

Oi9 There was some pollicie I doe beleive

Notes. After their criticism of royal policy during the 1625 Parliament, Sir Edward Coke and five other MPs were deliberately excluded from the 1626 Parliament. The Crown appointed (“pricked”) the men as sheriffs who, by virtue of their office, could not stand for parliament. Although Coke tried to challenge the terms of his appointment as Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, his efforts were unsuccessful and he did not sit in the 1626 session. Since the text of this poem is particularly unstable, we have chosen the longest known version, but have appended twenty-two lines that appear to be unique to a version that is otherwise shorter.

“Certaine verses made when my Lo: Cooke was made highe Sheriffe of Buckingham:”

There was some pollicie I doe beleive,

out of an old cast Judge,¹ to make a Shreive²

for hee soe longe at lawe had beene a Pedler,

that hee was growne as ripe as anie Medler.³

And is thought fitt by good Sir Simon Harvies⁴

judgment, to come now in the later service

Soe he that was for lawe soe well reputed

now may stand by, and see them executed.

Corage my Lord, yow shall growe yonge againe,

and bee attended by A Gallant trayne

your liveries & your feathers bothe shall showe,

that yow your office of Sherive knowe

I would not have you flye into a Cottage,

nor plead against it, with a writt of Dotage⁵

But beare it bravely, that it may bee spoke

How bountifull a house is kept at Stoke⁶

for all the people prayeth for your healthe

as beeinge Patron of the Common Wealthe

Now when yow ride amonge your feathered troope

Shew your selfe curteous, & to each man stoope

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Give largely to the poore, that throughe the Countie
 each man may freely speake, of your great bounty
 As for the charge yow knowe that in the sheere
 whats in the hundred lost is gained cleere
 Besides yow have not reigned soe longe in Courts 25
 and filld the Towne and Cuntry with reports⁷
 But that yow have both furnished your Chest
 and as your Capp, soe feathered your Nest,
 Now sittinge on the benche although hee grudge
 pray undertake yow to direct the Judge, 30
 offer to give the charge I know yow cann
 and bee against the savinge of a mann
 Then whisper to the Judge if yow bee wise
 your private Judgment of each Nisi prise⁸
 yow have the name yow will not have things rawe, 35
 as others doe that doe not knowe the lawe,
 your wife⁹ & frends will all bee gladd to heare
 that yow are made highe sheriffe of the sheire
 P¹⁰ your sonne in lawe that roareinge boye
 will now growe madd againe¹¹ for very joye 40
 his wife¹² will wishe, shee hathe beene often trickt
 her husband were like to her father prickt¹³
 But shee will have it all by night or daye
 if it bee Inter quatuor Maria¹⁴
 And throughe this great Alliance sure it came 45
 that yow was prickt highe sheriffe of Buckingham¹⁵
 But harke yow now some foolishe fellowe urges,
 and sayes a Sheriffe cannott bee a Burges,¹⁶
 Aske your man Samon¹⁷ hee can all relate
 followe his counsaile hee hathe a knavish pate 50
 Make him your undersheriff with resolucion

none fitter is to goe to execucion
 The towne of Coventrye¹⁸ doe not overslipp
 if yow doe meane to have a Burgeshipp
 Goe write your letters, and dispatche them thither 55
 and lett them know, that yow with hatt and feather
 will come & sitt, onely with their consent
 as Lord cheif Burges of the Parliament¹⁹
 There call a strickt account of all the treasure²⁰
 that hath beene spent, of late without all measure 60
 Bring grave examples from the ancient Kings²¹
 howe they with lesser charge did Greater things
 Nowe as for Subsidies²² pray lett them tarry
 for this is but a Warre thats voluntary²³
 Twere better the Palatinate were lost 65
 then that it should soe much the kingdome cost
 And still remember them that sitt at Helme
 my Lords take heed, how yow exhaust the Realme
 Speake stoutlie for the Publique to your power
 Soe may yow bee kept safe as in a Tower 70
 Soe may the winde make your riches feathers wagge
 Soe may noe raine at Sires²⁴ make them flagge
 Soe may yow bee and say yow hadd a Cave
 made Pagadore²⁵ in cheif of all the Navie
 Soe may yow live to see the joyfull day 75
 to bee Lord Chancelor of Virginia²⁶
 When yow were Lord cheif Cooke²⁷ they went to pott
 Monson²⁸ did scape a scouringe, did hee not?
 Oh then yow were as hott as any toast
 yow tooke away the scumme, and ruld the roast 80
 yow might have beene Lord Keeper²⁹ longe agoe
 hadd yow beene wise, that all the world dothe knowe

