

LETTER

Horace Walpole (1717–1797), author

to Sir Horace Mann (c. 1701–1786), British Resident at Florence

London, 17 January 1742 [*New Style*]

I must answer for your brother a paragraph that he showed me in one of your letters: “Mr. W.’s letters are full of wit; don’t they adore him in England?” Not at all—and I don’t wonder at them; for if I have any wit in my letters, which I do not at all take for granted, it is ten to one that I have none out of my letters. A thousand people can write that cannot talk; and besides, you know (or I conclude so, from the little one hears stirring), that numbers of the English have wit who don’t care to produce it. Then, as to adoring; you now see only my letters, and you may be sure I take care not to write you word of any of my bad qualities, which other people must see in the gross, and that may be a great hindrance to their adoration. Oh, there are a thousand other reasons I could give you why I am not the least in fashion. I came over in an ill season; it is a million to one that nobody thinks a declining old minister’s¹ son has wit. At any time, men in opposition have always most; but now, it would be absurd for a courtier to have even common sense. There is not a Mr. Stuart, or a Mr. Stewart, whose names begin but with the first letters of Stanhope² that has not a better chance than I for being liked.

I can assure you, even those of the same party would be fools not to pretend to think me one. Sir Robert has showed no partiality for me; and do you think they would commend where he does not? Even supposing they had no envy, which, by the way, I am far from saying they have not. Then, my dear child, I am the coolest man of my party, and if I am ever warm, it is by contagion; and where violence passes for parts, what will indifference be called? But how could you think of such a question? I don’t want money, consequently no old women pay me or my wit; I have a very flimsy constitution, consequently the young women won’t taste my wit, and it is a long while before wit makes its own way in the world; especially, as I never prove it by assuring people that I have it by me. Indeed, if I were disposed to brag, I could quote two or three half-pay officers, and an old aunt or two, who laugh prodigiously at everything I say; but till they are allowed judges, I will not brag of such authorities.

If you have a mind to know who is *adored* and has *wit*, there is old Churchill³ has as much God-d—n-ye wit as ever—except that he has lost two teeth. There are half a dozen Scotchmen who vote against the Court, and are cried up by the Opposition for wit to keep them steady. They are forced to cry up their parts, for it would be too bare-faced to commend their honesty. Then Mr. Nugent⁴ has had a great deal of wit till within this week; but he is so busy and so witty that even his own party grow tired of him. His plump wife, who talks of nothing else, says he entertained her all the way on the road with repeating his speeches.

I did not go into the country last week, as I intended, the weather was so bad; but I shall go on Sunday for three or four days, and perhaps shall not be able to write to you that week.

You are in an agitation, I suppose, about politics: both sides are trafficking deeply for votes during the holidays. It is allowed, I think, that we shall have a majority of twenty-six: Sir R. says more; but now, upon a pinch, he brags like any bridegroom.

The Westminster election passed without any disturbance in favor of Lord Perceive-all⁵ and Mr. Perceive-nothing,⁶ as my uncle calls them. Lord Chesterfield was vaunting to Lord Lovel¹ that they should have carried it

¹ Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), Prime Minister (1721–1742), father of the author

² Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694–1773), Earl of Chesterfield

³ Lieutenant-General Charles Churchill (c. 1679–1745)

⁴ Robert Nugent (1702–1788), Tory M.P. for Saint Mawes (1742–1754)

⁵ John Perceval (1711–1770), Viscount Perceval, Tory M.P. for Westminster (1742–1747)

⁶ Charles Edwin (c. 1699–1756), Tory M.P. for Westminster (1742–1747)

if they had set up two broomsticks. “So I see,” replied Lovel. But it seems we have not done with it yet: if we get the majority, this will be declared a void election too, for my Lord Chancellor² has found out that the person who made the return had no right to make it; it was the High Bailiff’s clerk, the High Bailiff himself being in custody of the serjeant-at-arms. It makes a great noise, and they talk of making subscriptions for a petition.

