

## Nvi Against the Libellers

### Nvi1 O stay your teares yow who complaine

*Notes.* On 18 January 1623, Joseph Mead's newsletter to his kinsman Sir Martin Stuteville reported that, "There is also a great paper of verses, in way of answer to these libels and State meddlers, vulgarly said to be the King's; but a gentleman told me that he will not own it" (Birch 2.355). A week later, John Chamberlain informed Dudley Carleton: "And now touching libells the report goes there be many abrode, and it shold seeme the Kings verses I herewith send you were made in aunswer to one of them". Two weeks later, however, Chamberlain reported in his following letter that the king now disclaimed authorship (Chamberlain 2.473, 478). Four days later still, Mead sent Stuteville a copy of the same poem—written "in answer, as it seems, to some libel"—and of a second verse also attributed to James. "This latter", Mead noted, "some say, the king hath disclaimed expressly; but what he saith to the other, I know not. But if it be not his, it is worse than a libel, and not to be read. But till that appears, I suppose, there is no danger" (Birch 2.364-365). Mead and Chamberlain, uncertain as they were about royal authorship, allow us to date with some precision the moment that "O stay your teares yow who complaine" began to circulate among the well-informed collectors of news. One copy of the poem (BL MS Harley 367) states that the libel James was responding to was "called the Comons teares". Unfortunately, no libel with that title has yet been found, though one might note a partial similarity to the title of the verse "If Saints in heaven cann either see or heare", a petition to the late Queen Elizabeth that couched itself in the voice of "her now most wretched and most Contemptible, the Commons of poore distressed England". Both copyists' notes and internal evidence, however, suggest that "If Saints in heaven" was written after March 1623, thus at least two months after James's poem began to circulate. We can reconstruct something of the content of the lost "Comons teares" by collating James's more specific allusions to the libel's charges—James makes about about a dozen such allusions in all, which we have annotated below. The charges thus deduced do not, as a group, match the charges of any one poem, but, taken individually, can be found in a range of other extant verses from the period of the Spanish Match crisis. James's poem has frequently been noted by scholars of verse libel for its memorable attack on "railing rymes and vaunting verse", and is explored in some detail by Perry ("Late Manuscript Poetry of James I" 212-17).

"King James his verses made upon a Libell lett fall in Court and entituled

'The wiper of the Peoples teares

The dryer upp of doubtts & feares”

O stay your teares yow who complaine  
Cry not as Babes doe all in vaine  
Purblinde<sup>1</sup> people why doe yow prate  
Too shallowe for the deepe of state  
You cannot judge what's truly myne 5  
Who see noe further then the Ryne<sup>2</sup>  
Kings walke the heavenly milky way  
But yow by bypathes gadd astray  
God and Kings doe pace together  
But Vulgar wander light as feather 10  
I should be sorie you should see  
My actions before they bee  
Brought to the full of my desires  
God above all men kings enspires  
Hold you the publique beaten way 15  
Wounder at kings, and them obey  
For under God they are to chuse  
What right to take, and what refuse  
Whereto if yow will not consent  
Yet hold your peace least you repent 20  
And be corrected for your pride  
That Kings designes darr thus decyde<sup>3</sup>  
By railing rymes and vaunting verse  
Which your kings brest shall never peirce  
Religion<sup>4</sup> is the right of kings 25  
As they best knowe what good it brings  
Whereto you must submitt your deeds  
Or be pull'd upp like stubborne<sup>5</sup> weeds  
Kings ever use their instruments<sup>6</sup>

Of whome they judge by their events 30  
The good they cherish, and advance  
And many things may come by chance  
Content your selfe with such as I  
Shall take neere,<sup>7</sup> and place on highe  
The men you nam'd<sup>8</sup> serv'd in their tyme 35  
And soe may myne as cleere of cryme  
And seasons have their proper intents  
And bring forth severall events  
Whereof the choise doe rest in kings  
Who punish, and reward them brings 40  
O what a calling weere a King  
If hee might give, or take no thing  
But such as yow should to him bring  
Such were a king but in a play  
If he might beare no better sway 45  
And then weere you in worser case  
If soe to keepe you<sup>9</sup> auntient face  
Your face would soone outface his might  
If soe you would abridge his right  
Alas fond men play not with kings 50  
With lyons clawes, or serpents stings  
They kill even by their sharpe aspect  
The proudest mynde they cann deject  
Make wretched the most mightiest man  
Though hee doth mutter what hee cann 55  
Your censures are in hurrying sound  
That rise as vapours from the ground  
I knowe when I shalbee most fitt  
With whome to fill, and emptie it  
The parliament<sup>10</sup> I will appoint 60

