

Cambridge University Press

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

First Printed in 1637

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Photograph by Henry Dixon and Son, London

John Fletcher

1579—1625

*(From the Portrait at Welbeck Abbey, by permission of
his Grace the Duke of Portland)*

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THE
ELDER BROTHER

A COMEDY
BY
JOHN FLETCHER

First printed in 1637

Now reprinted with slight alterations and abridgement for
use on occasions of Entertainment especially
in Schools and Colleges

EDITED BY
WILLIAM H. DRAPER, M.A.

Cambridge :
at the University Press
1915

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PREFACE

THE number of occasions for entertainment in the ever-developing life of our Universities, Colleges, and Schools, creates a demand for suitable plays or scenes, which has not met hitherto with an adequate supply.

John Fletcher's play *The Elder Brother*, which was first printed in 1637, seems well adapted for such occasions, for the following reasons.

(1) The gist of the play is to commend and praise learning by showing the character of A SCHOLAR as being not only consistent with patriotic and military prowess but as actually more favourable to these than the character of a mere courtier or popinjay. Although the tone of the play is pure comedy, the undertone is of weightier matter. It will be perhaps some recommendation that the scene is laid in France, a country more than ever knit to our own by recent history, and no English audience will be likely to miss the friendly allusion to the University of Louvain in Act II, Sc. 1.

(2) The characters of most importance are full of life and sparkle with wit, and are such as seem to 'put a spirit of youth in everything,' congenial to the occasions above mentioned.

(3) No elaborate scenery is required; and, what is often of great consideration, it is possible to abbreviate the play and choose a few effective scenes and dialogues without entirely mutilating the general purpose of the whole.

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PREFACE

There is only one woman character that has much to say and she is full of charm and good sense. Her maid Sylvia is a very good foil to her mistress, but is altogether of minor importance.

John Fletcher was a son of Richard Fletcher, Bishop of London (1594–1596), and it was to him and his brother Nathaniell that the Bishop bequeathed all his books ‘to be devyded betweene them equallie.’

Though his name is inseparably linked with that of Francis Beaumont it is a generally accepted fact that the present play was entirely the work of Fletcher himself.

The lines, in the original edition, serving as prologue to Act I, as well as those which form the epilogue, testify to the great reputation in which the author was held, and the play itself was re-printed in 1651, 1661, 1678, in which year it is described as ‘now being acted at the Theatre Royal by His Majesty’s Servants.’

The Editor’s thanks are due to His Grace the Duke of Portland for permission to reproduce the interesting portrait of Fletcher now at Welbeck, and to the Bishop of London for leave to photograph the monograms of Fletcher’s father at Fulham.

W. H. D.

January 1915.

ILLUSTRATIONS

JOHN FLETCHER	<i>Frontispiece</i>
ARMS OF RICHARD FLETCHER, THE POET’S FATHER	<i>to face p. vi</i>

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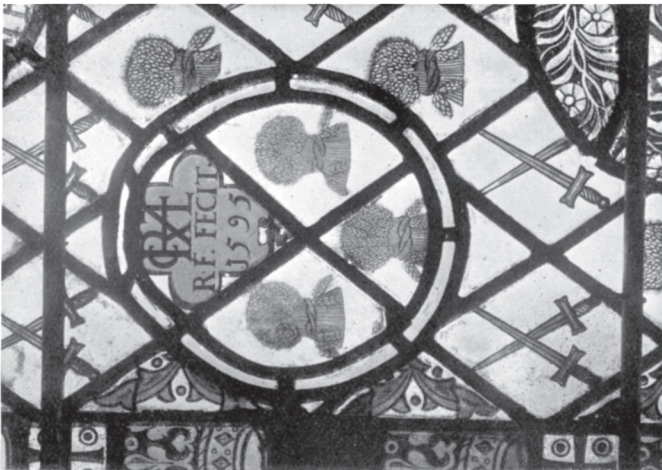
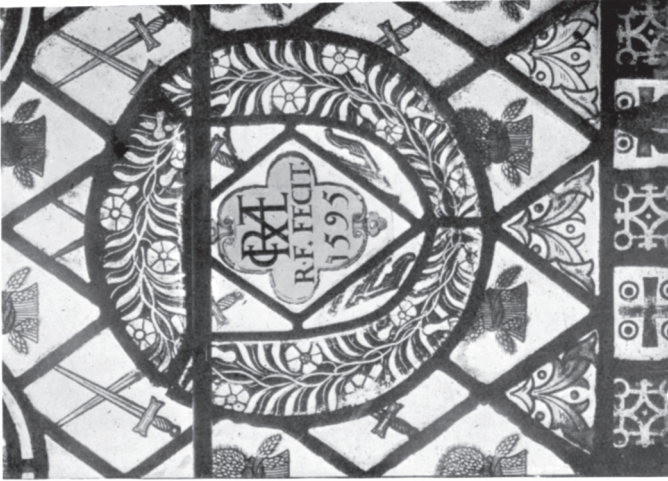
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Photographs by Donald Macbeth, London

Arms of Richard Fletcher, the poet's father

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NOTE

BY THE REV. C. A. ALINGTON,
Headmaster of Shrewsbury

EVERYONE who is interested in acting at Public Schools or Universities must have suffered from the dearth of suitable plays; and this fact alone should be enough to justify the re-publishing of this play by John Fletcher.

Besides this general merit it seems to me to have the special advantages claimed for it: the plot is simple and direct, the characters clearly drawn and the language remarkably free from difficulty.

We are often told that our countrymen despise learning, and pessimists maintain that the home life of the present day has degenerated from the beauty of the past. This play provides a cheerful antidote to both complaints: its moral is that of the supremacy of learning over ruder accomplishments,—a thesis which academic listeners must surely applaud: while if they are led to a comparison of modern domestic relations with those of the XVIIth century the result must certainly be to send them home content.

C. A. A.

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THE ARGUMENT

A certain Lord, Lewis, thinks it is time his young daughter Angelina was married, and commends to her attention the two sons of his neighbour Brisac, a gentleman and Justice of the Peace, the elder of whom is Charles, a scholar and studious lover of books, and the younger Eustace, a soldier of fortune with certain vain fellows for friends. Brisac, who is no scholar, favours his younger son Eustace, but his brother Miramont, a lover of learning, favours Charles in his suit with Angelina, in which he is strongly aided by Charles' faithful servant Andrew. Angelina after much observation prefers Charles and awakens in him a generous passion. Thereupon Eustace and his friends aided by Brisac try to make Charles sign away his inheritance, but he boldly refuses and challenges Eustace to decide their claims by the sword. Eustace is so moved by admiration for his brother's courage that he resigns his claim to Angelina, who in the end is wedded to Charles.

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Note. On occasions where it is necessary to present only a portion of the play, the following suggestions for abbreviation are offered.

SCHEME A. Act I, Sc. 1 and 2.

Act III, Sc. 2, to 'Get me my books again.'

Sc. 4, to 'I must partake it with him.'

Act V, Sc. 1, and part of Sc. 2, from 'Well overtaken' to end.

SCHEME B. Act I, Sc. 1. Sc. 2, from 'Sir, my young masters are newly alighted' to end.

Act II, Sc. 2.

Act III, Sc. 2, to 'Get me my books again.'

SCHEME C. Act I, Sc. 1.

Act II, Sc. 1, to 'shows and sheriffs.'

Act III, Sc. 2, from 'Hark! hark! The coach that brings the fair lady' to end. Sc. 4, to 'Be't good or bad, I must partake it with him.'