

# BIRTH OF A PRINCESS

Sarah Churchill (1660–1744), Duchess of Marlborough (1702–1744)

to John Dalrymple (1673–1747), Earl of Stair (1707–1747)

Wimbledon, 17 August 1737

...There has been a very extraordinary quarrel at court, which, I believe, nobody will give you so exact an account of as myself. The 31<sup>st</sup> of last month the Princess<sup>1</sup> fell in labor. The King<sup>2</sup> and Queen<sup>3</sup> both knew that she was to lie in at Saint James', where everything was prepared. It was her first child, and so little a way to London that she thought it less hazard to go immediately away from Hampton Court to London, where she had all the assistance that could be, and everything prepared, than to stay at Hampton Court, where she had nothing, and might be forced to make use of a country midwife. There was not a minute's time to be lost in debating this matter, nor in ceremonials; the Princess begging earnestly of the Prince to carry her to Saint James', in such a hurry that gentlemen went behind the coach like footmen.

They got to Saint James' safe, and she was brought to bed in one hour after. Her Majesty followed them as soon as she could, but did not come till it was all over. However, she expressed a great deal of anger to the Prince for having carried her away, though she and the child<sup>4</sup> were very well. I should have thought it had been most natural for a grand-mother to have said she had been mightily frightened, but was glad it was so well over. The Prince said all the respectful and dutiful things imaginable to her and the King, desiring Her Majesty to support the reasons which made him to away as he did without acquainting His Majesty with it. And, I believe, all human creatures will allow that this was natural for a man not to debate a thing of this kind, nor to lose a minute's time in ceremony, which was very useless, considering that it is a great while since the King has spoke to him, or taken the least notice of him. The Prince told Her Majesty he intended to go that morning to pay his duty to the King, but she advised him not.

This was Monday morning, and she said Wednesday was time enough; and, indeed, in that I think Her Majesty was in the right. The Prince submitted to her counsel, and only wrote a very submissive and respectful letter to His Majesty, giving his reasons for what he had done. And this conversation ended, that he hoped His Majesty would do him the honor to be god-father to his daughter, and that he would be pleased to name who the god-mothers should be; and that he left all the directions of the christening entirely to His Majesty's pleasure. The Queen answered that it would be thought the asking the King to be god-father was too great a liberty, and advised him not to do it.

When the Prince led the Queen to her coach, which she would not have had him done, there was a great concourse of people; and, notwithstanding all that had passed before, she expressed so much kindness that she hugged and kissed him with great passion. The King, after this, sent a message in writing by my Lord Essex<sup>5</sup> in the following words: That His Majesty looked upon what the Prince had done in carrying the Princess to London in such a manner as a deliberate indignity offered to himself and to the Queen, and resented it in the highest degree, and forbade him the Court.

I must own I cleared Sir Robert<sup>6</sup> in my own mind of this counsel, thinking he was not in town; but it has proved otherwise, for he was in town; and the message is drawn up in such a manner that nobody doubts of its being done by Sir Robert. All the sychophants and agents of the court spread millions of falsities upon this

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<sup>1</sup> Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha (1719–1772), wife of Frederick (1707–1751), Prince of Wales

<sup>2</sup> George II (1683–1760), King of Great Britain and Ireland (1727–1760)

<sup>3</sup> Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach (1683–1737), Queen-Consort of Great Britain and Ireland (1727–1737)

<sup>4</sup> Princess Augusta (1737–1813), first-born child of the Prince of Wales

<sup>5</sup> William Capell (1697–1743), Earl of Essex (1710–1743)

<sup>6</sup> Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), Prime Minister (1721–1742)

occasion; and all the language there was that this was so great a crime that even those that went with the Prince ought to be prosecuted.

How this will end nobody yet knows; at least I am sure I don't; but I know there was a council today held at Hampton Court. I have not heard yet of any christening being directed, but for that I am in no manner of pain; for, if it be never christened, I think 'tis in a better state than a great many devout people that I know.

Some talk as if they designed to take the child away from the Princess, to be under the care of Her Majesty, who professes vast kindness to the Princess; and all the anger is at the Prince. Among common subjects I think the law is that nobody that has any interest in an estate is to have anything to do with the person who is heir to it.

What prejudice this sucking child can do to the Crown I don't see; but, to be sure, Her Majesty will be very careful of it. What I apprehend most is that the Crown will be lost long before this little Princess can possibly enjoy it; and, if what I have heard today be true, I think the scheme of France is going to open; for I was told there was an ambassador to come from France whose goods had been landed in England, and that they have been sent back. But I won't answer for the truth of that, as I will upon everything else in this letter.

*The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford* (1842: Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard), I:113–114.