

DIFFICULTIES IN SPAIN

Charles, Lord Peterborough (1658–1735), Commander of British Forces
to Charles Montague, Baron of Halifax (1661–1715)

HMS SOMERSET, 29 May 1706

There cannot be worse company than a beggarly German and a proud Spaniard, particularly to my humour; and were it not for the revenge we seek in the disagreeable men with the agreeable ladies, our condition were intolerable, black eyes and wit in the wives being what alone can make us endure the husbands; the fair sex especially never failing to put in practice the making use of all opportunities in pleasures, the reverse of what our statesmen practice in business.

Are you not bound in conscience to make us amends from England with now and then a letter, in these dismal circumstances; the Ministers have given us till lately neither men nor money, and our friends no letters, neither of business nor scandal; I know not which we ought most to reproach.

But however, my Lord, being perfect good Christians and well with the Church in these countries (which thinks herself entirely safe under Her Majesty's protection), we forgive, if you will repent and amend; we offer you letter for letter, if you will enter in correspondence and traffic, story for story, and good wine for good ale and cider, bottle for bottle.

I do not trouble you with the account of our successes, which I am obliged to send to the Secretary's office. I believe the French themselves will own enough to make the news agreeable, but my Lord, I hope our Spanish prince will mend his pace, now he is become as one of us, a lover and a sinner; to merit some news of that kind from England, I inform you that we have certain intelligence to our great satisfaction, as we hope it may prove to the chitcats assembled near Charing Cross that a Don John is upon the stocks in Barcelona.

What is past you have heard before this comes to your hands, and I will write a letter to my Lord Sommers to summon in the Whig Arrierban for our support in case of necessity for autumn. Tell my Lord Duke next Sunday dinner I'm actually aboard the SOMERSET, pressing her to comply with my earnest desires of getting me ashore at Valencia; the Germans tell me the King will follow; the English will excuse me I hope if I stay for nobody; they sent me to Valencia when none of them desired to be of the party. I came back with more haste than I went, and am returning with the same impatience to try if I can find the way to Madrid, during this consternation of the Enemy, and from thence to London.

When the time comes that you shall see orders from a King to abandon kingdoms which by disobedience I have preserved for him—when you shall see all the general officers have had a more dangerous war with Ministers than the enemies, and above twenty positive orders from Court rejected from all sides by the unanimous votes of councils of war, consisting of Spaniards, Italians, Flemings, Dutch, and English—you will think our story remarkable and my circumstances very agreeable all this while, who have supported this affair hitherto by methods hardly ever approved by councils of war, where our case was most commonly thought desperate, and the measures I was obliged to take thought so too, but against German directions we were always of a piece.

My Lord Gallway should be in Madrid, having secured all the Spanish foot in Alcantara, being within a few days march of that capital early in May; by the last accounts he was at Almara along the river leading to Toledo, but if Portugal generals (who pass all understanding) should retire with six and twenty thousand men, having no enemy, we lose the present critical minute, and if not supported this autumn, fortune may turn against us and justly punish us for neglecting her favourable offers, which however, my Lord, shall never be laid to my charge, and may neither man nor woman forgive when that appears my fault.

My Lord I am so stung with mosquitoes that I am not able to write with my own hand.

John M. Kemble, ed. *State Papers and Correspondence Illustrative of the Social and Political State of Europe from the Revolution to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (London: 1857): 445–447.