

Oi11 Why did the fond Plebeans say

Notes. The occasion for this poem was Buckingham's December 1626 trip to Kent to confer with the departing French ambassador on the Duke's plans for a special embassy to Paris to heal strained Anglo-French relations. The poem alludes to the growing disgruntlement at the Duke among unpaid soldiers and sailors. The transcript in our chosen source (BL MS Sloane 826) includes a comment that the author of this poem was "justly punished", and offers the opinion that "the judicious reader" would "smile at" the libel.

"The Dukes gowing to Dover, in December 1626"

Why did the fond Plebeans say

That Buckingham was runne away?

Why did the sailours¹ and their wives,

Hope for fresh meat and merry lives?

The monied and the poore men make,

5

All holy-days for his flight sake?

Why were the Parliament benches brusht²

And all new plotts for money³ husht?

Why did this knight, and that rich squire,

Who did their kingdoms good desire,

10

The voyces of their shears to gaine⁴

Free open houses now proclaime?

Why were the exchequore coffers wide,

The mouldie chests new purifide?

The tellers talleys itching lye

15

For feeftens and for subsidie?⁵

Why did the soldiers,⁶ whose sad sailes

Came home anotamized from Cailles,⁷

Promise that Christmas day should see

Him cassockt,⁸ and his companie?

20

Why on this hope did they plung more

Into the soaking Tapsters⁹ score:
 And make their greedy lanlord stay,
 For rent, another quarter day?
 The Dukes returnd, these hopes are vaine, 25
 Th' Artillery men must watch againe.
 Put up your uselesse cudgells you,
 You munmorth-murriand-pitchie¹⁰ crew.
 Your tryumphs under hatches stow,
 Your ebbes encrease, so dose his flow. 30
 And though your wives have sharpt their nailes,
 To scratch his face, that project failes;
 He'is garded with the citie swisses,¹¹
 And whilst you scould he huggs his blisses.
 I graunt you as he went from hence, 35
 So fowle a night nere rained since,
 The body of the Scottish Queene
 To westminster remoovd hath beene.¹²
 But ah poore wretches did you thinke
 Your Admirall¹³ so soone would sinke 40
 Or that his stately toppe should vaile
 To one poore storme or shower of haile,
 And though some fondlings idely say
 The wind his periwigg¹⁴ blew away:
 Which found, an other swears he's dead, 45
 His body's gone but hears his head.
 This stopt pursuit, which slie that night
 Could not have donne for all his spright.
 At Canterbury,¹⁵ ther he met
 An other storme as lowd and wet, 50
 As that he ridde in, for the cry
 Beeing but once raiz'd the Dukes past by,

With knitting needles, and with ladles,
 Spitts, fire-forkes, and leggs of cradles,
 The women whose friends were yet unpaid, 55
 The coaches of the Duke assaid,
 And then had sheard his flesh assurd
 But Hollands¹⁶ lookes his peace procured
 The Mirmadones¹⁷ themselves had donne
 As much for Priams valiant sonne.¹⁸ 60
 And he look't soe, and yet tis true,
 The wether chang'd his lookes to blew
 At Dover least they should deceive him
 He made the Castle to receive him.
 The Embassadour of France¹⁹ and he 65
 Talked of whats unknowne to me:
 Perhaps they have agreed together
 To meete in France in fairer wether:
 Which so ift proove, then his returne
 Can never make the people mourne, 70
 For hees come back to let you know
 Some good of his before he goe.

Ignoto.

Source. BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 28v-29r

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 28v

Oi11

¹ *sailours*: many English sailors, under Buckingham's command, remained unpaid for long stretches during England's military mobilization of 1625-1630.

² *Parliament benches brusht*: i.e. the benches were cleaned in expectation that, now Buckingham had gone, parliament would be recalled.

- ³ *plots for money*: after the dissolution of the 1626 Parliament, Charles I levied a controversial extra-parliamentary tax—the Forced Loan—to raise money.
- ⁴ *The voyces of their shears to gaine*: to gain the voices of their shires in the expected parliamentary election.
- ⁵ *For feefteens and for subsidie*: for parliamentary grants of taxation (subsidies and fifteenths).
- ⁶ *soldiers*: like the sailors, many soldiers remained unpaid and undersupplied for long stretches during England’s military mobilization from 1625 to 1630.
- ⁷ *Cailes*: Cadiz. The lines allude to the failed English expedition to Cadiz in 1625.
- ⁸ *cassockt*: cloaked. The promise is that the soldiers will now be properly equipped with clothing.
- ⁹ *Tapsters*: barman’s.
- ¹⁰ *munmorth-murriand-pitchie*: the exact meaning of “munmorth” is obscure; “murriand” might be “murrained” (i.e. scabby); “pitchie” means covered in pitch, and therefore black.
- ¹¹ *citie swisses*: presumably Buckingham’s bodyguard.
- ¹² *The body...remoovd hath beene*: the body of James I’s mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, who had been executed in England in 1587, was reinterred in October 1612 in the Henry VII Chapel of Westminster Abbey.
- ¹³ *Admirall*: Buckingham had been Lord Admiral since 1618-19.
- ¹⁴ *periwigg*: wig.
- ¹⁵ *At Canterbury*: Canterbury, the cathedral city in Kent on the way to Dover. None of the standard secondary accounts of Buckingham’s career record a riot against his coach in Canterbury; however, mobs of sailors had attacked the Duke’s coach at least twice before, in August and October.
- ¹⁶ *Hollands*: Henry Rich’s, Viscount Kensington and Earl of Holland.
- ¹⁷ *Mirmadones*: Myrmidons, part of the Greek forces at Troy, and commanded by Achilles.
- ¹⁸ *Priams valiant sonne*: Hector of Troy, slain by Achilles.
- ¹⁹ *The Embassadour of France*: Francis de Bassompierre.
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