

ON THE SPANISH MARRIAGE

Gregory XV (1554–1623), Pope (1621–1623)

to Charles (1600–1649), Prince of Wales

Rome, 20 April 1623

Most noble prince, We wish you the health and light of God's grace. Forasmuch as Great Britain has always been fruitful in virtues, and in men of great worth, having filled the one and the other world with the glory of her renown, she does also very often draw the thoughts of the Holy Apostolic Chair to the consideration of her praises. And indeed, the Church was but then in her infancy when the King of kings did choose her for His inheritance, and so affectionately that, 'tis believed, the Roman eagles were hardly there before the banner of the Cross.

Besides that, many of her kings, instructed in the knowledge of the true salvation, have preferred the Cross before the royal scepter and the discipline of religion before covetousness, leaving examples of piety to other nations and to the ages yet to come, so that having merited the principalities and first places of blessedness in Heaven, they have obtained on Earth the triumphant ornament of holiness.

And although now the state of the English Church is altered, We see, nevertheless, the Court of Great Britain adorned and furnished with moral virtues which might serve to support the charity We bear unto her and be an ornament to the name of Christianity, if withal she should have for her defence and protection the orthodox and Catholic truth. Therefore, by how much the more the glory of your most noble father and the apprehension of your royal inclination delights Us, with so much more zeal We desire that the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven might be opened unto you and that you might purchase to yourself the love of the Universal Church.

Moreover, it being certain that Gregory the Great, of most blessed memory, has introduced to the people of England and taught to their Kings the law of the Gospel and the respect of Apostolic authority, We, as inferior to him in holiness and virtue, but equal in name and degree of dignity, think it very reasonable that We, following his blessed footsteps, should endeavor the salvation of those provinces, especially at this time, when your design, most noble prince, elevates Us to the hope of an extraordinary advantage.

Therefore, as you have directed your journey to Spain towards the Catholic King with desire to ally yourself to the House of Austria, We do commend your design and indeed do testify openly in this present business that you are he that takes principal care of Our prelacy. For, feeling that you desire to take in marriage the daughter of Spain, from thence We may easily conjecture that the ancient seeds of Christian piety which have so happily flourished in the hearts of the King of Great Britain may (God prospering them) revive again in your soul. And indeed it is not to be believed that the same man should love such an alliance that hates the Catholic religion and should take delight to oppress the Holy Chair.

To that purpose, We have commanded that most humble prayers be made continually to the Father of Lights that He would be pleased to put you, as a fair flower of Christendom and the only hope of Great Britain, in possession of that most noble heritage which your ancestors purchased for you—to defend the authority of the sovereign high-priest and to fight against the monsters of heresy. Remember the days of old, enquire of your fathers, and they will tell you the way that leads to Heaven and what way the temporal princes have taken to attain to the ever-lasting Kingdom. Behold the gates of Heaven opened. The most holy Kings of England, who came from England to Rome accompanied with angels, did come to honour and do homage to the Lord of lords, and to the Prince of the Apostles in the Apostolic Chair; their actions and their examples being as so many voices of God, speaking and exhorting you to follow the course of the lives of those to whose empire you shall one day attain.

Is it possible that you can suffer that the heretics should hold them for impious and condemn those whom the faith of the Church testifies to reign in the heavens with Jesus Christ, and have command and authority over all principalities and empires of the Earth? Behold how they tender you the hand of this truly happy inheritance, to conduct you safe and sound to the Court of the Catholic King, and who desire to bring you back again into the lap of the Roman Church, beseeching with unspeakable sighs and groans the God of all mercy for your salvation, and to stretch out to you the arms of the Apostolic charity to embrace you with all Christian affection, even you that are her desired son, in showing you the happy hope of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And indeed, you cannot give a greater consolation to all the people of the Christian world than to put the Prince of the Apostles in possession of your most noble island, whose authority has been held so long in the Kingdom of Britain for the defence of kingdoms and for a divine oracle. The which will easily come to pass, and that without difficulty, if you open your heart to the Lord that knocks; upon which depends all the happiness of that Kingdom. It is from this Our great charity that We cherish the praises of the royal name and that which makes us desire that you and your royal father may be styled with the names of deliverers and restorers of the ancient and paternal religion of Great Britain.

This is it We hope for, trusting in the goodness of God in Whose hands are the hearts of kings and who causes the people of the earth to receive healing, to Whom we will always labour with all our power to render you gracious and favourable. In the interim, take notice by these letters of the care of Our charity, which is none other than to procure your happiness. And it will never grieve Us to have written them, if the reading of them stir but the least spark of the Catholic faith in the heart of so great a prince; whom we wish to be filled with long continuance of joy, and flourishing in the glory of all virtues.

John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* (London: D. Browne, 1721), I:78–80. [modernized]