

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42674-0 - The Elder Brother: A Comedy by John Fletcher:

First Printed in 1637

Edited by William H. Draper

Excerpt

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THE
ELDER BROTHER,
A
COMEDY

D.

I

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Persons Represented in the Play

LEWIS, *a Lord.*

MIRAMONT, *a gentleman.*

BRISAC, *a Justice, brother to Miramont.*

CHARLES, *a scholar* }
 EUSTACE, *a courtier* } *sons to Brisac.*

EGREMONT }
 COWSY } *two courtiers, friends to Eustace.*

ANDREW, *servant to Charles.*

COOK }
 BUTLER } *servants to Brisac.*

PRIEST.

NOTARY.

SERVANTS.

OFFICERS.

ANGELINA, *daughter to Lewis.*

SYLVIA, *her woman.*

LILLY, *wife to Andrew.*

LADIES.

The Scene is laid in France

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LECTORI

*Would'st thou all Wit, all Comic Art survey?
 Read here and wonder; Fletcher writ the Play*

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A grove at some distance from the house of
 LEWIS.*

Enter LEWIS, ANGELINA, and SYLVIA.

LEW. Nay, I must walk you farther.

ANG. I am tir'd, sir,
 And ne'er shall foot it home.

LEW. 'Tis for your health;
 The want of exercise takes from your beauties,
 And sloth dries up your sweetness: That you are
 My only daughter and my heir, is granted;
 And you in thankfulness must needs acknowledge,
 You ever find me an indulgent father,
 And open handed.

ANG. Nor can you tax me, sir,
 I hope, for want of duty to deserve
 These favours from you.

LEW. No, my Angelina,
 I love and cherish thy obedience to me,

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THE ELDER BROTHER

Which my care to advance thee shall confirm :
 All that I aim at, is to win thee from
 The practice of an idle foolish state,
 Us'd by great women, who think any labour
 (Though in the service of themselves) a blemish
 To their fair fortunes.

ANG. Make me understand, sir,
 What 'tis you point at.

LEW. At the custom, how
 Virgins of wealthy families waste their youth ;
 After a long sleep, when you wake, your woman
 Presents your breakfast, then you sleep again,
 Then rise, and being trimm'd up by other hands,
 You are led to dinner, and that ended, either
 To cards or to your couch, (as if you were
 Born without motion) after this to supper,
 And then to bed : and so your life runs round
 Without variety or action, daughter.

SYL. Here's a learned lecture !

LEW. From this idleness,
 Diseases, both in body and in mind,
 Grow strong upon you ; where a stirring nature,
 With wholesome exercise, guards both from danger :
 I'd have thee rise with the sun, walk, dance, or hunt
 Visit the groves and springs, and learn the virtue
 Of plants and simples : do this moderately,
 And thou shalt not, with eating chalk, or coles,
 Leather and oatmeal, and such other trash,
 Fall into the green-sickness.

SYL. With your pardon
 (Were you but pleas'd to minister it) I could

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THE ELDER BROTHER

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Prescribe a remedy for my lady's health,
And her delight too, far transcending those
Your lordship but now mention'd.

LEW. What is it, Sylvia ?

SYL. What is't ! a noble husband ; in that word,
A noble husband, all content of woman
Is wholly comprehended.

LEW. Well said, wench.

ANG. And who gave you commission to deliver
Your verdict, minion ?

SYL. I deserve a fee,
And not a frown, dear madam : I but speak
Her thoughts, my lord, and what her modesty
Refuses to give voice to.

LEW. 'Tis well urg'd,
And I approve it : no more blushing, girl,
Thy woman hath spoke truth, and so prevented
What I meant to move to thee. There dwells near us
A gentleman of blood, Monsieur Brisac,
Of a fair estate, six thousand crowns *per annum*,
The happy father of two hopeful sons,
Of different breeding ; the elder, a mere scholar ;
The younger, a quaint courtier.

ANG. Sir, I know them
By public fame, though yet I never saw them ;
And that oppos'd antipathy between
Their various dispositions, renders them
The general discourse and argument ;
One part inclining to the scholar Charles,
The other side preferring Eustace, as
A man complete in courtship.

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THE ELDER BROTHER

LEW. And which way
(If of these two you were to choose a husband)
Doth your affection sway you ?

ANG. To be plain sir,
(Since you will teach me boldness) as they are
Simply themselves, to neither : let a courtier
Be never so exact, let him be bless'd with
All parts that yield him to a virgin gracious ;
If he depends on others,
Though he live in expectation
Of some huge preferment in reversion ; if
He want a present fortune, at the best
Those are but glorious dreams, and only yield him
A happiness in *posse*, not in *esse* ;
Nor can they fetch him silks from the mercer, nor
Discharge a tailor's bill, nor in full plenty
Maintain a family.

LEW. Aptly consider'd,
And to my wish : but what's thy censure of
The scholar ?

