

DEATH OF CHARLES I

Nathaniel Crouch (c. 1640–1725)

Monday, 29 January 1649

His children were permitted to come to him, where passed this following discourse, as it was set down in writing by his daughter, the Lady Elizabeth (which Lady Elizabeth, some months after, being confined to Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight, died there with grief for the sufferings of her dear father).¹

His children being come to meet him, he first gave his blessing to the Lady Elizabeth, and bid her to remember to tell her brother James, whenever she should see him, that it was his father's last desire that he should no more look upon Charles as his eldest brother only, but be obedient unto him as his sovereign; and that they should love one another, and forgive their father's enemies. Then said the King to her, "Sweetheart, you'll forget this." "No," said she, "I shall never forget it whilst I live"; and pouring forth abundance of tears, promised to write down the particulars.

Then the King taking the Duke of Gloucester² upon his knee, said, "Sweetheart, now they will cut off thy father's head" (upon which words the child looking very steadfastly upon him), "mark, child, what I say: they will cut off my head, and perhaps make thee a King. But mark what I say, you must not be a King so long as your brothers, Charles and James, do live; for they will cut off your brothers' heads (when they can catch them), and cut off thy head too, at last. And therefore I charge you not be made a King by them." At which the child sighing, said, "I will be torn in pieces first." Which falling so unexpectedly from one so young, it made the King rejoice exceedingly.

Tuesday, 30 January 1649

He was about ten of the clock brought from his palace at Saint James' to Whitehall, marched on foot (guarded with a regiment of foot soldiers) through the Park, with their colors flying, and drums beating, his private guard of partisans about him, Dr. Juxon, Bishop of London,³ on one side, and Colonel Tomlinson⁴ on the other, both bare-headed, bidding them go faster, saying that he now went before them to strive for a heavenly crown with less solicitude than he had often times bid his soldiers to fight for an earthly diadem.

Being come to the end of the Park, he ascends the stairs leading to the long gallery in Whitehall, and so into the Cabinet Chamber, where he formerly used to lodge; there His Majesty, with the Bishop of London, continued for some time in devotion, and received the blessed sacrament from the hand of the said Bishop. At which time he read for the second lesson the 27th chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, which contained the history of the death and passion of our blessed Saviour.

The communion ended, His Majesty thanked the Bishop for selecting so seasonable and comfortable a portion of scripture. The Bishop modestly replied no thanks were due to him, for it was the chapter appointed by the rubric of the Church for the second morning lesson for that day, being 30 January. Here the King continued at his devotion, refusing to dine; only about twelve of the clock he ate a bit of bread and drank a glass of claret.

From thence, about one o'clock, he was accompanied by Dr. Juxon and Colonel Tomlinson and other officers formerly appointed to attend him, and the private guard of partisans, with musketeers on each side, through the Banqueting House, adjoining to which the scaffold was erected, between Whitehall Gate and the gate leading into the gallery from Saint James'. The scaffold was hung round with black, the floor covered with black baize,

¹ After her father's execution, Elizabeth (1635–1650) Parliament successively placed her in the charge of the Earl of Northumberland, Sir Edward Harrington, Robert Sidney, and Anthony Mildmay.

² Henry, Duke of Gloucester (1640–1660), youngest of Charles I's three sons. Parliament briefly considered establishing Henry on the throne as King, but rejected this in favor of the Commonwealth.

³ William Juxon (1582–1663), Bishop of London (1633–1649) and later Archbishop of Canterbury (1660–1663)

⁴ Matthew Tomlinson (1617–1681), one of Cromwell's cavalry commanders

and the ax and block laid in the middle of the scaffold. There were divers companies of foot of Colonel Pride's regiment, and several troops of horse placed on the one side of the scaffold toward King Street, and on the other side toward Charing Cross, and the multitudes of people that came to be spectators very great. The King being come upon the scaffold, it was expected he would say something to the people, which he did.

But because we have no other relation of what His Majesty then spoke, save what was taken in short-hand on the scaffold by three several gentlemen who were very exquisite in that art; nor had His Majesty any copy (being surprised and hastened by those who attended him to the scaffold), save only a few heads in a little scrap of paper, which after his death the soldiers took from the Bishop of London, to whom he gave it; therefore the reader must be content with this copy, which was by them upon joint comparing of the copies published, some few words being altered to make the sense perfect.

The King being come upon the scaffold and looking about him upon the people, who were kept off by the troops of horse so that they could not come near to him, omitted what he had purposed to have spoken to them (as 'tis thought) and turning himself to the soldiers and officers (the instruments of the regicide) spoke to them to this effect:

The King being come upon the scaffold, looked very earnestly upon the block, and asked Colonel Hacker¹ if there were no higher; and then spoke thus (directing his speech chiefly to Colonel Tomlinson):

I shall be very little heard of anybody here, I shall therefore speak a word unto you here. Indeed, I could hold my peace very well if I did not think that holding my peace would make some men think that I did submit to the guilt as well as to the punishment; but I think it is my duty to God first, and to my country, for to clear myself as an honest man, a good King, and a good Christian.