When I see thyngs more out of joynt  
 Then will I sett all wry things straight  
 And not upon your pleasure waite  
 Where if yow speake as wise men should  
 If not, by mee you shall be school'd 65  
 Was ever king call'd to accompt  
 Or ever mynd soe high durst mount  
 As for to knowe the cause and reason  
 As to appoint the meanes, and season  
 When kings should aske their subjects ayd<sup>11</sup> 70  
 Kings cannot soe be made affraid  
 Kings will Comand and beare the sway  
 Kings will inquire and find the way  
 How all of yow may easiely pay  
 Which theyle lay out as the thinke best<sup>12</sup> 75  
 In earnest sometimes and in jeast.  
 What counsellis would be overthrowne  
 If all weere to the people knowne?  
 Then to noe use were councill tables<sup>13</sup>  
 If state affaires were publique bables. 80  
 I make noe doubt all wise men knowe  
 This weere the way to all our woe  
 For Ignorance of causes makes  
 Soe many grosse and fowle mistakes  
 The moddell of our princely match<sup>14</sup> 85  
 You cannot make but marr or patch  
 Alas how weake would prove your care  
 Wishe you onely his best welfaire  
 Your reasons cannot weigh the ends  
 So mixt they are twixt foes, and frends. 90  
 Wherefore againe meere seeing people

Strive not to see soe high a steeple  
 Like to the ground whereon you goe  
 Hige<sup>15</sup> aspects will bring yow woe  
 Take heed your paces bee all true 95  
 And doe not discontentes renewe  
 Meddle not with your princes cares  
 For who soe doth too much: hee darrs.  
 I doe desire noe more of yow  
 But to knowe mee as I knowe yow 100  
 So shall I love, and yow obey  
 And yow love me in a right way  
 O make me not unwilling still  
 Whome I would save unwilling kill<sup>16</sup>  
 Examples in Extremitie 105  
 Are never the best remedie  
 Thus have I pleased my selfe not yow  
 And what I say yow shall finde true  
 Keepe every man his ranke, and place  
 And feare to fall in my disgrace 110  
 You call your children chicks of state  
 You claime a right unto your fate<sup>17</sup>  
 But know yow must be pleas'd with what  
 Shall please us best in spight of that  
 Kings doe make Lawes to bridle yow 115  
 Which they may pardon, or embrue  
 Their hands in the best blood you have  
 And send the greatest to the grave.  
 The Charter which yow great doe call<sup>18</sup>  
 Came first from Kings to stay your fall 120  
 From an unjust rebellion moved  
 By such as Kingdomes little Loved

Embrace not more then you can hold  
 As often doe the overbold  
 As they did which the Charter sought 125  
 For their owne greatnes who soe wrought  
 With Kings and you; that all prov'd nought  
 The Love that Kings to yow have borne  
 Mov'd them therto for to be sworne  
 For, where small goods are to be gott 130  
 We are knowne to thee, that knowes us not,  
 But yow that knowe mee all soe well  
 Why doe you push me downe to hell  
 By making me an Infidell<sup>19</sup>  
 Tis true I am a craddle King<sup>20</sup> 135  
 Yet doe remember every thinge  
 That I have heeretofore putt out  
 And yet Beginn not for to doubt  
 But oh how grosse is your devise  
 Change to impute to kings for vice<sup>21</sup> 140  
 The wise may change yet free from fault  
 Though change to worse is ever nought  
 Kings ever overreach you all  
 And must stay yow thoe that you fall,  
 Kings cannot comprehended bee 145  
 In comon circles. Conjure yee  
 All what you cann by teares or termes  
 Deny not what your king affirmes  
 Hee doth disdaine to cast an eye  
 Of anger on you least you die 150  
 Even at the shadowe of his face  
 It gives to all that sues for grace  
 I knowe (my frends) need noe teaching

Prowd is your foolish overreaching.  
 Come counsell me when I shall call 155  
 Before bewarr what may befall  
 Kings will hardly take advice  
 Of counsell they are wondrous nice  
 Love and wisdome leads them still  
 Their counsell tables upp to fill 160  
 They need noe helpers in their choice  
 Their best advice is their owne voyce,  
 And be assured such are kings  
 As they unto their counsell brings  
 Which allwaies soe compounded are 165  
 As some would make and some would marr.  
 If I once bend my angrie browe  
 Your ruyne comes though not as nowe;  
 For slowe I am revenge to take;  
 And your amendments, wroth will slake 170  
 Then hold your pratling spare your penn  
 Be honest, and obedient men  
 Urge not my Justice, I am sloe  
 To give yow your deserved woe.  
 If proclamations<sup>22</sup> will not serve 175  
 I must do more, Peace to preserve  
 To keepe all in obedience  
 And drive such busie bodies hence.