Lord Stafford³ is come over. He told me some good stories of the Primate.⁴

Last night I had a good deal of company to hear Monticelli⁵ and Amorevoli,⁶ particularly the three beauty-Fitzroys—Lady Euston,⁷ Lady Conway,⁸ and Lady Caroline.⁹ Sir R. liked the singers extremely; he had not heard them before. I forgot to tell you all our beauties: there was Miss Hervey,¹⁰ my lord’s daughter, a fine, black girl, but as masculine as her father should be; and Jenny Conway,¹¹ handsomer still, though changed with illness, than even the Fitzroys.

I made the music for my Lord Hervey,¹² who is too ill to go to operas, yet, with a coffin-face, is as full of his little dirty politics as ever. He *will not* be well enough to go to the House till the majority is certain somewhere, but lives shut up with my Lord Chesterfield and Mr. Pultney—a triumvirate who hate one another more than anybody they could proscribe, had they the power. I dropped in at my Lord Hervey’s the other night, knowing my lady had company; it was soon after our defeats. My lord, who has always professed particularly to me, turned his back on me and retired for an hour into a whisper with young Hammond¹³ at the end of the room. Not being at all amazed at one whose heart I knew so well, I stayed on to see more of this behavior; indeed, to use myself to it. At last he came up to me and begged this music, which I gave him, and would often again, to see how many times I shall be ill and well with him within this month.

Yesterday came news that his brother, Captain William Hervey, has taken a Caracas ship, worth full two hundred thousand pounds. He was afterwards separated from it by a storm, for two or three days, and was afraid of losing it, having but five-and-twenty men to thirty-six Spaniards; but he has brought it home safe.

I forgot to tell you that upon losing the first question, Lord Hervey kept away for a week; on our carrying the next great one, he wrote to Sir Robert how much he desired to see him, “not upon any business, but Lord Hervey longs to see Sir Robert Walpole.”

Lady Sundon¹⁴ is dead, and Lady M— disappointed: she, who is full as politic as my Lord Hervey, had made herself an absolute servant to Lady Sundon, but I don’t hear that she has left her even her old clothes. Lord Sundon is in great grief. I am surprised, for she has had fits of madness every since her ambition met such a check by the death of the Queen.¹⁵ She had great power with her, though the Queen pretended to despise her, but had unluckily told her or fallen into her power by some secret. I was saying to Lady Pomfret, “To be sure she is dead very rich!” She replied, with some warmth, “She never took money.” When I came home, I mentioned this to Sir R. “No,” said he, “but she took jewels; Lord Pomfret’s¹⁶ place of Master of the Horse to the

¹ Thomas Coke (1697–1759), Baron Lovel

² Philip Yorke (1690–1764), Baron Hardwicke, Lord Chancellor (1737–1756)

³ William Matthias Howard (1718–1751), Earl of Stafford

⁴ Bishop of Lorraine

⁵ Angelo Maria Monticelli (1710–1764), Italian opera singer who performed in London, 1741–1746.

⁶ Angelo Amorevoli (1716–1798), Italian opera singer resident in London, 1741–1742.

⁷ Lady Dorothy Boyle (1724–1742), Countess Euston; daughter-in-law of George FitzRoy, Duke of Grafton

⁸ Isabella FitzRoy (1726–1782), Baroness Conway; daughter of George FitzRoy, Duke of Grafton

⁹ Caroline FitzRoy (1722–1784); daughter of George FitzRoy, Duke of Grafton

¹⁰ Mary Lepell Hervey (1723–1780); daughter of John, Lord Hervey

¹¹ Jane Conway (–1749); daughter of Francis Seymour-Conway, Baron Conway

¹² John Hervey (1696–1743), Lord Hervey, heir-apparent to the Earl of Bristol

¹³ William Hammond (1710–1742), M.P. for Truro (1741–1742)

¹⁴ Charlotte Clayton, Baroness Sundon and Mistress of the Robes to Queen Caroline

¹⁵ Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach (1683–1737), Queen-Consort of Great Britain

¹⁶ Thomas Fermor (1698–1753), Earl of Pomfret

Queen was bought of her for a pair of diamond earrings, of fourteen hundred pounds value.” One day that she wore them at a visit at old Marlborough’s, as soon as she was gone the Duchess said to Lady Mary Wortley,¹ “How can that woman have the impudence to go about in that bribe?” “Madam,” said Lady Mary, “how would you have people know where wine is to be sold unless there is a sign hung out?” Sir R. told me that in the enthusiasm of her vanity, Lady Sundon had proposed to him to unite with her, and govern the kingdom together: he bowed, begged her patronage, but said he thought nobody fit to govern the Kingdom but the King and Queen.

