

R4 Come arme thy self brave England

Notes. This poem may be dated from a statement in the third stanza, that England has been poorly defended for twenty-seven years. Since it implicitly targets the Stuart kings, comparing them unfavourably to Elizabeth, the poem was almost certainly written in 1630, twenty-seven years after James I assumed the English throne. In this case the poem may also reflect on Charles's decision in that year to end five years of war against Spain and France.

"A Song"

Come arme thy self brave England

Put on thin iron coate

And shake of dull securitie

Which made this Kingdome dote

For thou hast long clothed bin

5

In silken robes of peace

Which made our enymyes bragge & boast

And our passions cease.

When peace first entred Berwicke¹

And threw our bulwarks downe

10

Dismounted all our ordinance

That furnished the towne

And by this long continuance

It hath all most un donne us

Which makes our enimybes bragge and boast

15

And thinke to overcome us.

Our castles our blockhouses

That should affront our foes

Were kept this 27 yeares²

By pigens, pyes, and crowes

Or by some ancient beads man³

20

That scarce a flie could kill
While hee lies sleeping in the gate
A begger steales his bill.⁴

Our brass and Iron peeces 25
Are eaten up with rust
Insteed of balles and powder
Are cramd with durt & dust
And those that yet stand mounted
Are of soe milde condition 30
They dare not shoote against their foes
Tis out of their commission.

Faire Essex, Suffolke, Northfolke,
Prepared were to fight
But yet the theevish Dunkerks 35
Still robd us in our sight.⁵
And is not this a shame
A greife and a vexation
That one poore paultry lowsy towne
should trouble a whole Nation. 40

Wee kill them all in taverns
With oaths and bugbeare words
And in a drunken quarrell
Goe forth and shew our swords
And after this bravado 45
Come in and drinke againe
A health to the confusion of
The pride and power of Spaine.

And for this quaffing valour

A captaine hee is made⁶ 50
 Because hee went into the feild
 And shew'd his naked blade
 Hee purchast hath a beaver⁷
 A buffcoate and a belt
 To make a voyage ore the seas 55
 To fetch a flanders felt.⁸

God bless our noble K. and Queene,
 And eke our Lady Besse⁹
 And send us better generalls
 Then were in the last presse¹⁰ 60
 And send us such commaunders
 As in Elizas reigne
 And then wee need not feare the Turke
 The Devill or pride of spaine.

Source. BL MS Sloane 1792, fols. 74v-75v

R4

¹ *When peace...Berwicke*: sardonic reference to James's journey in 1603 to assume the English throne, travelling from Edinburgh and crossing into England at the town of Berwick. James liked to be known for his commitment to peace.

² *this 27 yeares*: presumably twenty-seven years from James's accession in 1603.

³ *beads man*: in Catholic religious practice, a beadsman is a man employed to pray for the welfare of another. Here, the term signifies perhaps a man left as a kind of pre-Reformation relic, or perhaps more generally a harmless subordinate.

⁴ *bill*: slightly ambiguous, but probably referring to a weapon, similar to a halberd, used by both soldiers and constables.

⁵ *Faire Essex...our sight*: privateers from Dunkirk, a town held by the Spanish, troubled English

shipping in the late 1620s. Plans for a joint Anglo-Dutch attack on Dunkirk came to nothing.

⁶ *And for this...hee is made*: it is not clear whether these lines refer to a particular man.

⁷ *beaver*: face-guard of a helmet.

⁸ *Because hee went...flanders felt*: while the exact events (if any) behind these lines are unclear, the meaning is straightforward; the poet expresses indignation at those who put interests of trade above those of English Protestant militarism.

⁹ *our Lady Besse*: probably King Charles's sister, Elizabeth, who became a symbol for those in England who desired a more militant foreign policy after she and her husband, the Elector Frederick, were driven into exile by Habsburg forces.

¹⁰ *And send us...the last presse*: presumably a reference to the last military mobilization, c.1627-28. A sardonic glance at the leadership of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, is probably intended.