ANG. Troth (if he be nothing else)
As of the courtier, all his songs and sonnets,
His anagrams, acrostics, epigrams,
His deep and philosophical discourse
Of nature's hidden secrets, makes not up
A perfect husband ; he can hardly borrow
The stars of the celestial crown to make me
A tire for my head, nor Charles's Wain for a coach,
Nor Ganymede for a page, nor a rich gown
From Juno's wardrobe.
No, no, father

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THE ELDER BROTHER

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Though I could be well pleas'd to have my husband
A courtier, and a scholar, young, and valiant ;
These are but gawdy nothings, if there be not
Something to make a substance.

LEW. And what is that ?

ANG. A full estate, and that said, I've said all ;
And get me such a one with these additions,
Farewell singleness, and welcome wedlock.

LEW. But where is such a one to be met with,
daughter ?

A black swan is more common ; you may wear
Grey tresses ere we find him.

ANG. I am not

So punctual in all ceremonies, I will 'bate
Two or three of these good parts, before I'll dwell
Too long upon the choice.

SYL. Only, my lord, remember,
That he be rich and active, for without these,
The others yield no relish, but these perfect.
You must bear with small faults, madam.

LEW. Merry wench,
And it becomes you well ; I'll to Brisac,
And try what may be done.

[*Exeunt, on one side, ANGELINA and SYLVIA ; on
the other, LEWIS.*]

SCENE II. *A room in the House of BRISAC.*

Enter ANDREW, COOK and BUTLER.

AND. Unload part of the library, and make room
For th'other dozen of carts ; I'll straight be with you.

COOK. Why, hath he more books ?

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THE ELDER BROTHER

AND. More than ten marts send over.

BUT. And can he tell their names ?

AND. Their names ! he has 'em

As perfect as his *Pater Noster* ; but that's nothing,
H'as read them over leaf by leaf three thousand times ;
But here's the wonder, though their weight would sink
A Spanish galleon, without other ballast,
He carrieth them all in his head, and yet
He walks upright.

BUT. Surely he has a strong brain.

AND. If all thy pipes of wine were fill'd with books,
Made of the barks of trees, or mysteries writ
In old moth-eaten vellum, he would sip thy cellar
Quite dry, and still be thirsty : then for's diet,
He eats and digests more volumes at a meal,
Than there would be larks (though the sky should fall)
Devoured in a month in Paris. Yet fear not
Sons o'the buttery and kitchen, though his learn'd
stomach

Cannot be appeas'd ; he'll seldom trouble you,
His knowing stomach contemns your black-jacks, butler,
And your flagons ; and Cook, thy boil'd, thy roast, thy
bak'd.

COOK. How liveth he ?

AND. Not as other men do,
Few princes fare like him ; he breaks his fast
With Aristotle, dines with Tully, takes
His watering with the Muses, sups with Livy,
Then walks a turn or two in *Via Lactea*,
And (after six hours conference with the stars)
Sleeps with old *Erra Pater*.

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THE ELDER BROTHER

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BUT. This is admirable.

AND. I'll tell you more hereafter. Here's my old master,
And another old ignorant elder ; I'll upon 'em.

Enter BRISAC, LEWIS.

BRI. What, Andrew ? welcome ; where's my Charles ?
Speak, Andrew,
Where did'st thou leave thy master ?

AND. Contemplating
The number of the sands in the high-way,
And from that, purposes to make a judgment
Of the remainder in the sea : he is, sir,
In serious study, and will lose no minute,
Nor out of's pace to knowledge.

LEW. This is strange.

AND. Yet he hath sent his duty, sir, before him
In this fair manuscript.

BRI. What have we here ?
Pot-hooks and andirons !

AND. I much pity you,
It is the Syrian character, or the Arabic.
Would you have it said, so great and deep a scholar
As Mr Charles is, should ask blessing
In any Christian language ? Were it Greek
I could interpret for you, but indeed
I'm gone no farther.

BRI. Take in the knave,
And let him eat.

AND. And drink too, sir

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THE ELDER BROTHER

BRI. And drink too sir,
And see your masters chamber ready for him.

BUT. Come, Dr Andrew, without disputation
Thou shalt commence i'the cellar.

AND. I had rather
Commence on a cold bak'd meat.

COOK. Thou shalt ha't, boy.

[Exeunt all except BRISAC and LEWIS.]

BRI. Good Monsieur Lewis, I esteem my self
Much honour'd in your clear intent, to join
Our ancient families, and make them one ;
And 'twill take from my age and cares, to live
And see what you have purpos'd but in act,
Of which your visit at this present is
A hopeful omen ; I each minute expecting
The arrival of my sons ; I have not wrong'd
Their birth for want of means and education,
To shape them to that course each was addicted ;
And therefore that we may proceed discreetly,
Since what's concluded rashly seldom prospers,
You first shall take a strict perusal of them,
And then from your allowance, your fair daughter
May fashion her affection.

LEW. Monsieur Brisac,
You offer fair and nobly, and I'll meet you
In the same line of honour ; and I hope,
Being blest but with one daughter, I shall not
Appear impertinently curious,
Though with my utmost vigilance and study,
I labour to bestow her to her worth :
Let others speak her form, and future fortune