

VI.

On Mr. FRANCIS BEAUMONT, (*then newly dead*).

HE that hath such acuteness, and such wit,
As would ask ten good heads to husband it :
He, that can write so well, that no man dare
Refuse it for the best, let him beware :
Beaumont is dead, by whose sole death appears,
Wit's a disease consumes men in few years.

RICH. CORBET, ¹⁴ D. D.

VII.

On the happy Collection of Mr. FLETCHER's Works, never before printed.

FLETCHER, arise! usurpers share thy bays,
They *canton* thy vast wit to build small *plays* :
He comes! his *volume* breaks through clouds and dust ;
Down, little wits! ye must refund, ye must.

Nor comes he private; here's great Beaumont too :
How could one single world encompass two ?
For these co-heirs had equal power to teach
All that all wits both can, and cannot, reach.
Shakespeare was early up, and went so drest
As for those *daunting* hours he knew was best ;
But, when the sun shone forth, *you two* thought fit
To wear just robes, and leave off *trunk-hose* wit.
Now, now, 'twas perfect; none must look for new,
Manners and scenes may alter, but not *you* ;
For yours are not mere *humours*, gilded strains ;
The fashion lost, your massy *sense* remains.

Some think your wits of two complexions fram'd,
That one the *sock*, th' other the *buskin*, claim'd ;
That should the stage *embattle* all its force,
Fletcher would lead the foot, Beaumont the horse.
But, you were both for both; not *semy-wits*,
Each piece is wholly two, yet never splits :
Ye're not two *faculties*, and one *soul* still,
He th' *understanding*, thou the quick free *will* ;
Not as two *voices* in one song embrace,
Fletcher's keen *treble*, and deep Beaumont's *base*,¹⁵

Two,

deprived of the chancellorship of Salisbury, and all his other preferments. After the restoration, he was made, first Dean of Westminster, then Bishop of Worcester, and afterwards of Salisbury. Mr. Wood gives a character of him, that extremely resembles that of the excellent Dr. Hough, the late Bishop of Worcester; the sum of it is, that he joined the politeness of a courtier to the sanctity, goodness, and charity of an apostle.

SEWARD.

¹⁴ Richard Corbet, first Student, then Dean of Christ-Church, afterwards Bishop of Oxford, and from thence translated to Norwich; in his youth was eminent for wit and poetry, of which this is a specimen, and a good testimony of Beaumont's having a luxuriant wit as well as Fletcher,

— a wit

That would ask ten good heads to husband it.

SEWARD.

¹⁵ But, as two voices in one song embrace,

(Fletcher's keen treble, and deep Beaumont's base)

Two, full, congenial souls.] Here Berkenhead is speaking of the doubtful opinions relating to the share which Beaumont and Fletcher had in these plays: he tells you, that the general opinion was, that Beaumont was a *grave tragic writer*, Fletcher most excellent in comedy. This he contradicts; but how, why, they did not differ as a general of horse does from a general of foot, nor as the *sock* does from the *buskin*, nor as the *will* from the *understanding*,

Two, full, congenial souls ; still both prevail'd ;
 His muse and thine were *quarter'd*, not *impal'd* ;¹⁶
 Both brought you ingots, both toil'd at the mint,
 Beat, melted, sifted, 'till no dross stuck in't ;
 Then in each other's scales weigh'd every grain,
 Then smooth'd and burnish'd, then weigh'd all again ;
 Stamp't both your names upon't at one bold hit,
 Then, then 'twas coin, as well as bullion-wit.

