
SUMMARY: Dedicatory epistle dated 1 January [=1581] to Philip Howard, Earl of Surrey, in Thomas Churchyard's (1520?-1604) *A Light Bundle of Lively Discourses Called Churchyard's Charge, presented as a New Year's gift to the right honourable the Earl of Surrey*. In the epistle Churchyard promises to dedicate his next book to Oxford, whom he terms 'the most worthiest and towards[t] nobleman'.

To the right honourable my especial good Lord, the Earl of Surrey, Thomas Churchyard wisheth many happy new years, fortunate days and weeks, increase of honour and virtue,
with most assured felicity

I know not, my good Lord, whether my boldness and presumption be greater than the baseness of my matter herein penned and I mind to present, considering the worthiness of the personage to whom I dedicate my book, and the weakness of my wit that presenteth vain verses where virtue of the mind aboundeth. But for that I treat not of mere trifles (nor mean to corrupt sound senses and good manners with wanton words or lewd rime), I am partly persuaded this mine New Year's gift shall give your Lordship delight, and purchase to myself the desired thanks that every honest writer deserveth, because the substance and effect of all my inventions are shadowed under the shield of good meaning, and a matter well meant (by the courtesy of true construction) may pass the muster & good opinion of the people among the best assemblies that looketh on the furniture I bring and ableness of my pen. And albeit some weapons want to beat back the thumping bolts of evil tongues (in my defence be it spoken), yet the armour of right and target of troth shall be sufficient to strike down the blows that haughty hearts with threatening thwarts can offer. And whosoever hastily or unadvisedly through malicious words hinders the credit of any honest works may be thought both a rash and a partial speaker & a busy meddler in matters they neither mind to amend nor will suffer that the world shall speak well thereof.

But now farther to proceed & enter into the cause of this my boldness, the troth is, in calling to remembrance a promise that I made touching some verses, and honouring in heart the Earl of Surrey, your Lordship's grandfather & my master (who was a noble warrior, an eloquent orator, and a second Petrarch), I could do no less but publish to the world somewhat that should show I had lost no time in his service. And finding another of his race and towardness who hath taste and feeling in the good gifts of nature and noble virtues of his ancestors (the hope of which graces promiseth great perfection to follow in time to come), I thought I might dedicate a book unto your Lordship named by mine own liking *Churchyard's Charge*.

But now, right noble Earl, the world, loving change and variety of matter, waxeth aweary of frivolous verses (because so many are writers of metre) and looketh for some learned discourse, by which means my barren books may remain unread or misliked, and so lie on the stationer's stall as a silly sign of a new nothing, neither worth the buying nor the regarding. To that I may answer (under pardon and correction) that the ground which of

nature yieldeth but thistles or brambles may bring forth no good corn of itself contrary to his operation and kind. Nor a man that is accustomed to treat of trifles may not meddle with the deepness of grave arguments. For as it passes the search and capacity of a simple wit to see into any matter of importance, so it is necessary that a pleasant and plain companion should always be occupied about pastimes, and namely at Christmas, when little short tales drives out a piece of the long nights, and rather with mirth to procure a laughter than with sadness provoke a lowering. And he that stirreth up the heavy minds to lightsome confaits is more welcome in every place than he that overthrowes the weak senses of common people with curious imaginations, and burthens both body and mind with words of greater weight than common judgment can conceive and be able to bear. A tale or a toy merrily delivered pleaseth most men's ears, and an earnest sad argument either rocks a man asleep or maketh the hearers aweary. And the nature of rime is to revive the spirits, or move a smile when many a one is scarce pleasantly disposed. A rime goeth on such feet, standeth on such joints, and rappeth out such reasons that wisdom taketh pleasure in and folly will make a wonder of. The words by invention hits a thing so jump, and keeps such a decorum and method, that both order and measure is seen in the cunning conveyance of the verses, especially if the sweet and smooth sentences be sifted from the sour rough bran of needless babble and vanity, a sensible wit having the penning of the matter.

But lo, my good Lord, in showing the nature and quality of a good verse, how my hobbling is seen and perceived by the badness or bare handling of the things herein written. Yet now I have run so far in overweening that either I am forced to go forward or remain in the midway discomforted and without remedy. Wherefore, albeit I shall show but a bundle of dry devises, I must open my fardel & make sale of such stuff as my head hath been stuffed withal, even like the poor pedlar that trudgeth with his pack to a fair, and there unfoldeth, among some new laces & odd trifles, a great deal of old ware and little remnants that for lack of quick sale hath lain long in a close corner. I need not to seek out a patron to support them, for they are neither worth the reading nor the buying, yet having no better, am compelled to utter the things I have left. Providing that my next book may show somewhat among the rest that goeth before, for that it shall be dedicated to the most worthiest (and towards[t] nobleman), the Earl of Oxford, as my leisure may serve, and yet with great expedition. Thus being over-tedious and bold in stretching out a short and sorry epistle (that had been better knit up in few lines), I wish your Lordship many new and happy years, long life to your liking to the honour of God and increase of good fame, and a piece or portion of each goodness can be named. From my lodging near to the court the first day of January.

Your Lordship's at commandment,
Thomas Churchyard