

LETTER TO THE OLD PRETENDER

Charles Edward Stuart (1720–1788), the Young Pretender

to James Stuart (1688–1766), the Old Pretender

With the eruption of the War of the Austrian Succession, France and England found themselves again at war. Two years of detailed planning led to a carefully constructed plan for a dual landing—large French armies, commanded by Louis XIV's best generals, would simultaneously descend on Essex and Scotland. The British government learned of the plot, and began arresting conspirators throughout England. As a result, in February 1744 the French cancelled the invasion plans and began moving their assembled forces out of Dunkirk.

A group of Scottish Jacobites, however, convinced Charles Stuart that he could re-conquer Britain without an army, and so pressed forward with his plans. On 23 July 1745 he landed in the Outer Hebrides. The British government heard many conflicting rumors, but received no sure intelligence until mid-August, when it learned Charles had raised his standard and already had several thousand Highlanders under arms.

With most of its army on the Continent, Britain had few soldiers available to meet the threat, and Charles advanced south through the Scottish highlands largely unopposed. Charles wrote this report back to his father just before entering Edinburgh unopposed on 15 September 1745.

Perth (Scotland), 10 September 1745

Since my landing, everything has succeeded to my wishes. It has pleased God to prosper me hitherto even beyond my expectations. I have got together 1300 men, and am promised more brave, determined men who are resolved to die or conquer with me.

The enemy marched a body of regular troops to attack me, but when they came near they changed their mind and, by taking a different route and making forced marches, have escaped to the north, to the great disappointment of my Highlanders. But I am not at all sorry for it. I shall have the greater glory in beating them when they are more numerous and supported by their dragoons.

I have occasion every day to reflect on Your Majesty's last words to me—that I should find power, if tempered with justice and clemency, an easy thing to myself and not grievous to those under me. 'Tis owing to the observance of this rule, and to my conformity to the customs of these people, that I have got their hearts to a degree not to be easily conceived by those who do not see it. One who observes the discipline I have established would take my little army to be a body of picked veterans, and to see the love and harmony that reigns amongst us he would be apt to look upon it as a large, well-ordered family in which everyone loves another better than himself.

I keep my health better in these wild mountains than I used to do in the Campagnie Felice, and sleep sounder lying on the ground than I used to do in the palaces at Rome.

There is one thing, and but one, in which I had any difference with my faithful Highlanders. It was about the price upon my kinsman's head which, knowing Your Majesty's generous humanity, I am sure will shock you as it did me when I was shown the proclamation setting a price upon my head.¹ I smiled and treated it with the disdain I thought it deserved, upon which they flew into a violent rage and insisted upon my doing the same by him. As this flowed solely from the poor men's love and concern for me, I did not know how to be angry with them for it, and tried to bring them to temper by representing that it was a mean, barbarous principle among princes, and must dishonour them in the eyes of all men of honour; that I did not see how my cousin's having

¹ On 3 August, the London government put a bounty of £30,000 on the Young Pretender, who on 20 August responded by placing an equal bounty on George II.

set me the example would justify me in imitating that which I blame so much in him. But nothing I could say would pacify them. Some went even so far as to say, "Shall we venture our lives for a man who seems so indifferent of his own." Thus have I been drawn in to do a thing for which I condemn myself.

Your Majesty knows that in my nature I am neither cruel nor revengeful, and God, Who knows my heart, knows that if the Prince who has forced me to this (for it is he that has forced me) was in my power, the greatest pleasure I could feel would be treating him as the Black Prince treated his prisoner, the King of France, to make him ashamed of having shown himself so inhuman an enemy to a man for attempting a thing whom he himself (if he had any spirit) would despise for not attempting.¹

I beg Your Majesty would be under no uneasiness about me. He is safe who is in God's protection. If I die, it shall be as I lived, with honour; and the pleasure I take in thinking I have a brother in all respects more worthy than myself to support your just cause and rescue my injured country from the oppression under which it groans (if it will suffer itself to be rescued) makes life more indifferent to me.