But yow on point of lawe, did stand soe strickt³⁰
 that now too late yow finde that yow are prickt,
 Well tis noe matter better to plodd on 85
 then rise & fall as Francis did & John³¹
 When B. was but B:³² hadd hee spar'd
 hee longe ere this, hadd proved dainty lard
 but hee in stead of Lard must bee a lord
 when hee grewe very leane not fitt for bord 90
 Thoughe hee was greazed, well about the flanck
 and was sett up to fatt in a brawne francke
 All was to litle for at last hee brought
 his fleshe to Albones which is all to nought
 My lord said that hee was like to one 95
 That soone hadd brought his Gamon to a bone
 Another said, and sharpely if yow marke it
 That he brought his hoggs, to a faire markett
 A third concludeinge, all the case thus handles
 hoggs greaze dothe waste to fast to make good candles 100
 Why did the late lord Keeper³³ loose the Seale
 did hee injustice, in the office deale?
 Did hee take bribes? for bribes are to bee taken
 by order of his Predecessor Bacon³⁴
 Or was hee too conceited in his will 105
 as armed with resolution more then skill
 Or did hee shewe himselfe at Oxford bace
 practizinge the house to question my lord Grace³⁵
 Or was hee thought too good, and then a worse
 must take the Seale, and bringe with him a purse³⁶ 110
 I cannott tell, but I see by my bookes
 the Divell sometimes over Lincolne lookes.³⁷

[the following lines appear only in BL MS Harley 4955, fol. 73r]

If that your vertuous Lady³⁸ felt it too,
 she woulde be humble, & fall downe and doo
 you better service for when you doe rise 115
 Then she is patient, But she seemeth wise
 if once you fall, & leaves you for another
 Soe she will serve both Husband Childe, & Brother
 for all this I say nott shee will dalley
 though you live privatelie in ram Alley³⁹ 120
 she lives to her selfe, & makes a hapy life
 as ever woman did that was a wife.
 Being seperated from her Husbande
 for still she keepes both Juells, plate, & land
 and never askt you Counsayle for to drawe 125
 an instrument to setle it by lawe
 she had a better of her one invention
 for when she married this was her intention
 she meant the premiss off her mariage Journey
 should be well don, & not by an attorney. 130
 O this ladye worthelye doth meritt
 for she is hye, & a mightie spiritt
 If she take wrong Ile be bound to eate her
 for let a Dutches wronge her, she'll beate her

Source. BL Add. MS 15226, fols. 22v-24r

Other known sources. BL MS Harley 4955, fol. 72r; NLW MS 5309D, p. 447; Huntington MS 198, 1.56

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¹ *old cast Judge*: Coke had been one of the leading judges of England until his dismissal as Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1616.

- ² *Shreive*: sheriff; one of the most significant legal officers in a county.
- ³ *Medler*: a pun on “meddler” and “medlar”, a type of fruit.
- ⁴ *Sir Simon Harvies*: Sir Simon Harvey, a former Grocer and now a financial official in the royal household (Clerk of the Greencloth), whom Coke had attacked in an August 1625 speech in parliament on the King’s fiscal woes.
- ⁵ *Dotage*: Coke was in his mid-seventies at the time of his appointment as sheriff.
- ⁶ *Stoke*: Coke had a residence at Stoke Mandeville in Buckinghamshire.
- ⁷ *reports*: allusion to Coke’s legal reports, published (in French and Latin) 1600-1615.
- ⁸ *Nisi prise*: “nisi prius”—literally meaning “unless previously”—was the name of a legal writ.
- ⁹ *your wife*: Lady Elizabeth Coke.
- ¹⁰ *P*: John Villiers, Viscount Purbeck and brother of the favourite Buckingham, was married to Coke’s daughter, Frances.
- ¹¹ *growe madd againe*: Purbeck suffered from notorious bouts of mental illness.
- ¹² *his wife*: Frances, Lady Purbeck, had been charged in 1625 with an adulterous relationship with Sir Robert Howard, who was rumoured to be the father of her baby boy. The following lines on Lady Purbeck are quite obscure, though it is possible they allude to this scandal.
- ¹³ *prickt*: men were chosen as sheriff by pricking a hole in parchment next to the chosen person’s name. In the context of the poem’s discussion of the marriage of the Purbecks, the term probably bears bawdy innuendo. Similarly, it might also allude to Lady Purbeck’s hope that her husband would be chosen sheriff and thus be forced to reside in his county while she pursued her adulterous liaisons.
- ¹⁴ *Inter quatuor Maria*: “between the four seas”; i.e. on English soil.
- ¹⁵ *throughe this great Alliance...of Buckingham*: the marriage of Coke’s daughter allied him to the family of the favourite, the Duke of Buckingham.
- ¹⁶ *a Sheriffe cannott bee a Burges*: sheriffs could not serve as MPs (a burgess is an MP from an incorporated town).
- ¹⁷ *Samon*: identity unknown; presumably one of Coke’s servants or clerks.
- ¹⁸ *Coventrye*: Coke had been MP (burgess) for Coventry in the 1624 Parliament.

