

LETTER

Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641), Earl of Strafford
to William Wentworth (1626–1695), his son

In 1614, Thomas Wentworth entered Parliament as a Member for Yorkshire (1614–1624, 1625–1629) and the following year received appointment as Custos Rotulorum for Yorkshire (1615–1626). He disapproved of Charles I's foreign policy and forced loans, for which opposition Charles' chief minister imprisoned Wentworth in 1627. Soon released from prison, Wentworth began supporting the King after the latter accepted the 1628 Petition of Right, which limited royal power.

Wentworth saw the monarchy as integral to the English constitution, explaining "the authority of a king is the keystone which closes up the arch of order and government," and believed Englishmen owed loyalty to a monarch who respected the rule of law, even when they disagreed with particular policies. Over time, Wentworth proved his devotion to the King, who eventually appointed Wentworth a privy counsellor (1629) and Lord Deputy of Ireland (1632–1639). In 1639 Charles recalled Wentworth, and in 1640 created him Earl of Strafford.

For several years, tensions had been mounting between the House of Commons and the King, and in November Parliament arrested Strafford and put him on trial for treason. In April 1641, the House of Lords voted to acquit Strafford. Two days later, on 13 April, the House of Commons brought in a Bill of Attainder against Strafford, declaring him guilty of treason without need for a trial. The King promised he would never sign the Bill into law, but Strafford wrote the King, urging the monarch to sign the death warrant, which Charles did on 10 May 1641.

The Tower of London, 11 May 1641

These are the last lines that you will receive from a father who tenderly loves you. I wish I had greater leisure to impart my mind to you; but, I trust, our merciful God will supply all things by His grace, and guide and protect you in all your ways. To His infinite goodness I bequeath you. Therefore, be not discouraged; serve Him and trust in Him, and He will preserve and prosper you.

Be sure you give all respect to my wife,¹ which will well become you, for she has ever had a great love for you. Never be wanting in your care to your sisters,² but let them ever be most dear to you; this is a duty that you owe to the memory of your excellent mother and myself. And the like regard you must have to your younger sister;³ for, indeed, you owe it to her also, both for her father's and her mother's sake.

Serve God diligently, morning and evening; recommend yourself to Him; and have Him before your eyes in all your ways. Be careful to take the counsel of those friends whom I have desired to advise you in your education. With patience hear their instructions, and diligently follow their counsel; for, till you have experience in the world, it will be far safer to trust to their judgments than to your own.

Lose not the time of your youth, but gather those seeds of virtue and of knowledge which may be of use to yourself, and to your friends, for the rest of your life. And that this may be the better effected, attend to it with patience, and be sure to refrain from anger. Suffer not sorrow to cast you down, but with cheerfulness and good courage, and in all sobriety and truth, go on in the race which you have to run.

Be sure, with a hallowed care, to have regard to all the commandments of God, and do not allow yourself to neglect them in the least respect, lest by degrees you come to forget them in the greatest, for the heart of man is

¹ Elizabeth Rhodes, Thomas Wentworth's third wife. His second wife, Arabella Holles (1594–1631), was the mother of William Wentworth.

² Anne Wentworth (1629–1696) and Arabella Wentworth (1631–), together with William, were children of Arabella Holles

³ Margaret Wentworth, daughter of Elizabeth Rhodes and Thomas Wentworth

deceitful above all things. Perform all your duties and devotions towards God rather joyfully than pensively, for He loves a cheerful giver.

5 As for your religion, let it be directed by those who are in God's Church the proper teachers of it, rather than by your own fancy or by men who are singular in their opinions and delight to go in ways of their own finding out. You will certainly find soberness and truth in the one, and much unsteadiness and vanity in the other.

10 The King, I trust, will deal graciously with you, and restore to you those honors and that fortune of which a distempered time has deprived you, together with the life of your father; which I rather advise may be a new gift and creation from himself than by any other means, in order that you may pay thanks to him without having obligation to any other.

15 Be sure you avoid, as much as you can, inquiring after those who have been sharp in their judgments towards me; and I charge you never to suffer a thought of revenge to enter your heart. But be careful to inform yourself who were my friends in this prosecution, and apply yourself to make them your friends also. On them you may rely, and bestow much of your conversation.

20 God Almighty of His infinite goodness bless you and your sisters, perfect you in every good work, and give you right understandings in all things!

You must not fail to behave yourself towards my lady Clare,⁴ your grandmother, with all duty and observance, for she loves you most tenderly; and she has been very kind to me. God reward her for it; and in this and all the rest, what I counsel you, the same I direct also to your sisters.

25 And once more I do, from my very soul, beseech our gracious God to bless and govern you, to save you in the day of His visitation, and to unite us again in the communion of His blessed saints, where there is fullness of joy and bliss forever.

The Young Man's Book of Classical Letters (Grigg and Elliot: Philadelphia, 1841):63–66.

⁴ Anne Stanhope Holles, Countess Clare, maternal grand-mother of William Wentworth