

Oi6 There was a great fleete, all they that did see't

Notes. This poem records the embarrassing failures of the first major military operation by the English against the Spanish. A fleet, sent to raid the Spanish port of Cadiz, set sail under the command of Edward Cecil, Viscount Wimbledon, on 8 October 1625. As the libeller's narrative makes clear, the expedition was little more than a series of disasters.

“Upon the English fleete sett forth. Anno. 1625”

There was a great fleete, all they that did see't

As twas in the Downes¹ a ridinge,

Will say Sir John Cooke² shall sweare on a booke

It was a yeere a providinge.

And ten thousand foote,³ were added untoo't

Which were at Plimouth traynd

By those that knewe little but to eate up your vittaile

And that was all they gaind.

This flete & this Army, which did meane no harme, I

Perswade my selfe to any.

Had like to have bin lost in the Spanish Coast

By a storme that is knowne to many.

At Cales⁴ wee putt in, where if you had bin,

You should have seene good sport.

The collyers⁵ that day, did all runne away,

And would not batter the fort.

Wee landed our men, & marcht too & agen

Three dayes & then came back

To our shippes againe, having gotten in Spaine,

Our bellys full of sacke.⁶

This service thus ended, wee homewards intended

To eate no more rotten beefe.⁷

Or as foule a matter, to drinke stincking water,

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But the wind was in our teeth.
A Councell was call'd,⁸ by the heads that were bald, 25
Where it was thought most meete.
Because we must stay, & not goe away,
To waite for the Indian fleete.
For wee were told, they were laden with gold
And should greate riches finde 30
But hee that went thither, found naught but ill weather,
I feare there words were but winde.
Its such a condition, to have a commission
To bringe out so many men
And doe nothing more, but eate up your store, 35
And then goe whome agen
As never was knowne, if the Case were my owne,
And I had so much pelfe.⁹
I would giv't away cleare, to bee ridd of the feare
or else goe hang my selfe. 40
Some say that Sir Thomas Loove,¹⁰ god keepe him from us
Did sett this project on foote.
Which if hee did, it may cost him his head,
And his great masters¹¹ to boote.
Amongst them twill fall, but who shall have all 45
The weight on't is not knowne
Lett it wither for mee, if that the proud tree
Bee not blasted or overblowne.
God blesse charles our Kinge, & every thinge
That hee warlickly takes in hande. 50
And in his next choise hee shall have my voyce
For a wiser man to commande.¹²
Finis. ignoto.

Source. Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 226

Oi6

- ¹ *the Downes*: a common naval rendezvous off the English coast, east of Deal in Kent.
 - ² *Sir John Cooke*: i.e. Sir John Coke, Commissioner of the Navy and Master of Requests, who was promoted to Secretary of State to Charles I in September 1625.
 - ³ *ten thousand foote*: the expeditionary force consisted of 10,000 foot soldiers and 5000 seamen.
 - ⁴ *Cales*: Cadiz.
 - ⁵ *The collyers*: the fleet included forty collier ships (coal ships), which failed to follow orders to bombard Cadiz during the assault of 22 October.
 - ⁶ *Our bellys full of sacke*: the English troops discovered several vats of wine (sack) that they then consumed with predictably disastrous effects on their military effectiveness.
 - ⁷ *rotten beefe*: the fleet was beset by supply shortages.
 - ⁸ *A Councell was call'd*: on 29 October a Council of War decided to try to intercept the Spanish treasure fleet from the Americas; however, the plan was foiled by bad weather.
 - ⁹ *pelfe*: goods, money.
 - ¹⁰ *Sir Thomas Loove*: Sir Thomas Love was a leading commander during the Cadiz voyage. In January 1626, Chamberlain reported that in contemporary post mortems on the Cadiz voyage, "Some lay the blame on the desseign or counsell, the souldiers on their generall Vicount Sitstill, [i.e. Edward Cecil] (as they now stile him) he on the sea men, but most on his Grace [i.e. Buckingham], and he on Sir Thomas Loue and so from post to piller" (2.628).
 - ¹¹ *his great masters*: the Duke of Buckingham's.
 - ¹² *For a wiser man to commande*: this last line could be read as an attack on either the Cadiz expedition commander, Viscount Wimbledon, or Wimbledon's superior, the Lord Admiral Buckingham.
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