- ¹⁹ *Lord cheif Burges of the Parliament*: not a real office; rather, mocking Coke's leadership of the Commons, and alluding to his former royal office as Lord Chief Justice.
- ²⁰ *strickt account of all the treasure*: an allusion, perhaps, to Coke's critical remarks on royal financial governance during the 1625 Parliament.
- ²¹ *grave examples from the ancient Kings*: legal-historical precedents, which formed the substance of Coke's parliamentary rhetoric.
- ²² *Subsidies*: parliamentary taxation granted to the King.
- ²³ *a Warre thats voluntary*: i.e. England's war with Spain, the supposed goals of which included the recovery of the Palatinate from Spanish and Bavarian occupation, and the reinstallation of Charles I's brother-in-law Frederick V as Elector Palatine.
- ²⁴ *Sires*: lords, gentlemen.
- ²⁵ *Pagadore*: pay-master.
- ²⁶ *Lord Chancellor of Virginia*: Coke is being mocked here for his continued pursuit of high legal office—Lord Chancellor of England being the most important such office. The English settlement in Virginia enjoyed a precarious existence in the 1620s.
- ²⁷ *Lord cheif Cooke*: Coke was Lord Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas 1606-1613 and of the Court of King's Bench from 1613 until his dismissal in 1616. The next few lines pun on "Coke" and "cook".
- ²⁸ *Monson*: Sir Thomas Monson, imprisoned as a suspect in the conspiracy to murder Sir Thomas Overbury. As Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench (and chief prosecutor of the Overbury murder), Coke attempted to bring Monson to trial on two occasions in 1615; on both attempts, Coke was forced to postpone proceedings. Monson was eventually released without trial.
- ²⁹ *Lord Keeper*: Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, another high office Coke was known to have coveted.
- ³⁰ *But yow...soe strickt*: probably an allusion to Coke's disputes over matters of law with Lord Chancellor Ellesmere and the King which led to Coke's fall in 1616.
- ³¹ *Francis did & John*: Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Keeper, who lost office in 1621; and John Williams, bishop of Lincoln, who succeeded Bacon as Lord Keeper and, having fallen foul of Buckingham, was dismissed in October 1625.
- ³² *When B. was but B*: "when Bacon was but Bacon"; i.e. before he was elevated to Lord Verulam and

Viscount St. Albans. The next thirteen lines include a series of puns on “Bacon” and “bacon”.

³³ *late lord Keeper*: John Williams.

³⁴ *for bribes...Predecessor Bacon*: Bacon was impeached by the 1621 Parliament for taking bribes.

³⁵ *at Oxford...my lord Grace*: under attack in the Oxford session of the 1625 Parliament, Williams may have tried to shift blame onto the Duke. Buckingham seems to have believed that Williams was working with his enemies during the 1625 session.

³⁶ *bringe with him a purse*: i.e. pay a bribe for the office.

³⁷ *the Divell...Lincolne lookes*: Williams was Bishop of Lincoln; the “Divell” here might be taken to be the Duke of Buckingham. “The Devil looks over Lincoln” was a proverbial phrase that referred to a large devil gargyle on Lincoln College, Oxford.

³⁸ *your vertuous Lady*: Coke’s wife, Lady Elizabeth Coke. The Cokes’ marriage was notoriously volcanic, and the two had fallen out when Coke attempted to marry their daughter to John Villiers against Lady Elizabeth’s wishes. The lines that follow allude to the quarrel and the property disputes that surrounded it.

³⁹ *ram Alley*: a narrow passage near Coke’s residence in the Inner Temple in London.