Thus twins : But as when Fate one eye deprives,
 That other strives to double, which survives,
 So Beaumont died ; yet left in legacy
 His rules and standard wit (Fletcher) to thee.
 Still the same planet, though not fill'd so soon,
 A two-horn'd *crescent* then, now one *full-moon*.
 Joint *love* before, now *honour*, doth provoke ;
 So th' old twin *giants* forcing a huge oak,
 One slip'd his footing, th' other sees him fall,
 Grasp'd the whole tree, and single held up all.
 Imperial Fletcher ! here begins thy reign ;
 Scenes flow like sun-beams from thy glorious brain ;
 Thy swift-dispatching soul no more doth stay,
 Than he that built two cities in one day ;
 Ever brim-full, and sometimes running o'er,
 To feed poor languid wits that wait at door ;
 Who creep and creep, yet ne'er above-ground stood ;
 (For creatures have most feet, which have least blood).
 But thou art still that *bird of paradise*,
 Which hath *no feet*, and ever nobly *flies* :
 Rich, lusty *sense*, such as the *Poet* ought ;
 For poems, if not excellent, are naught ;
 Low wit in scenes in state a peasant goes ;
 If mean and flat, let it foot yeoman-prose,
 That such may spell, as are not readers grown ;
 To whom he, that writes wit, shews he hath none.

Brave Shakespeare flow'd, yet had his ebbings too,
 Often above himself, sometimes below ;
 Thou always best ; if aught seem'd to decline,
 'Twas the unjudging rout's mistake, not thine :

standing, but were *two full congenial souls*, and differed only as the *base* and *treble* do in the same song. Why, if this is the true reading, he confirms in these lines what he had contradicted in all the foregoing similes, for *base* and *treble* have much the same difference between them as horse and foot in an army, or the wit and understanding in the soul. To make the writer consistent with himself, the true reading seems to be *not* instead of *but* :

*Not as two voices in one song embrace,
 Fletcher's keen treble and deep Beaumont's base ;
 Two full congenial souls.* SEWARD.

¹⁶ *His muse and thine were quarter'd, not impal'd ;*] I know I am going out of my depth, in attempting a criticism on terms in heraldry. But my books tell me, that *impaling* is when the arms of the man and wife are placed on the same escutcheon, the one on the right and the other on the left ; which is a proper emblem of the matrimonial union ; and might seemingly be as well applied to the marriage of Beaumont and Fletcher's wit, as the word *quartering* can, which the same Berkenhead speaks of at the latter end of this poem :

*What strange production is at last display'd,
 Got by two fathers without female aid !*

But I shall attempt no change in a science where I am ignorance itself.

SEWARD.

Thus

Thus thy fair Shepherdess, which the bold heap
 (False to themselves and thee) did prize so cheap,
 Was found (when understood) fit to be crown'd;
 At worst 'twas worth *two hundred thousand pound*.

Some blast thy *works*, lest we should track their walk,
 Where they steal all those few good things they talk;
 Wit-burglary must chide those it feeds on,
 For plunder'd folks ought to be rail'd upon;
 But (as stoln goods go off at half their worth)
 Thy strong sense *palls*, when they purloin it forth.
 When didst thou borrow? where's the man e'er read
 Aught begg'd by thee from those alive or dead?
 Or from dry *goddesses*? as some who, when
 They stuff their page with gods, write worse than men;
 Thou wast thine *own* muse, and hadst such vast odds,
 Thou out-writ'st him whose verse *made* all those *gods*:
 Surpassing those our dwarfish age up-rears,
 As much as Greeks, or Latins, thee in years:
 Thy ocean fancy knew nor banks nor damms;
 We ebb down dry to pebble-*anagrams*;
 Dead and insipid, all despairing sit;
 Lost to behold this great *relapse* of wit:
 What strength remains, is like that (wild and fierce)
 'Till Jonson made good poets and right verse.

Such boist'rous trifles thy muse would not brook,
 Save when she'd shew how scurvily they look;
 No savage metaphors (things rudely great)
 Thou dost *display*, not *butcher* a conceit;
 Thy nerves have *beauty*, which invades and charms;
 Looks like a princess harness'd in bright arms.
 Nor art thou loud and cloudy; those, that do
 Thunder so much, do't without lightning too;
 Tearing themselves, and almost split their brain
 To render harsh what thou speak'st free and clean;
 Such gloomy sense may pass for *high* and *proud*,
 But true-born wit still flies *above* the *cloud*;
 Thou knew'st 'twas *impotence*, what they call *height*;
 Who blusters strong i'th' dark, but *creeps* i'th' light.

