

K2 Bridewell I come be valient muse and strip

Notes. This poem adapts existing conventions of satiric poetry for the purposes of political comment. It constructs a socially-coded voice at the outset, the speaker positioned as one looking up at those in the court, and risking the whips of Bridewell for his efforts. Thereafter, it assumes a heavily ironic tone, considering the corruptions that could never possibly stain England. Although it lacks the detail and specificity of the preceding poem, it valuably articulates general concerns of the time, especially those affecting the Church.

“A Satire”

Bridewell¹ I come be valient muse and strip
ride naked in despite of Bridewells whip.

Goe to the Court let those above us knowe
they have their faults as well as we belowe.

Goe tell the great ons, their greatnes of blood
is but false greatnes, their greatnes understood.

5

The Noble are the virtuous, honour from mudd
and clay is base, those greatest that are good.

Some have heigh place by birth, some lands advance
Some climbe by witt, some are made great by chance

10

I know a man made lord for his good face
whoe scarce had witt for to supplie that place.²

another loth that name to undertake
must needs be lorded for his ladies sake.³

a third that could not such promotion gett
a thousand find to be a Baronett.⁴

15

a fourth not mov'd with an ambitious spright
was well content to be a common knight.⁵

Honors a hackney,⁶ offices for gould
like common jades in faires are bought and sould.

20

Let none despaire. asses and fooles inheritt

Fortune advanceth more then witt or merit
 all this in forraine states I see, with us
 none are advanced but the virtuous.
 England thou art not soyld with spotts like these 25
 thou art not given to flattery, pride, nor ease
 Thy Ladies there with there one lords doe lie
 thy Court is chaster then a nunnery.
 mariage is there not made a slipperie knott
 of fast and loose, but in the generall lott 30
 she that doth draw a blank, an eunuch wedd⁷
 is as well pleas'd to keepe her meaden head
 as if she had mett with Hercules stronge flame
 as a lawfull prize to rob her of the same
 She dares not blase her lust to breath the fame 35
 She had rather loose her pleasure then her name.
 There is noe fashion? all with them is union
 they speake one truth and are of one religion
 Theire foxes suck not out the poore lambes blood
 nor private ends are made the publick good. 40
 But all are for the generall all agree
 like bells and bagpipes in one hermonie.
 The sacred seate of justice Joves Rare throne
 is not infected with corruption.
 The judges cannot err nor slip aside 45
 where righteous angells are their daylie guide.
 the seales are just, noe bribes corrupt the lawes
 justice eies noe man but lookes on the cause.
 Has't thou a suite requireth equitie?
 Committ it to the righteous Chancery.⁸ 50
 Thou shal't not find it there last halfe soe longe
 as thy Buffe Jerkin⁹ that is tough and stronge.

Nor shall find alminacks¹⁰ weare out of date
 before that courte doe sentance thy debate
 Thy beard shall not turne gray nor state be reard 55
 or gag'd or spent before thy cause be heard.
 Ther's noe such triflinge, these dispatches goe
 faster then mills, when stubborne winds doe blow.
 The racks ride not soe fast as doth the cause¹¹
 pegasus¹² goes slowlie to the swift paced lawes. 60
 Conscience provokes their speed, before thou spend
 a double fee thy cause is at an end.
 Looke heigher muse & cast a modest eie
 into the Churche and veiwe her puretie
 is she defil'd with superstition¹³ 65
 or antique shapes of old devotion
 is ceremonie impos'd to sanctetie
 or onely urg'd to teach conformitie
 doe any climbe up to the pulpitts steares
 more by their purse then by their zealous prayers 70
 O god forbidd but pulpitts should be free
 from flatteringe falshood, pride and simony.¹⁴
 dare any bribe the usher or the page
 for the next advowson¹⁵ of a vicarage:
 dares any preach against a vitious life 75
 and be the first will kis his neighbours wife
 Does profitt at a Bishops conscience knock
 and bidd him sheere the sheepe and pine the flock.
 whoe flatters less; Doe cleargie men agree?
 to make a baude of their devinetie? 80
 ah noe o noe our reverend Churchmen dare
 boldly tell absalon of his longe haire¹⁶
 These tent¹⁷ the wounds like Surgeons to the quick

