

PRETENDER'S DECLARATION

James Stuart (1688–1766), The Old Pretender

25 October 1715

James VIII by the Grace of God, of Scotland, England, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith etc. To all Our loving subjects of what degree or quality soever, greeting. As We are firmly resolved never to lose any opportunity of asserting Our undoubted title to the imperial crown of these realms, and of endeavouring to get the possession of that right which is devolved upon Us by the laws of God and man, so We must in justice to the sentiments of Our heart declare that nothing in the world can give Us so great satisfaction as to owe to the endeavours of Our loyal subjects both Our own and their restoration to that happy settlement which can alone deliver this church and nation from the calamities which they lie at present under, and from those future miseries which must be the consequences of the present usurpation. During the life of Our dear sister, of glorious memory, the happiness which Our people enjoyed softened in some degree the hardship of Our own fate; and We must further confess that when we reflected on the goodness of her nature, and her inclination to justice, We could not but persuade Ourselves that she intended to establish and perpetuate the peace which she had given to these kingdoms by destroying forever all competition to the succession of the crown, and by securing to Us, at last, the enjoyment of the inheritance out of which We had been so long kept, which her conscience must inform her was our due, and which her principles must bend her to desire that We might obtain.

But since the time that it pleased Almighty God to put a period to her life, and not to suffer Us to throw Ourselves, as We then fully purposed to have done, upon Our people, We have not been able to look upon the present condition of Our kingdoms, or to consider their future prospect, without all the horror and indignation which ought to fill the breast of every Scotsman.

We have beheld a foreign family, aliens to our country, distant in blood, and strangers even to our language, ascend the throne.

We have seen the reins of government put into the hands of a faction, and that authority which was designed for the protection of all exercised by a few of the worst, to the oppression of the best and greatest number of Our subjects. Our sister has not been left at rest in her grave; her name has been scurrilously abused, her glory, as far as in these people lay, insolently defaced, and her faithful servants inhumanely persecuted. A parliament has been procured by the most unwarrantable influences, and by the grossest corruptions, to serve the vilest ends, and they who ought to be the guardians of the liberties of the people are become the instruments of tyranny. Whilst the principal powers engaged in the late wars enjoy the blessings of peace, and are attentive to discharge their debts, and ease their people, Great Britain, in the midst of peace, feels all the load of a war. New debts are contracted, new armies are raised at home, Dutch forces are brought into these kingdoms, and, by taking possession of the Duchy of Bremen, in violation of the public faith, a door is opened by the usurper to let in an inundation of foreigners from abroad and to reduce these nations to the state of a province, to one of the most inconsiderable provinces of the empire.

These are some few of the many real evils into which these kingdoms have been betrayed, under pretence of being rescued and secured from dangers purely imaginary, and these are such consequences of abandoning the old constitution as we persuade Ourselves very many of those who promoted the present unjust and illegal settlement never intended.

We observe, with the utmost satisfaction, that the generality of Our subjects are awakened with a just sense of their danger, and that they show themselves disposed to take such measures as may effectually rescue them from that bondage which has, by the artifice of a few designing men, and by the concurrence of many unhappy causes, been brought upon them.

We adore the wisdom of the Divine Providence, which has opened a way to Our restoration by the success of those very measures that were laid to disappoint Us for ever. And We must earnestly conjure all Our loving subjects not to suffer that spirit to faint or die away which has been so miraculously raised in all parts of the kingdom, but to pursue with all the vigour and hopes of success, which so just and righteous a cause ought to inspire, those methods which the finger of God seems to point out to them.

We are come to take Our part in all the dangers and difficulties to which any of Our subjects, from the greatest down to the meanest, may be exposed on this important occasion, to relieve Our subjects of Scotland from the hardships they groan under on account of the late unhappy union, and to restore the kingdom in its ancient, free, and independent state.

We have before Our eyes the example of Our royal grandfather, who fell a sacrifice to rebellion, and of Our royal uncle, who, by a train of miracles, escaped the rage of the barbarous and blood-thirsty rebels, and lived to exercise his clemency towards those who had waged war against his father and himself; who had driven him to seek shelter in foreign lands, and who had even set a price upon his head. We see the same instances of cruelty renewed against Us by men of the same principles, without any other reason than the consciousness of their own guilt, and the implacable malice of their own hearts. For in the account of such men, it's a crime sufficient to be born their king; but God forbid that We should tread in those steps, or that the cause of a lawful prince, and an injured people, should be carried on like that of usurpation and tyranny, and owe its support to assassins. We shall copy after the patterns above mentioned, and be ready, with the former of Our royal ancestors, to seal the cause of Our country, if such be the will of Heaven, with Our blood. But we hope for better things; we hope, with the latter, to see Our just rights, and those of the Church and people of Scotland, once more settled in a free and independent Scots parliament, on their ancient foundation. To such a parliament, which We will immediately call, shall we entirely refer both Our and their interests, being sensible that these interests, rightly understood, are always the same. Let the civil, as well as religious, rights of all our subjects receive their confirmation in such a parliament; let consciences truly tender be indulged; let property of every kind be better than ever secured; let an act of general grace and amnesty extinguish the fears even of the most guilty; if possible, let the very remembrance of all which have preceded this happy moment be utterly blotted out, that Our subjects may be united to Us, and to each other, on the strictest bonds of affection, as well as interest.

And that nothing may be omitted which is in Our power to contribute to this desirable end, We do by these presents absolutely and effectually for Us, Our heirs, and successors, pardon, remit, and discharge all crimes of high treason, misprision of treason, and all other crimes and offences whatsoever, done or committed against Us or Our royal father of blessed memory, by any of Our subjects of what degree or quality soever who shall, at or after Our landing, and before they engage in any action against Us or Our forces, from that time lay hold on mercy and return to that duty and allegiance which they owe to Us, their only rightful and lawful sovereign.

By the joint endeavours of Us and Our parliament, urged by these motives and directed by these views, we may hope to see the peace and flourishing estate of this kingdom in a short time restored. And We shall be equally forward to concert with our parliament such further measures as may be thought necessary for leaving the same to future generations.

And We hereby require all sheriffs of shires, stewarts of stewardries, or their deputies, and magistrates of burghs to publish this Our declaration immediately after it shall come to their hands in the usual places and manner, under the pain of being proceeded against for failure thereof, and forfeiting the benefit of Our general pardon.

Katharine A. Esdaile, ed. *Walpole and Chatham (1714–1760)* (1912):9–13.