And as thy thoughts were *clear*, so, *innocent*;
 Thy fancy gave no unswept language vent;
 Slander'st not *laws*, prophan'st no *holy page*
 (As if thy father's crosier aw'd the stage);
 High crimes were still arraign'd; though they made shift
 To prosper out *four acts*, were plagu'd i'th' *fifth*:
 All's safe, and wise; no stiff affected scene,
 Nor *swoln*, nor *flat*, a true full natural vein;
 Thy sense (like well-drest ladies) cloath'd as skinn'd,
 Not all unlac'd, nor city-starch'd and pinn'd?
 Thou hadst no sloth, no rage, no sullen fit,
 But *strength* and *mirth*; Fletcher's a *sanguine* wit.

Thus, two great *consul*-poets all things sway'd,
 'Till all was English born or English made:
Mitre and *coif* here into one piece spun,
 Beaumont's a *judge's*, this a *prelate's* son.
 What strange production is at last display'd,
 Got by two fathers, without female aid!

Behold,

Behold, two *masculines* espous'd each other;
Wit and the world were born without a *mother*. J. BERKENHEAD

VIII.

On the Works of BEAUMONT and FLETCHER, now at length printed.

GREAT pair of Authors, whom one equal star
 Begot so like in *genius*, that you are
 In fame, as well as writings, both so knit,
 That no man knows where to divide your wit,
 Much less your praise: you, who had equal fire
 And did each other mutually inspire;
 Whether one did contrive, the other write,
 Or one fram'd the plot, the other did indite;
 Whether one found the matter, th' other dress,
 Or th' one dispos'd what th' other did express:
 Where-e'er your parts between yourselves lay, we
 In all things, which you did, but one thread see;
 So evenly drawn out, so gently spun,
 That Art with Nature ne'er did smother run.
 Where shall I fix my praise then? or what part
 Of all your numerous labours hath desert
 More to be fam'd than other? Shall I say,
 I've met a lover so drawn in your play,
 So passionately written, so inflam'd,
 So jealously enrag'd, then gently tam'd,
 That I in reading have the person seen,
 And your pen hath part stage and actor been?
 Or shall I say, that I can scarce forbear
 To clap, when I a * captain do meet there;
 So lively in his own vain humour drest,
 So braggingly, and like himself exprest,
 That modern cowards, when they saw him play'd,
 Saw, blush'd, departed, guilty and betray'd?
 You wrote all parts right; whatsoe'er the stage
 Had from you, was seen there as in the age,
 And had their equal life: vices which were
 Manners abroad, did grow corrected there:
 They who possess a box and half-crown spent
 To learn obscenity, return'd innocent,
 And thank'd you for this coz'nage, whose chaste scene
 Taught loves so noble, so reform'd, so clean,
 That they, who brought foul fires, and thither came
 To bargain, went thence with a holy flame.
 Be't to your praise too, that ¹⁸ your stock and vein
 Held both to tragic and to comic strain;

¹⁷ J. Berkinhead.] *Berkinhead* was first amanuensis to bishop Laud, and fellow of Souls. He was author of the *Mercurius Aulicus*, a very loyal paper in the time of the rebellion. He was persecuted much in Cromwell's days, and lived by his wits; afterwards he held good places under King Charles the Second, was member of parliament, and knighted.

SEWA

* *Bessus*.

¹⁸ ——— your stock and vein
 Held both to tragic and to comic strain.] i. e. Your stock of understanding and knowledge, and your vein of wit and humour, are equally excellent in tragedy and comedy.

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