I shall begin first with my innocency; in troth, I think it is not very needful for me to insist long upon this, for all the world knows that I never did begin a war with the two Houses of Parliament, and I call God to witness, to Whom I must shortly make an account, that I never did intend to encroach upon their privileges, they began upon me; it is the militia they began upon—they confessed that the militia was mine, but they thought it fit to have it from me; and, to be short, if anybody will look to the dates of commissions of their commissions and mine, and likewise to the declarations, he will clearly see that they began these unhappy troubles, not I.

So that as to the guilt of these enormous crimes that are laid against me, I hope in God that God will clear me of it; I will not, I am in charity. God forbid that I should lay it upon the two Houses of Parliament, there is no necessity of either; I hope they are free of this guilt, for I do believe that ill instruments between them and me has been the chief cause of all this bloodshed; so that by way of speaking, as I find myself clear of this, I hope (and pray God) that they may too.

Yet for all this, God forbid that I should be so ill a Christian as not to say that God's judgments are just upon me. Many times He does pay justice by an unjust sentence—that is ordinary. I will only say this: that unjust sentence I suffered to take effect is punished now by an unjust sentence upon me. So far I have said to show you that I am an innocent man.

Now for to show you that I am a good Christian. I hope there is (pointing to Dr. Juxon) a good man that will bear me witness that I have forgiven all the world, and even those in particular that have been the chief causers of my death. Who they are, God knows; I do not desire to know, I pray God forgive them. But this is not all, my charity must go further; I wish that they may repent, for indeed they have committed a great sin in that particular; I pray God, with Saint Stephen, that this be not laid to their charge; nay, not only so, but that they may take the right way to the peace of the Kingdom. For my charity commands me to endeavor to the last gasp the peace of the Kingdom. So, Sir, I do wish

¹ Francis Hacker (–1660), one of Cromwell's commanders

with all my soul, and I do hope there is some here will carry it further, that they may endeavour the peace of the Kingdom.

Now, Sirs, I must show you both how you are out of the way, and will put you in the way. First, you are out of the way, for certainly all the way you ever have had yet, as I could find by anything, is in the way of conquest; certainly this is an ill way. For conquest, Sirs, in my opinion is never just except there be a good just cause, either for matter of wrong, or just title, and then if you go beyond it the first quarrel that you have to do is it that makes it unjust at the end that was just at first. But if it be only matter of conquest, then it is a great robbery; as a pirate said to Alexander that *he* was the great robber, he was but a petty robber.

And so, Sir, I do think that the way you are in, is much out of the way. Now, Sir, for to put you in your own way, believe it, you will never do right, nor God will never prosper you, until you give God His due, the King his due (that is, my successors), and the people their due. I am as much for them as any of you. You must give God His due by regulating rightly His church (according to His Scriptures), which is now out of order. For to set you in a way particularly now I cannot, but only this—a national synod freely called, freely debating among themselves, must settle this when that every opinion is freely and clearly heard.

For the King, indeed I will not—(then turning to a gentleman that touched the ax, said, “Hurt not the ax that may hurt me”)—for the King, the laws of the land will clearly instruct you for that; therefore, because it concerns my own particular, I only give you a touch of it.

For the people, and truly I desire their liberty and freedom as much as anybody whatsoever, but I must tell you that their liberty and freedom consists in having of government, those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own. It is not for having share in government, Sirs; that is nothing pertaining to them. A subject and a sovereign are clear different things, and therefore until they do that, I mean, that you do put the people in that liberty, as I say, certainly they will never enjoy themselves.

Sirs, it was for this that now I am come here. If I would have given way to an arbitrary way, for to have all laws changed according to the power of the sword, I needed not to have come here. And therefore I tell you (and I pray God it be not laid to your charge) that I am the martyr of the people.

In troth, Sirs, I shall not hold you much longer, for I will only say this to you, that in truth I could have desired some little time longer, because I would have put this that I have said in a little more order, and a little better digested than I have done. And therefore I hope you will excuse me.

I have delivered my conscience, I pray God that you do take those courses that are best for the good of the kingdom and your own salvations.

Dr. Juxon: “Will Your Majesty (though it may be very well known Your Majesty’s affections to religion, yet it may be expected that you should) say somewhat for the world’s satisfaction?”

King: “I thank you heartily, my lord, for that. I had almost forgotten it. In troth, Sirs, my conscience in religion, I think, is very well known to all the world, and therefore I declare before you all that I die a Christian according to the profession of the Church of England, as I found it left me by my father. And this honest man—(pointing to Dr. Juxon)—I think will witness it.”

Then turning to the officers, said, “Sirs, excuse me for this same; I have a good cause and I have a gracious God; I will say no more.”

