

LETTER

Horace Walpole (1717–1797), author

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

Arlington Street, 29 March 1745

I begged your brother to tell you what it was impossible for me to tell you.¹ You share nearly in our common loss! Don't expect me to enter at all upon the subject. After the melancholy two months that I have passed, and in my situation, you will not wonder I shun a conversation which could not be bounded by a letter—a letter that would grow into a panegyric, or a piece of moral; improper for me to write upon, and too distressful for us both! A death is only to be felt, never to be talked over by those it touches!

I had yesterday your letter of three sheets: I began to flatter myself that the storm was blown over, but I tremble to think of the danger you are in! A danger in which even the protection of the great friend you have lost could have been of no service to you. How ridiculous it seems for me to renew protestations of my friendship for you at an instant when my father is just dead, and the Spaniards just bursting into Tuscany! How empty a charm would my name have when all my interest and significance are buried in my father's grave! All hopes of present peace, the only thing that could save you, seem vanished. We expect every day to hear of the French declaration of war against Holland. The new Elector of Bavaria² is French, like his father; and the King of Spain³ is not dead. I don't know how to talk to you. I have not even a belief that the Spaniards will spare Tuscany. My dear child what will become of your? Whither will you retire till a peace restores you to your ministry? For upon that distant view alone I repose!

We are every day nearer confusion. The King is in as bad humor as a monarch can be; he wants to go abroad, and is destined by the Mediterranean affair, the inquiry into which was moved by a Major Selwyn,⁴ a dirty pensioner, half-turned patriot, by the Court being overstocked with votes. This inquiry takes up the whole time of the House of Commons, but I don't see what conclusion it can have. My confinement has kept me from being there, except the first day; and all I know of what is yet come out is, as it was stated by a Scotch member the other day, "that there had been one (Matthews) with a bad head, another (Lestock) with a worse heart, and four (the captains of the inactive ships) with no heart at all." Among the numerous visits of form that I have received, one was from my Lord Sandys;⁵ as we two could only converse upon general topics, we fell upon this of the Mediterranean, and I made him allow "that, to be sure, there is not so bad a court of justice in the world as the House of Commons; and how hard it is upon any man to have his cause tried there!"

Sir Everard Falkner⁶ is made secretary to the Duke,⁷ who is not yet gone: I have got Mr. Conway to be one of his aide-de-camps. Sir Everard has since been offered the joint post-mastership vacant by Sir John Eyles' death; but he would not quit the Duke. It was then proposed to the King to give it to the brother; it happened to be a cloudy day, and he only answered, "I know who Sir Everard is, but I don't know who Mr. Falkner is."

The world expects some change when the Parliament rises. My Lord Granville's physicians have ordered him to go to the Spa, as you know, they often send ladies to the Bath who are very ill of a want of diversion. It will scarce be possible for the present ministry to endure this jaunt. Then they are losing many of their new allies:

¹ The death of Robert Walpole (1676–1745), Earl of Orford, Prime Minister (1721–1742)

² Maximilian III Joseph (1727–1777) had just succeeded as Elector of Bavaria, which country was an ally of France and Prussia against England and Austria in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748).

³ Philip V (1683–1746), King of Spain

⁴ John Selwyn (1688–1751)

⁵ Samuel Sandys (1695–1770), Baron Sandys of Ombersley

⁶ Sir Everard Falkner (1694–1758), British Ambassador at Constantinople (1737–1744)

⁷ Prince William (1721–1765), Duke of Cumberland

the new Duke of Beaufort,¹ a most determined and unwavering Jacobite, has openly set himself at the head of that party and forced them to vote against the Court, and to renounce my Lord Gower.² My wise cousin, Sir John Phillipps, has resigned his place; and it is believed that Sir John Cotton will soon resign; but the Bedford, Pitt, Lyttelton, and that squadron, stick close to their places. Pitt has lately resigned his bed-chamber to the Prince, which, in friendship to Lyttelton, it was expected he would have done long ago. They have chosen for this resignation a very apposite passage out of Cato:

*He toss'd his arm aloft, and proudly told me
He would not stay, and perish like Sempronius.*

This was Williams'.

