[John Duncan], â??Small Beerâ?•

Description

[JOHN DUNCAN]

â??Small Beerâ?•

If ever yet, *Aonian* maids,
You blessâ??d poor bard with timely aids;
Haste now â?? and help without suspension,
Bring spirit, numbers, rhyme, invention.
Here in sad plight your votâ??ry view,
Iâ??m left â?? eâ??en as I bake, to brew;
Spare, gentle critics, each default,
Youâ??ll find much water, little malt.
Bless me! an ague-fit I fear;
O theme to kill a Muse, *small Beer*.
Thy name, base draff, a verse degrades,
Drink of penurious, musty maids,
Or drudging rogues, who sing like parrots,
Wedgâ??d in close stalls, or fulsome garrets.
Tasteless, weak, flatulent remains â??
Squeezâ??d from impoverishâ??d husks and grains,
Fit swill for *Bedlamâ??s* residentiaries,
Or *Bridewellâ??s* chastned penitentiaries,
Hard beveridge of the starvâ??ling wit,
Thou very ratsbane to the cit.
Sad sobâ??rer in his midnight hours,
When wine thâ?? insensate brain oâ??er powâ??rs â??
To what hard streights, thy poysâ??nous juice,
The good old dame does oft reduce,
When souerly belching from her pipes,
On *Gin* she calls to ease her gripes.
In vain â?? no *Gin* â?? (once cheap relief)
Is now â?? from guts to chase the grief.
Close pent, from bowels swoln and tore,
Thouâ??rt heard in many a fearful roar,
Imposer on the frugal purse,
In using bad, in keeping worse.
Stale, thouâ??rt mere verjuice; gall, when mild;
At best thouâ??rt but good water spoilâ??d.
Stay â?? some who own for truth my satire,

May yet accuse her of ill nature.
For once (if Sire *Apollo* will
A proof of genius and of skill)
Iâ??ll act the casuist in my lays,
In one line lash, with tâ??other praise.
Small Beer, cool, elegant, regale,
Thou royal child of good *king Ale:*
In massy tankard bright and stable,
Oft brought up to the princely table;
To tempâ??rance, chastity and quiet,
Thou friend â?? sworn foe to feuds and riot;
Rescuer of captivated reason,
From traitâ??rous wineâ??s effected treason!
Oft known the deadly feverâ??s flame,
(By the scorchâ??d Patient cravâ??d) to tame;
To the sick wretch debarâ??d admission,
Throâ?? envy of the sly Physician;
Thee grateful Sailorâ??s plenteous sip,
Converted to ambrosial flipp.
And thee, to heat, the good wife learns
(Safe junket for unfuddling bearns)
With sugar, mingled sweet, and spice,
The saving huswifeâ??s rare device;
Dear to the school-boyâ??s liquâ??rish chops,
In posset boilâ??d, or sugar sops;
Or by the alewifeâ??s cunning art,
Workâ??d up in bottles fresh and smart,
Thouâ??rt servâ??d on holidays in glasses,
Choice fare with â??prentice youths and lasses.
Ah me! Iâ??m at a sad extreme,
Quite, quite exhausted, rhyme and theme;
Tirâ??d fancy lags, dull numbers droop;
My muse, like barrel, all a-stoop,
Creeps on her lees, runs thick and slow,
Help, *Phoebus*! Iâ??m a cup too low.

NOTES:

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1 *Aonian maids* The Muses. Aonia is â??a region of ancient Boeotia that contained the Helicon and Cithaeron mountains, sacred to the Musesâ?• (*OED*).

5 *votâ??ry* A devotee.

9 *ague-fit* â??A state or bout of distressâ?• (*OED*).

11 *draff* â??Grains of malt after brewingâ?• (*OED*).

12 *penurious* Poor.

15 *flatulent* â??Generating or apt to generate gas in the alimentary canalâ?• (*OED*).

17 *swill* â??Liquid, or partly liquid, foodâ?• typically given to pigs (*OED*); *Bedlam* The Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, notorious mental asylum in the eighteenth century.

18 *Bridewell* A London prison; *penitentiaries* Inmates.

20 *ratsbane* â??Rat poisonâ?• (*OED*).

33 *verjuice* â??The acid juice of green or unripe grapes, crabapples, or other sour fruitâ?• (*OED*); *gall* Here a type of â??intensely bitter substanceâ?• (*OED*).

39 *casuist* A person â??who studies and resolves cases of conscience or doubtful questions regarding duty and conductâ?• (*OED*).

52 *sly* â??Deceitfulâ?• (*OED*).

54 *ambrosial flipp* A delightful â??mixture of beer and spirit sweetened with sugar and heated with a hot ironâ?• (*OED*).

56 *bearns* Variation of â??bairns,â?• children.

59 *liquâ??rish chops* â??Fond of delicious fareâ?• (*OED*).

60 *posset* **â??**A drink made from hot milk curdled with ale, wine, or other liquor, flavoured with sugar, herbs, spices, etc.â?• (*OED*).

60 *sugar sops* â??A dish composed of steeped slices of bread, sweetened and sometimes spicedâ?• (*OED*).

69 *lees* The sediment of alcoholic beverages in the barrel.

70 *Phoebus* â??Apollo as the god of light or of the sun; the sun personifiedâ?• *(OED).*

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Edited by Rafe Abd Al Illah Kassim