and Loyaltie
Then now I can recall to memory

For which with sighes all desperate of releife 250
I cry for pardon to asswage my greife

And as for this offence I now intended²⁹
I doe not doubt but I shall favour finde
but what can my estate be thereby mended
For still I shall retaine a guilty minde 255
From which I can no place of refuge finde

For every man will kill me with his eie
and therfore twere more ease for me to dye

For I such Terrour in my Conscience feele
by thought of my most execrable deedes 260
that though my hart obdurate be as steele
yet when I thinke thereon it quakes and bleedes
such piercing passions from them still proceedes

Ah: since I have confessed now the truth
Forgive me then and pittie this my ruth³⁰ 265

But if thou wilt not deigne to pittie mee
then must I ever pittillesse remaine
for all that live laugh at my misery
except some few and they I thinke doe faine
fearinge I should their falshood vile explaine 270

Thus like a Cursed Caitiffe³¹ did I live
and now my cursed case doth no man greive

Source. Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fols. 11r-14r

Other known sources. BL Add. MS 15226, fol. 6v

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¹ *For I his word...worth then weedes*: allusion to the charge of atheism levelled at Raleigh and his circle in the 1590s and revived by the prosecutors at Raleigh's treason trial in 1603.

² *reefe*: i.e. rife.

³ *thy soveraigne*: Elizabeth I.

⁴ *the*: probable scribal error; read "thy".

⁵ *Thou*: probable scribal error; read "though".

⁶ *thy just Apologie*: allusion to Essex's *Apologie*, a 1598 letter to Anthony Bacon that was circulating in manuscript by 1599, appeared in a rapidly-suppressed printed edition in 1600, and was printed again in 1603.

⁷ *I also had assistance...infamy*: this stanza may refer to the actions of, among others, Robert Cecil. Cecil was in the process of becoming James I's chief minister and was instrumental in Raleigh's fall.

⁸ *some of my Confederates...pretended facte*: the key figure who was alleged to have conspired with Raleigh against Essex and who then fell with Raleigh as a result of the Bye and Main Plots was Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham.

⁹ *he*: i.e. God.

¹⁰ *though they flourish...honors greate*: of all Essex's enemies, these lines best fit Robert Cecil.

¹¹ *For as by letters...had them possest*: this stanza probably refers to the letters written by Essex to his wife, Frances, and purloined by a disgruntled former servant, John Daniell. Daniell apparently doctored the letters to make them more incriminating and then tried to blackmail the Countess of Essex by claiming that Raleigh and Cobham had offered to pay £3000 for them. Essex cited the case at his trial as an example of his enemies' vicious smear campaign against him. Daniell was eventually tried in Star Chamber in June 1601.

¹² *meede*: reward.

¹³ *And then a letter...produce*: perhaps a reference to the letter from Cobham used by the prosecution

against Raleigh in his treason trial.

14 *mastive*: i.e. mastiff; a dog.

15 *For when I heard...then offendinge*: the general meaning of this stanza is clear enough: the same men who once joined him in attacking Essex, have now attacked Raleigh. The sense of the poem implies this might refer to the Crown's most strident prosecutor at both treason trials, Sir Edward Coke.

16 *And now I find...Lords did send*: on 7 February 1601, the Privy Council summoned Essex to appear before it. The Earl refused, claiming he was ill. The poet implies here that Raleigh had persuaded one of Essex's friends to lure him into this dangerous act of contempt for royal authority by convincing the Earl that Raleigh and Cobham would attack him on his way to the Council. The identity of the "Judas" here is unclear, but it may be Sir Ferdinando Gorges.

17 *wee procurde the Prince...imploy*: reference to Elizabeth I's decision to send Essex to Ireland to quash Tyrone's rebellion. Essex left London for Ireland in March 1599.

18 *And more to feare...thy Comminge to prevent*: this couplet may refer to the military mobilization in the summer of 1599, triggered by incorrect reports that a new Spanish Armada was headed to England.

19 *To traine the over*: allusion to a plot to trick Essex into returning from Ireland.

20 *geason*: uncommon, infrequent.

21 *But here our expectacion...most incessantlie*: this stanza alludes to Essex's unauthorized return from Ireland in September 1599 and his subsequent placement under house arrest at the beginning of October 1599.

22 *dimbd*: i.e. dimmed.

23 *Curres*: dogs; often with the implication of "low-born".

24 *Then for Starchamber*: reference to the late November 1599 defence of the imprisonment of Essex by several Privy Councillors assembled in the court of Star Chamber. The implication, developed in this and the following stanza, is that the original plan was for Essex to be tried by that court, but that the plan was changed to facilitate a stage-managed series of denunciations of Essex *in absentia*.

25 *wild*: i.e. willed.

26 *For then all offices...before decreede*: Essex was stripped of office after a judicial verdict against him at a York House hearing in June 1600.

27 *Herbegrace*: herb-of-grace; the herb rue, symbolizing repentance.

²⁸ *And this was sly...to displace*: the allegation introduced in this stanza, and developed in the following stanza, is that Raleigh and Cobham worked to incite Essex to open revolt by suborning one of his trusted friends—perhaps Sir Ferdinando Gorges—and using him to urge on the Earl. Essex rose in armed revolt on 8 February 1601.

²⁹ *this offence I now intended*: reference to the alleged Main Plot.

³⁰ *ruth*: sorrow.

³¹ *Caitiffe*: wretch, villain.