My Lord Coke's match is broken-off, upon some coquetry of the lady with Mr. MacKenzie at the Ridotto. My Lord Leicester says "there shall not be a third lady in Norfolk of the species of the two fortunes that matched at Rainham and Houghton." Pray, will the new Countess of Orford come to England?

The town flocks to a new play of Thomson's called *Tancred and Sigismunda*; it is very dull, I have read it. I cannot bear modern poetry; these refiners of the purity of the stage, and of the incorrectness of English verse, are most woefully insipid. I had rather have written the most absurd lines in Lee than *Leonidas* or the *Seasons*, as I had rather be put into the round-house for a wrong-headed quarrel than sup quietly at eight o'clock with my grand-mother. There is another of these tame geniuses, a Mr. Akenside,³ who writes odes. In one he has lately published, he says "Light the tapers, urge the fire." Had not you rather make gods jostle in the dark than light the candles for fear they should break their heads? One Russel, a mimic, has a puppet-show to ridicule operas; I hear, very dull, not to mention its being twenty years too late. It consists of three acts, with foolish Italian songs burlesqued in Italian.

There is a very good quarrel on foot between two duchesses; she of Queensberry⁴ sent to invite Lady Emily Lenox⁵ to a ball. Her Grace of Richmond,⁶ who is wonderfully cautious since Lady Caroline's⁷ elopement, sent word "she could not determine." The other sent again the same night; the same answer. The Queensberry then sent word that she had made up her company, and desired to be excused from having Lady Emily's; but at the bottom of the card wrote, "Too great a trust." You know how mad she is, and how capable of such a stroke. There is no declaration of war come out from the other duchess, but I believe it will be made a national quarrel of the whole illegitimate royal family.

It is the present fashion to make conundrums: there are books of them printed and produced at all assemblies; they are fully silly enough to be made a fashion. I will tell you the most renowned: "Why is my uncle Horace like two people conversing? Because he is both teller and auditor." This was Winnington's.

Well, I had almost forgot to tell you a most extraordinary impertinence of your Florentine Marquis Riccardi.⁸ About three weeks ago, I received a letter by Monsieur Wasner's footman from the Marquis. He tells me most cavalierly that he has sent me seventy-seven antique gems to sell for him, by the way of Paris, not caring it should be known in Florence. He will have them sold all together, and the lowest price two thousand pistoles. You know what no-acquaintance I had with him. I shall be as frank as he, and not receive them. If I did, they might be lost in sending back, and then I pay his two thousand *doppie di Spagna*. The refusing to receive them is positively all the notice I shall take of it.

¹ Charles Noel Somerset (1709–1756), Duke of Beaufort

² John Leveson-Gower (1694–1754), Baron Gower, a prominent Tory politician and Lord Privy Seal (1744–1754)

³ Mark Akenside (1721–1770)

⁴ Catherine Hyde Douglas (1701–1777), Duchess of Queensbury

⁵ Emily Lenox (1731–1814), daughter of the Duke of Richmond

⁶ Sarah Cardogan Lenox (1706–1751), Duchess of Richmond

⁷ In 1744, Caroline Lenox (1723–1774), eldest daughter of the Duke of Richmond, eloped with the Whig politician Henry Fox (1705–1774)

⁸ Vincenzo Maria Riccardi (1704–1752), Marquis Riccardi

I enclose what I think a fine piece on my father. It was written by Mr. Ashton, whom you have often heard me mention as a particular friend. You see how I try to make out a long letter, in return for your kind one, which yet gave me great pain by telling me of your fever. My dearest Sir, it is terrible to have illness added to your other distresses!

I will take the first opportunity to send Dr. Cocchi¹ his translated book; I have not yet seen it myself.

Adieu, my dearest child! I write with a house full of relations, and must conclude. Heaven preserve you and Tuscany.

The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford (1842: Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard), I:406–410.

¹ Antonio Cocchi (1695–1758), physician, Professor of Medicine and Philosophy, and antiquarian in Florence