**Source.** Bodleian MS Malone 23, pp. 49-56

**Other known sources.** *James VI and I* 2.182; Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fol. 58r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.11, fol. 15r; Bodleian MS Rawl. D.152, fol. 11r; Bodleian MS Rawl. D.398, fol. 183r; Bodleian MS Tanner 265, fol. 14r; Bodleian MS Tanner 306, fol. 242r; BL Add. MS 25707, fol. 74r; BL Add. MS 28640, fol. 123v; BL Add. MS 29303, fol. 5r; BL Add. MS 52585, fol. 4r; BL Add. MS 61481, fol. 97r; BL MS Egerton 923, fol. 37r; BL MS Harley 367, fol. 151r; BL MS Lans. 498, fol. 32r; St. John's MS

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- <sup>1</sup> *Purblinde*: totally blind.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ryne*: the scribe includes “Lyne”, above the line, as an alternate reading. The exact meaning of “Ryne” is unclear, though it probably means “rain”, or perhaps is a misuse of the verb “rine” (to touch; lay the fingers of the hand upon). One might, with a little stretching, take it to mean “Rhine”, in which case it would function as a mockery of James’s subjects’ fascination with events in Germany.
- <sup>3</sup> *decyde*: probable scribal error; read “deryde”.
- <sup>4</sup> *Religion*: probable allusion to an attack, in the lost libel “the Comons teares”, on James’s religious policies.
- <sup>5</sup> *stubborne*: the scribe includes “stinking”, above the line, as an alternate reading.
- <sup>6</sup> *their instruments*: in this and the next few lines (and again towards the end of the poem), James counters the critique in the lost libel “the Comons teares” of his choice of ministers, presumably with his favour towards Buckingham being the most significant of the libel’s targets.
- <sup>7</sup> *neere*: probable scribal error; read “neere me”.
- <sup>8</sup> *The men you nam’d*: this allusion suggests that the lost libel “the Comons teares” invoked the names of past, and probably Elizabethan, counsellors and favourites. Both Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, and Sir Walter Raleigh enjoyed a posthumous revival in the 1620s as icons of militaristic Protestantism.
- <sup>9</sup> *you*: probable scribal error; read “your”.
- <sup>10</sup> *The parliament*: in the following lines James reasserts his prerogative over the calling of parliament and alludes to some of the problems of the last session of parliament in 1621. Presumably the lost libel “the Comons Teares” either lamented the dissolution of the 1621 Parliament or urged the calling of another one, presumably to raise money for a more militaristic foreign policy.
- <sup>11</sup> *When kings should...ayd*: i.e. by calling a parliament.
- <sup>12</sup> *How all of you...thinke best*: probable allusion to the royal right to raise revenue and spend it as the King sees fit. This might be rebutting charges in the lost libel “the Comons teares” concerning extra-parliamentary taxation or the usage of money granted to the King by parliament. James’s comments might, however, be directed at members of parliament rather than at the libel. (The phrase “as the thinke best” is a probable scribal error; read “as they thinke best”.)



- 13 *councell tables*: allusion to the King's Privy Council.
- 14 *our princely match*: probable allusion to James's plan to secure a Spanish Match for his son Charles. One could deduce that the lost libel "the Comons teares"—like the House of Commons in 1621—had argued against the Match.
- 15 *Hige*: scribal error; read "Highe".
- 16 *O make me...unwilling kill*: the meaning of these lines is not entirely clear. In general terms, James seems to be attacking attempts—perhaps articulated in the lost libel "the Comons teares"—to contest his prerogative of mercy. Possibly the lost libel included lines criticizing James's release of the convicted murderers, the Earl and Countess of Somerset, early in 1622.
- 17 *You call...unto your fate*: a variant has "you call our children, chidds of State / you claime a right unto there fate" (BL MS Harley 367). This reading suggests James is alluding to the lost libel's comments on—and support for—the displaced Elector and Electress Palatine, James's daughter Elizabeth and her husband Frederick; however, such an interpretation does not really accord with James's continued interest in his prerogative of justice and mercy in the lines that follow.
- 18 *The Charter...great doe call*: Magna Carta, the grant of liberties, extracted by rebellious nobles from King John in 1215, and a shibboleth of parliamentary constitutionalist rhetoric in the early Stuart period. James's specific evocation of "you" suggests the lost libel "the Comons teares" might have referred to the Magna Carta (as did the later libel "If Saints in heaven cann either see or heare"). James goes on to provide an interesting gloss on the origins of the Magna Carta.
- 19 *making me an Infidell*: the lost libel "the Comons teares" may have charged James with popery or irreligion.
- 20 *craddle King*: cradle king. James ascended the throne of Scotland as a one-year-old.
- 21 *Change to impute...for vice*: James is presumably again rebutting a charge, most likely of (religious) "innovation", made in the lost libel "the Comons teares".
- 22 *proclamations*: James issued two proclamations intended to suppress "Lavish and Licentious Speech of matters of State" in December 1620 and July 1621 (*Stuart Royal Proclamations* 1.495-96, 1.519-520).
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