

R9 Two Parliaments dissolv'd? then let my hart

Notes. In at least one source this poem is titled "On the Dissolution of the Short Parliament of 1640" (Rous 88). Given this title, the first line, which laments "Two Parliaments dissolv'd" seems inconsistent, and almost unaccountable. One possible explanation is that it was written in response to false rumours that the Long Parliament had also been dissolved.

Two Parliaments dissolv'd? then let my hart,

As they in factions, it in fractions part;

And like the Levite (sad with rage) ascribe,

Its peecemeale portions to each broken Tribe;¹

And say, that Bethlem Judas love hath beene

Wrong'd by the fag end crew of Benjamen.²

Oh let such high presumption be accurst,

When the last Tribe shall wrong the best, & first:³

When (like the Levite) our blest Charles may say,

The Ravenous Wolfe hath seiz'd the Lions prey.⁴

Thus oft inferiour Subjects are not shy

To wrong alone, but mocke at Majesty.

What faculty shall not be injured,

If that the feet had power to spurne the head;

And Kings prerogatives must needs fall downe,

When subjects make a foot-ball of a Crowne.

Thus starres Heavens inferiour Courtiers might

Command the darknesse, but not rule the Light,

Nor him that makes it, should they all combine

With Luna⁵ in the full; one Sunne would shine

Brighter then they; nor can he be subdued

Though he but one, and they a multitude.

Say subjects yee were starrs, and were allow'd

Yee justly of your number might be proud;

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Yet to the Sunne be humble, and know this 25
 The light is borrowed, not your owne, but his.
 When the unfettered subjects of the seas,
 The fountaines felt their silver feet at ease,
 Noe sooner summoned but nimbly went
 To meet the ocean at a Parliament; 30
 Did then those petty fountaines say their King
 The Ocean, was noe Ocean but a spring?
 Let mee alone if fresh accesse of store
 Can make mee poorer then I was before;
 And shall wee then the power of Kings dispute, 35
 And thinke it lesse when more is added to't?
 Noe let the Common body if it can
 Bee not a River, but an Ocean;
 And swell into a deluge till it hide
 The tops of Mountaines in it teeming pride; 40
 Kings (like Noahs Arke) are nearer to the skies,
 The more the billowes underneath them rise;
 You then who if your harts were fired with Love,
 Might sitt in Counsell like the Gods above;
 You that doe question the Kings power below, 45
 If you come there, will you use heavens King soe?
 Doe not aspire, you may take up your rest
 More safe below, then in the Eagles nest;
 Hath Clemency offended, will you harme
 And plucke the Sunne from heaven that keeps you warme? 50
 Nor King, nor Bishops?⁶ please you what you gott?
 An outside English and an inside Scott;⁷
 While faction thus our Countryes peace distracts,
 Wee may have wordes of Parliaments, not Acts.⁸
 Ill ended Sessions, and yet well begun, 55

Too much being spoke, hath made too little done.

See faction thrives, Puritanisme beares sway

None must doe any thing, but onely Say.⁹

Stoop, stoop yee barren headed hills, confesse

Yee might bee fruitfuller if yee were lesse.

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Tremble yee thread-bare Commons, are ye vext

That Lambs feed on you? Lions will come next.

Source. BL MS Egerton 2725, fols. 129r-130r

Other known sources. Rous 88; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.25, fol. 38r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.97, p. 191; Bodleian MS Malone 21, fol. 93r; Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 361, fol. 68r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 90r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 117, fol. 150v; Bodleian MS Tanner 306, fol. 290r; BL Add. MS 22959, fol. 58r; BL MS Harley 367, fol. 160r; Folger MS V.a.192, part 2, fol. 5r

R9

¹ *And like the Levite...broken Tribe:* these lines introduce a passage of biblical analogy, setting England's divisions against those of ancient Israel. In one interpretation, "the Levite" is not intended to signify any one particular person, either in the Bible or in England, but rather stands as a figure of a priest. In another (more likely) interpretation, "the Levite" may be the specific Levite of Judges 20, whose concubine was murdered in the Benjamite city of Gibeah, and who responded by cutting the woman in pieces and sending the body "throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel" (Judges 20.6).

² *And say...crew of Benjamen:* these difficult lines continue the biblical analogy. "Bethlem Judas" (or, more plausibly, "Bethlem Judah's") refers to the city of Bethlehem-Judah (or, in modern usage, Bethlehem). An analogy to London is likely. The poem implies that the fundamental "love", or goodwill, of the city has been undermined by a divisive faction. The image of "the fag end crew of Benjamen", in this context, probably continues the analogy with the narrative in Judges 20 and 21, since the murder of the concubine of "the Levite" precipitated a war in which the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely destroyed.

³ *When the last Tribe...first:* continues the biblical analogy; the "last Tribe" is presumably that of Benjamin, while "the best, & first" that of Levi. In the English context, "the best, & first" might also be Charles I.

⁴ *The Ravenous Wolfe...Lions prey:* when Jacob initially divides Israel into twelve tribes, Benjamin is likened to a wolf, and Judah to a lion (Genesis 49.27 and 49.9).

⁵ *Luna*: the moon.

⁶ *Nor King, nor Bishops*: the link between monarchy and episcopacy was one of the hot political debates of the early seventeenth century. Those opposed to the hierarchy within the Church typically claimed that this position was consistent with a commitment to the monarchy; by contrast, a traditional declaration, supposedly endorsed by James I, held: “No bishops, no king”.

⁷ *An outside English...Scott*: the image, invoking a conventional model of hypocrisy, suggests that those who have brought down the 1640 Parliament are secretly committed to the paths of resistance that led the Scots into the Bishops’ Wars.

⁸ *Wee may have wordes...not Acts*: i.e. parliaments may be allowed (briefly) to debate, but never to enact legislation.

⁹ *Say*: probably a pun. On the one hand, this continues the poem’s distinction between talk and action, parliamentary debate and enacted legislation. On the other hand, it perhaps alludes to William Fiennes, Viscount Saye and Sele, who was becoming an increasingly prominent parliamentary leader at this time.