Then turning to Colonel Hacker, he said, “Take care they do not put me to pain and, Sir, this and it please you.”

But then a gentleman coming near the ax, the King said, “Take heed of the ax, take heed of the ax.”

Then the King speaking to the executioner, said, “I shall say but very short prayers, and when I thrust out my hands—”

Then the King called to Dr. Juxon for his nightcap, and having put it on, he said to the executioner, “Does my hair trouble you?” Who desired him to put it all under his cap, which the King did accordingly, by the help of the executioner and the Bishop. Then the King turning to Dr. Juxon said, “I have a good cause, and a gracious God on my side.”

Dr. Juxon: “There is but one stage more; this stage is turbulent and troublesome, but it is a short one. But you may consider it will soon carry you a very great way. It will carry you from earth to Heaven, and there you shall find a great deal of cordial joy and comfort.”

King: “I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world.”

Dr. Juxon: “You are exchanged from a temporal to an eternal crown, a good exchange.”

The King then said to the executioner, “Is my hair well?” Then the King took off his cloak and his George,¹ giving his George to Dr. Juxon (it is thought for to give it to the Prince). Then the King put off his doublet and, being in his waistcoat, put his cloak on again; then looking upon the block, said to the executioner, “You must set it fast.”

Executioner: “It is fast, Sir.”

King: “When I put my hands out this way (stretching them out), then—”

After that, having said two or three words (as he stood) to himself, with hands and eyes lifted up, immediately stooping down, laid his neck upon the block. And then, the executioner again putting his hair under his cap, the King said (thinking he had been going to strike), “Stay for the sign.”

Executioner: “Yes, I will, and it please Your Majesty.”

And after a very little pause, the King stretching forth his hands, the executioner at one blow severed his head from his body. The head being off, the executioner held it up, and showed it to the people; which done, it was with the body put in a coffin covered with black velvet for that purpose, and conveyed into his lodgings there.

And from thence it was carried to his house at Saint James’, where his body was embalmed and put in a coffin of lead, laid there a fortnight to be seen by the people. And on the Wednesday seven-night after, his corpse embalmed and coffined in lead, was delivered chiefly to the care of four of his servants—viz., Mr. Herbert,² Captain Anthony Mildmay,³ his sewers, Captain Preston, and John Joyner, formerly cook to His Majesty. They attended with others clothed in mourning suits and cloaks, accompanied the hearse that night to Windsor, placed it in that which was formerly the King’s bed-chamber.

Next day it was removed into the Dean’s Hall, which room was hanged with black and made dark, lights burning round the hearse, in which it remained till three in the afternoon, about which time came the Duke of Lenox,⁴ the Marquess of Hertford,⁵ the Marquess of Dorchester,⁶ and the Earl of Lindsey,⁷ having obtained an order from the Parliament for the decent interment of the King, their royal master, provided the expence thereof exceeded not five hundred pounds.

¹ Cross of the Order of Saint George

² Sir Thomas Herbert (1606–1682), Gentleman of the Bedchamber (1647–1649)

³ Anthony Mildmay, Gentleman Usher and Carver to the King

⁴ James Stewart (1612–1655), Duke of Lennox and Duke of Richmond

⁵ William Seymour (1588–1660), Marquess of Hertford

⁶ Henry Pierrepont (1606–1680), Marquess of Dorchester

⁷ Montagu Bertie (1608–1666), Earl of Lindsey

At their coming into the Castle,¹ they showed their order of Parliament to Colonel Wichcot, Governor of the Castle, desiring the interment might be in Saint George's chapel, and by the form in the Common Prayer Book of the Church of England. This request was by the Governor denied, saying it was improbable that the Parliament should permit the use of what they had so solemnly abolished, and therein destroy their own Act. To which the lords replied there is a difference betwixt destroying their own Act and dispensing with it, and that no power so binds its own hands as to disable itself in some cases.

All could not prevail, the Governor persisting in the negative, the lords betook themselves to the search of a convenient place for the burial of the corpse; the which after some pains taken therein, they discovered a vault in the middle of the choir, wherein, as is probably conjectured, lies the body of King Henry VIII and his beloved wife, the Lady Jane Seymour, both in coffins of lead. In this vault there being room for one more, they resolve to inter the body of the King; the which was accordingly brought to the place, borne by the officers of the garrison, the four corners of the velvet pall borne up by the aforesaid four lords; the pious Bishop of London followed next, and other persons of quality. The body was committed to the earth with sighs and tears, especially of the reverend Bishop, to be denied to do the last duty and service to his dear and royal master; the velvet pall being cast into the vault, was laid over the body; upon the coffin was these words set

KING CHARLES, 1648.

Richard Burton, *The Wars in England and Scotland, and Ireland* (Westminster: Machell Stace, 1810):164–171.

¹ Windsor Castle