

Oiii14 The Parliament of late hath oft been broken

Notes. This poem on the dissolution of parliaments cannot be dated with absolute precision. The allusion in the first stanza to a parliamentary grant of five subsidies suggests that it may have been composed either after the 26 June prorogation of the first session of the 1628 Parliament, or after the dissolution of the Parliament following the second session early in 1629. During the first session, after extracting concessions from the King in the form of a reluctant royal assent to the Petition of Right, the Commons had voted to grant Charles five subsidies worth of taxation.

The Parliament of late hath oft been broken;
Whence divers men have diversly thus spoken.
Because the Parliament at once did give
Five Subsidies, they could not after live
Upon their meanes; thence came it (out of doubt)
That it did breake, and proved banke-route.

5

An other it to steele did thus compare;
Which heated oft, and quench't, is brickle ware;
The Parliament hath oft beene in a heate,¹
And hath beene quench't as oft; but by this feate,
'Tis growne to bee so brickle² now att last,
That it doth breake in two, at every blast.

10

One did express his judgment by a Fable;
There were two potts, the one was strong and able,
An iron pott; the other was but weake,
A Pott of Earth, and apter so to breake.
These undertooke a jorney both one way,
But that of iron did so oversway,
That th'Earthen pott did alwaies goe to wracke,
Hitting, or hitt, it still receiv'd a cracke.

15

This to bee likely cannott bee deny'd,

20

And so hee left it of, to bee apply'd.³

Source. BL MS Harley 4955, fol. 85v

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¹ *The Parliament...in a heate*: alluding to the frequent and often contentious meetings of parliament in the 1620s.

² *brickle*: brittle.

³ *to bee apply'd*: the poet refuses to apply the fable to contemporary political circumstances. At least two readings of the fable are plausible. The first would identify the strong “iron pott” as the King, whose clashes with parliament (the “Earthen pott”) resulted in injury to parliament, not monarchy. The second would identify the “iron pott” as the favourite Buckingham, whose clashes with parliament left him unscathed, and parliament under the King’s displeasure.
