

EXECUTION OF THE REBEL LORDS

R. Graham to Mr. Grimston

20 August 1746

As you and Mrs. Grimston attended the Lords' trial, I thought it would not be disagreeable to you to have an account of their exit or the last act of their tragedy, especially as I saw part of it, and heard the rest from one who was on the scaffold. The sheriffs came there between 9 and 10 to see if everything was prepared. The scaffold was nine feet above ground, with a rail and black bays hanging from it. On the floor (which was covered with sawdust) was fixed the block, 2 feet, 2 inches high and 3 inches broad. Near it lay red bags to receive the heads, and two white sheets to wrap the bodies in, and on each side were the coffins with coronets and inscriptions, and on the ground two hearses. The executioner was in blue with gold buttons and a red waistcoat (the cloths of Fletcher executed by him); the ax that of a carpenter.

At 11 the Lords came: Kilmarnock¹ attended by Foster and a young clergyman. Balmerino² was dressed in blue turned up with red (his uniform). Going into the house prepared for them, a spectator asked which was Balmerino. To which he replied, "I am he, at your service." Then turning to Kilmarnock, he told him he was sorry he was not the only sacrifice, and asked the sheriffs if they were ready, for he longed to be at home, and said he was ashamed for some of his friends, who shed tears when Lord Kilmarnock came on the scaffold. The bays was turned up that all might see, and the executioner put on a white waistcoat. My Lord had a long discourse with Foster, who pressed him to own there what he had told him privately—a detestation of the fact for which he suffered; which he did and which Foster has advertised.

The executioner was a great while fitting him for the block, my Lord rising several times; and when down on his knees, it was six minutes before he gave the sign, when his head was nearly severed from his body by one blow; a slight cut finished the execution, and the body fell on its back....

The scaffold being cleared, and the executioner having put on a clean shirt, Lord Balmerino mounted the stage and immediately walked to his coffin and read the inscription, and then called up a warder and gave him his tie wig, and put on a Scotch plaid cap, and then read a paper denying the Pretender's orders for no quarter, commending him very much. But being interrupted, he desired (briskly) to go on, and said he should lay down his head with pleasure on that block (pointing to it) and desiring those between him and it to remove. He reflected very much upon General Williamson,³ but said he had received the Sacrament that morning and was told it was not proper for a person of his condition to say more of him, but referred for his character to Psalm 109, from verse 5 to 15.⁴ He said the Pretender gave him leave to enter our service, but soon as he could be of service to him, he left us. He talked to the executioner, took the ax in his hand and tried the block, and told and showed him where to strike (near his head), and gave him three guineas (all he had); kneeled down and presently gave the sign. The first blow did not strike his head off, so that the assistants were forced to lift up his body to receive a second, but the third finished him.

I own I was a great deal more moved when I called on my friend Mr. Gill in the afternoon, and found him in great pain and given over by his doctor than I was with what I saw in the morning.

¹ William Boyd (1704–1746), Earl of Kilmarnock

² Arthur Elphinstone (1688–1746), Lord Balmerino

³ Lieutenant-General Adam Williamson (1676–1747), Deputy-Lieutenant of the Tower of London (1722–1747)

⁴ And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath, and let the strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him; neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 109:5–15, KJV)

The Guards attending were 1.000, and I am sure the spectators were 100 to 1 of the Guards.

A. Hayward, ed. *Diaries of a Lady of Quality from 1797 to 1844*, Second Edition (London: Longmans, 1864):142–144.