

Oii14 As sick men feare the cure & startle more

Notes. Without resorting to explicit defence of Buckingham, this poem puts a positive spin on what most contemporaries saw as a shameful defeat at Ré. The poet argues that there was no shame in being driven off by vastly superior numbers, and that the English scored a “victory” by escaping with so few losses. In the only known source, the first letter of each line of the poem is missing. The scribe’s practice in earlier poems in the manuscript was to add the initial letter of each line in the ruled margin of each page, in a different colour ink; however, he has omitted to add the initials to this poem. While most of the words are obvious, and we have added the initial letters accordingly, there may be one or two where a different first letter might also work.

As sick men feare the cure & startle more

To feele the surgeons paine then than the sore

And rather then the steele & knife shall cease

There flesh they’le rather putrifie with ease

Thus we dread warr because itt shewes in blood

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And death & iron; which misunderstood

Affright the eie soe much; we thinke itt sure

A countries ruine, which indeeds the cure

Then like our selves diseasd the Commonwealth

Takes Phisick onlie & letts blood for health

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Take of this name of warr; it will soone appeare

Theres nothinge fearefull in itt but our feare

Thinke itt an arme lent to mainetaine our peace

And make itt safetie which was drowsines

Alas we nickname peace the sleepe of state

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When tis obnoxious both to sword & fate

And feares all smoakes of warrs: when those our calmes

Proceed not from our strength, but from their almes

That doe forbear of Courtesie & delaie

To crush our naked countrie, when they maie

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Give me a peace that’s fenc’d from all alarmes

By itts owne power; & thats a peace in armes
 Thinke itt a hand given to regaine our glorie
 Which now is onlie livinge in this storie
 Whilst men that read our Chronicles doe looke 25
 To match our present vertue with the booke
 And cannot, whilst the gentrie knowes noe field
 Nor armes but that the herauld gives their sheild¹
 When each noise baffeld us, & we fear'd: more
 Flie of enemies then a sword before 30
 And even the lowest nation did dare
 To be our foes whiles we were foes to warr
 Thinke but that warr recovers what was lost
 In honour onlie & itt quitts the cost
 Thinke itt a sword then in religions hand 35
 Which now alone unweapond could not stand
 The sharpe encounters of whole Europes wrath
 Were itt not arm'd as well with steele as faith
 Whilst Spaine now knitts with France & France againe
 Is foes soe much to us as friends to Spaine² 40
 Whilst our profession³ is defied & wee
 Maintaininge itt, maintaine an injurie
 Warr must releeve this too; in warr alone
 Subsists our honour, peace religion
 And when this last doth call for wars that man 45
 That is noe souldier is noe Christian
 Indeed our triumphs have soe usuall beene
 Upon those shores we loose when we not win
 And tis a thinge scarce yett in storie read
 That we saw Fraunce & Fraunce unconquered 50
 Thus some that olde of Agincourt⁴ can tell
 And judge of battells by the Cronicle

That after thinges are done of thinges can guesse
 And measure all thinges meereleie by successe
 Sweare att this bloodshed⁵ would have war to kill 55
 As thriftilie as doth the cittie bill⁶
 Thirtie a weeke or soe, & wonder why
 A sword or gunn should strike soe mortallie
 But valour allwaies masters not the field
 Tis sometime greate masterie to yeeld 60
 And some with weaker spiritts have aspir'd
 A victorie, then others have retir'd
 Thus those 300 Greekes that kept the straights
 And held the Persian off att Europe gates⁷
 Were Victors, although slaine & those that slew 65
 They vanquisht that soe manie kild soe few
 But we came safelier of nor need France boast
 Our handfull could not overcome their hoast
 Nor they our handfull; twas a brave defeat
 In disadvantage we could thus retreat 70
 Even we still orecame & beinge thus
 In soe much ods they did but equall us
 Naie we subdued them in not beinge subdued
 This was a victorie in a multitude
 Had France stept soe farre on the English shore 75
 And brave our land & strength att our owne dore
 Had soe few held us worke soe long in spite
 Of our neere armie & thats more in sight,
 Fought with our stone & Forts & which worse dants⁸
 Then all these putt together their owne wants 80
 And we thus forc'te them nak'te without supplie
 And to each man oppos'd a companie
 And came thus thinlie lopt awaie & stood

There countrie in so cheape a rate of blood
 This had beene bonfires then & many a bell⁹ 85
 Had runge their joyes out that had scapt soe well
 In desperate peril tis good luck we have
 Not shipwrackt all, we conquer what we save
 Were farre more dangerous then the sea the ground
 Suckt us up faster then the sword could wound 90
 Wee thought we singlie had with men to doe
 But we had skirmish with their salt pitts¹⁰ too
 Whose graves that not receav'd but made the dead
 Easy to kill those were first buried.
 Thus one might slaughter 20 & yett be 95
 A greater coward in his victorie.
 Thus fell our Captaines that were in such store
 Had falne by them had they not falne before
 Our losse was deere but lett not some base lie
 And our feares make a worse mortalitie 100
 Then all our warr, & doe our selves that wronge
 The french would doe that kill more with their tongue
 Then twice our number; true, some valiant blood
 Had beene drawne here but we have left as good
 If we would thinke but soe, nor can we bee 105
 Enfeebled by soe small a companie
 Our murmur onlie can resist our chance
 Our vertue is as good as when t'wann France
 Letts rather thinke our English corps upon
 The French ground their have tane possession 110
 Which when we prosecute againe we feare
 Theyle hardly scape soe well as we scapt there.

- ¹ *Nor armes...their sheild*: i.e. the only arms the gentry know are their coats-of-arms, assigned by the royal heralds.
- ² *Whilst Spaine...friends to Spaine*: alluding to the Franco-Spanish rapprochement. At this time England was at war with both countries.
- ³ *our profession*: Protestantism.
- ⁴ *Agincourt*: the English armies under Henry V defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415.
- ⁵ *this bloodshed*: i.e. the fighting on the Ile de Ré.
- ⁶ *the cittie bill*: i.e. the Bills of Mortality that published names of the dead in London.
- ⁷ *300 Greekes...att Europe gates*: allusion to the 480 BC battle of Thermopylae (literally “the warm gates”) in which a force of 300 Spartans led by Leonidas withstood for several days an assault by the massive forces of the Persian king Xerxes before being destroyed.
- ⁸ *dants*: daunts.
- ⁹ *bonefires...bell*: bonfires and bell-ringing were traditional forms of celebration.
- ¹⁰ *salt pitts*: retreating to their ships, the English army had to cross treacherous salt marshes.
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