As I know and admire the fortitude with which Your Majesty has supported your misfortunes, and the generous disdain with which you have rejected all offers of forcing assistance on terms which you thought dishonourable to yourself and injurious to your country; if bold but interested friends should at this time take advantage of the tender affection with which they know you love me, I hope you will reject their proposals with the same magnanimity you have hitherto shown, and leave me to shift for myself, as Edward III left his brave son when he was in danger of being oppressed by numbers in the field.²

No, sir, let it never be said that to save your son you injured your country. When your enemies bring in foreign troops and you reject all foreign assistance on dis-honourable terms, your deluded subjects of England must see who is the true father of his people. For my own part, I declare once for all that while I breathe I will never consent to alienate one foot of land that belongs to the Crown of England, or set my hand to any treaty inconsistent with its sovereignty and independency.

If the English will have my life, let them take it if they can. But no unkindness on their part shall ever force me to a thing that may justify them in taking it. I may be overcome by my enemies, but I will not dishonour myself. If I die, it shall be with my sword in hand fighting for the liberty of those who fight against me.

I know there will be fulsome addresses from the different corporations of England; but I hope they will impose upon none but the lower and more ignorant people. They will no doubt endeavour to revive all the errors and excesses of my grandfather's unhappy reign, and impute them to Your Majesty and me, who had no hand in them, and suffered most by them. Can anything be more unreasonable than to suppose that Your Majesty, who is so sensible of and has so often considered the fatal errors of your father, would with your eyes open go and repeat them again?

Notwithstanding the repeated assurance Your Majesty has given in your declaration that you will not invade any man's property, they endeavour to persuade the unthinking people that one of the first things they are to expect will be to see the public credit destroyed, as if it would be your interest to render yourself contemptible in the eyes of all the nations of Europe and all the kingdoms you hope to reign over, poor at home and insignificant abroad.

They no doubt try to frighten the present possessors of Church and abbey lands with vain terrors, as if Your Majesty's intention was to resume them all, not considering that you have lived too long in a Catholic country and read the history of England too carefully not to have observed the many melancholy monuments to be seen there of the folly of those pious princes who, thinking to honour religion, have lessened it by keeping

¹ Edward (1330–1376), Prince of Wales, captured King John II of France at the Battle of Poitiers (1356)

² Hard-pressed at one point during the Battle of Crècy (1346), the Black Prince asked for reinforcements. Edward III replied, "I am confident he will repel the enemy without my help" and refused to aid his son.

superstitious rites in the Church, whereby they have insensibly raised up a power which has too often proved an overmatch for their successors.

I find it a great loss that the brave Lord Marischal¹ is not with me. His character is very high in this country, and it must be so wherever he is known. I had rather see him than 1000 French, who, if they should come only as friends to assist Your Majesty in the recovery of your just rights, the weak people would believe came as invaders.

There is one man in this country whom I could wish to have my friend, and that is the Duke of Argyll,² who I find is in great credit amongst them on account of his great abilities and quality, and has many dependents by his large fortune; but I am told I can hardly flatter myself by the hopes of it. The hard usage which his family has received from ours has sunk deep into his mind. What have these princes to answer for who by their cruelties have raised enemies not only to themselves but to their innocent children?

I must not close this letter without doing justice to Your Majesty's Protestant subjects, who I find are as zealous in your cause as the Roman Catholics, which is what Dr. Wagstaff has often told me I should find when I came to try them. I design to march tomorrow, and hope my next shall be from Edinburgh.

Henry Paton, *The Lyon in Mourning* (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1895), II:58–62.

¹ George Keith (1693–1778), Earl Marischal of Scotland had fled Scotland after the failed 1715 rising, and did not return with Charles in 1745.

² Archibald Campbell (1682–1761), Duke of Argyll