not skinn it ore to gett a Bishoprick
 michah dares tell Samaria of her crimes¹⁸ 85
 what plauges shall follow these Idolatrous times
 the mountaines cleane & rocks melt with fier¹⁹
 Sion²⁰ thy shames are like a purple flood
 for thou wert Built on ruine and on blood.
 thy head and rulers for reward doe judge 90
 michah saith clients doe for justice trudge
 and unregarded pas²¹ salem²² shall be
 a chaos made of all deformitie.
 and Sion that did once all pleasure yeald
 shall be plowed up and made a desart feild. 95
 I know our michah would say more then this
 But what needs michah when noe sion is.
 The sonne doth teach the lesser lamps to shine
 and from his flame the drawe a soule devine.
 Our torches and our candles doe shine bright 100
 because the doe pertake of phoebus²³ light.
 veiwe you our lesser lamps & doe not cease
 till thou hast prest our justices of peace.
 the common people feare these mightie men
 that will not sell a statute for a hen 105
 nor from the right and truth one jott decline
 for a fatt capon or a bottle of wine.
 a loade of coale will starte his conscience warme
 for two hee'le keepe his neighbours from all harme.
 theise are just magistrates for if they know 110
 a robbery that was done a yeare agoe
 by one that had a horse of colour gray
 if you and I doe chance to ride that way
 upon like colourd steeds the yeare after day

the felonie was donne and this foule fact 115
 it will be made to appeere to be our act
 and by the wisdom of the bench decreed
 we were the men did act this wicked deed.
 here is true justice, theise are happie states
 that governed are by such wise magistrates 120
 Il'e leave them now & if my sonne & heire
 by chance doe slip into a justice chaire
 this precept from his father let him marke
 a foolish justice needs a cunninge clearke.
 when that the bodie of the tree doth grow 125
 straight & upward the branches still are soe
 England thy head and members all are straight
 though all things ballanst by uneven waight.
 mercie and peace in thee togaither kisse
 let all the world envie thy happie blisse 130
 and let those better witts envie my layes
 thatt had the fortune to singe Englands praise
 judge right for if you judge amisse the blame
 is not the writers but the readers shame.

Source. Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fols. 30r-31r

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¹ *Bridewell*: London prison for whores and vagabonds, to which a commoner might expect to be committed for unlawful criticism of the state.

² *Some have...that place*: these lines are copied directly from a poem on the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury ("Tis painefull rowing gainst the bigg swolne tide"). The second couplet, in both poems, refers to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset.

³ *another...ladies sake*: this reference is unclear.

⁴ *a third...Baronett*: possibly John Holles, who became Baron Holles of Haughton in 1616 after

making a payment to the Crown of £10,000 (ten times what the poem suggests). He became first Earl of Clare in 1624, after paying a further £5000.

⁵ *a fourth...common knight*: this reference is unclear.

⁶ *hackney*: presumably meant here in the sense of a “horse kept for hire” (OED I.2).

⁷ *she that doth...wedd*: allusion to the case of Frances Howard, who sued for a nullity of her marriage in 1613, claiming that her husband, Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, was impotent (see Section F).

⁸ *Has't thou...Chancery*: the Court of Chancery was supposed to operate on laws of conscience and equity, thereby moderating the rigour of the common law.

⁹ *Buffe Jerkin*: a military jerkin (jacket) of buff-leather.

¹⁰ *alminacks*: annual books of tables, containing a range of information and forecasts.

¹¹ *The racks...cause*: unclear; possibly using “rack” in the now obsolete sense of a horse’s gait, in which the two feet on each side are lifted almost simultaneously, and the horse is left entirely without support between the lifting of one pair and the landing of the other (OED).

¹² *pegasus*: winged horse of classical mythology.

¹³ *defil'd with superstition*: like much religious critique of the times, the poem here identifies elements of popery infiltrating the English Church.

¹⁴ *simony*: the buying or selling of ecclesiastical preferments; or, more generally, traffic in sacred things.

¹⁵ *advowson*: right of presentation (to an ecclesiastical office).

¹⁶ *absalon...haire*: Absalom’s luxurious growth of hair, cut annually, is mentioned in 2 Samuel 14.26; here it serves as an image of unchecked pride.

¹⁷ *tent*: probe (surgically).

¹⁸ *michah...crimes*: the prophet Micah railed against the sins of Samaria, the ancient capital of Israel.

¹⁹ *fier*: a gap in the manuscript perhaps indicates the scribe’s recognition of a missing line.

²⁰ *Sion*: Zion, the hill in Jerusalem which became the centre of Jewish life and worship; here, continues the poem’s alignment of Israel and England.

²¹ *pas*: probably read “pass.”

²² *salem*: another name for Jerusalem.

²³ *phoebus*: the god of the sun, or the sun personified; here used as an image of the King.