Another day. Friday morning.

I was forced to leave off last night, as I found it would be impossible to send away this letter finished in any time. It will be enormously long, but I have prepared you for it. When I consider the beginning of my letter, it looks as if I were entirely of your opinion about the agreeableness of them. I believe you will never commend them again when you see how they increase upon your hands. I have seen letters of two or three sheets, written from merchants at Bengal and Canton to their wives, but then they contain the history of a twelvemonth; I grow voluminous from week to week. I can plead in excuse nothing but the true reason—you desired it, and I remember how I used to wish for such letters when I was in Italy. My Lady Pomfret carries this humanity still further, and because people were civil to her in Italy, she makes it a rule to visit all strangers in general.

She has been to visit a Spanish Count and his wife, though she cannot open her lips in their language. They fled from Spain, he and his brother having offended the Queen by their attachments to the Prince of Asturias;² his brother ventured back to bring off this woman, who was engaged to him. Lord Harrington has procured them a pension of six hundred a year. They live chiefly with Lord Carteret³ and his daughter, who speak Spanish.

But to proceed from where I left off last night, like the Princess Dinarzade in the Arabian Nights, for you will want to know what happened one day. Sir Robert was at dinner with Lady Sundon, who hated the Bishop of London⁴ as much as she loved the Church. “Well,” said she to Sir R., “how does your Pope do?” “Madam,” replied he, “he is my Pope, and shall be my Pope; everybody has some Pope or other; don’t you know that you are one? They call you Pope Joan.” She flew into a passion, and desired he would not fix any names on her; that they were not so easily got rid of.

We had a little ball the other night at Mrs. Boothby’s, and by dancing did not perceive an earthquake, which frightened all the un-dancing part of the town.

We had a civility from His Royal Highness,⁵ who sent for Monticelli the night he was engaged here, but, on hearing it, said he would send for him some other night. If I did not live so near Saint James’, I would find out some politics in this—should not one?

Sir William Stanhope⁶ has had a hint from the same Highness that his company is not quite agreeable. Whenever he met anybody at Carlton House whom he did not know, he said, “Your humble servant, Mr. or Mrs. Hamilton.”⁷

I have this morning sent aboard the SAINT QUINTIN a box for you, with your secretary—not in it.

¹ Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762)

² Fernando VI (1713–1759) was the son and heir of Felipe V by the latter’s first wife; the Queen here offended was Felipe’s second wife, who wanted her own son, Carlos, to inherit the Throne of Spain.

³ John Carteret (1690–1763), Baron Carteret, a rival of Robert Walpole

⁴ Edmund Gibson (1669–1748), Bishop of London (1720–1748) and Chancellor of the College of William and Mary (1729–1748)

⁵ Frederick (1707–1751), Prince of Wales

⁶ Sir William Stanhope (c. 1690–1756), Baron Harrington

⁷ Lady Jane Hamilton (–1771), mistress of Frederick, Prince of Wales, obtained positions at court for many of her relatives.

Old Weston¹ of Exeter is dead. Dr. Clarke, the Dean,² Dr. Willes, the decipherer,³ and Dr. Gilbert of Llandaff⁴ are candidates to succeed him. Sir R. is for Willes, who, he says, knows so many secrets that he might insist upon being Archbishop.

My dear Mr. Chute! How concerned I am that he took all that trouble to no purpose. I will not write to him this post, for as you show him my letters, this here will sufficiently employ anyone's patience—but I have done. I long to hear that the Dominichin is safe. Good night!

The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford (1842: Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard), I:207–212.

¹ Stephen Weston (1665–1742), Bishop of Exeter was succeeded by Nicholas Clagget, Bishop of Saint David's

² Alured Clarke (1696–1742), Dean of Exeter

³ Edward Willes (1693–1773), Dean of Lincoln and Decipherer to the King, and later Bishop of Saint David's (1743–1744) and Bishop of Bath (1744–1773)

⁴ John Gilbert (1693–1761), Bishop of Llandaff (1740–1748) and later Bishop of Salisbury (1748–1757) and Archbishop of York (1757–1761)