RAISING THE SIEGE OF VIENNA

John III Sobieski (1629–1696), King of Poland (1674–1696)
to Marie Casimire Louise de la Grange d’Arquien (1641–1716), his wife

13 September 1683

The Immortal God (to Whom honor and glory be ascribed forever) has blessed us with so signal a victory as scarce the memory of man can equal. The enemy was not only content to raise the siege of Vienna and leave us masters of the field, but also of all their cannon and tents, with inestimable treasure, and climbed over mountains of carcasses made by their own bodies in the flight.

My eyes were never blessed before with so delightful a prospect as to see my soldiers follow here a great drove of their sheep and oxen, and there a much greater herd of Turkish captives; nor my ears ever charmed with so pleasing music as the howlings and dying groans of these miserable wretches. So great was their haste that the Prime Vizier,¹ almost alone and forsaken of all, was forced without the ceremony of his turban to take his flight; but yet he left me heir to his tent and riches, which were shown me by a renegade of his own retinue.

I have presented the Turkish standard to His Holiness,² who was instrumental no less by his money than his prayers to their overthrow. The Prime Vizier's horse with all his trappings I reserved for myself. And though he was so fortunate in his flight to escape us, yet his Caymecam, or lieutenant-general, with some of the most considerable Pashas fell by our swords; But the approaching night put a stop to our pursuit, and their slaughter. Those Janissaries which were left behind in the mines and trenches, we thought not worth the dulling of our swords, therefore we made but one funeral pile for them all, and burnt them.

In the action there were about thirty thousand Turks killed, besides Tartars, and one hundred thousand tents taken. Our soldiers and the burghers of Vienna were two whole nights and one day in rifling their tents and bodies, and I believe a week would scarce suffice to finish it.

The rarities which were found in the Prime Vizier's tent were no less numerous than strange and surprising, as very curious parrots, and some Birds of Paradise, with all his banios and fountains, and some ostriches, which he chose rather to kill than let them fall alive into our hands. Nay, his despair and jealousy transported him so far as to destroy his very women for the same reason.

The whole army attributes the glory of this victory to God, and Us, and all the Princes of the Empire, with the great officers, as the Dukes of Bavaria³ and Lorraine,⁴ Prince Waldek,⁵ etc. were so far transported with my valor and success that their thanks and praises were more numerous than was their fears before, and Count Starhemberg,⁶ the Governor, saluted me with the title of his mighty deliverer. The common people in my going to and from the churches, paid their veneration even to my very garments, and made their cries and acclamations reach the sky, of “Long Live the King of Poland.”

In the battle We lost some of Our friends, as Prince Halicz⁷ and the Treasurer of Our Household.⁸ The Reverend Marco d’Aviano⁹ heaped on me his prayers and blessings, and told me he saw a white dove fluttering over the army, which he looked upon as an happy augur of our victory.

¹ Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa (1634–1683), commander of the Ottoman forces attacking Vienna and Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire
² Pope Innocent XI
³ Maximillian II (1662–1726), Prince-Elector of Bavaria
⁴ Charles V (1643–1690), Duke of Lorraine
⁵ Prince Georg Friedrich (1620–1692), Graf von Waldek, commander of the Bavarian forces
⁶ Ernst Rüdiger (1638–1701), Graf von Starhemberg, commander of the defending forces within Vienna
⁷ Stanislaw Potocki (1659–1683), Starost of Halicz and Kolomyja
⁸ Mądrowski, Treasurer of the Royal Household
⁹ Marco d’Aviano (1631–1699), Capuchin confessor of Emperor Leopold I
We are now on our march towards Hungary, taking the advantage of their distraction to defeat the remainder of their scattered troops, and surprise Grau or Nieuheisel. I have all the Princes of the Empire my companions in this enterprise, who tell me they are ready to follow such a leader not only into Hungary, but to the end of the world.

The Prime Vizier being unable to put a stop to our pursuit, told his eldest son, Mohammed Han, that he must now bid adieu to all his greatness and never expect to be in safety whilst there lies one stone upon another in the walls of Vienna, but withal bid him hasten to the Grand Seignior¹ and demand a speedy succor, to whom his son replied that he knew him too well for that and there was nothing for them now to rely on but their flight.

I am just now going to take horse, and all my way for two Hungarian miles together are so strewed with the carcasses of men, horses, and camels that the stench of them would be insupportable to any but a soldier.

I have sent several dispatches to foreign princes to give notice of this action, but the King of France² was forgotten.

I rejoice to see our son Alexander³ of so clear and undaunted a courage, who always stuck to me in my most imminent dangers, and made the first onset on a body of Turkish sipahi with that courage that he put them soon to flight and received the applauses of the whole army. He has contracted a very intimate friendship with the young Duke of Bavaria, with whom he equally divided the spoil. This prince has been very assiduous in his services to me; therefore I have presented him three of my horses, the Pasha of Egypt’s tent and standard, and ten pieces of cannon. To his sister, the dauphiness,⁴ a locket of diamonds. Yet there remains such heaps of their colors and scimitars in our possession as are not to be numbered.

All my countrymen marched with the same bravery to the relief of Vienna as the soldiers of Godfrey of Bouillon did to the Holy Land,⁵ and the miraculous Cross that you presented me with (which was his companion in that expedition) I believe contributed no less to our victory.

Thanks be to Heaven, now the half-moon triumphs no longer over the Cross, and it was thrown down from Saint Stephen’s steeple in Vienna (whom it had over topped so long) immediately on the defeat.

Neither have the Turks any occasion to upbraid us with their blasphemous Mohammedan proverb—You Christians, where is your God?

A Letter from the King of Poland to his Queen. in which is inserted many particulars relating to the Victories obtained against the Turks. with a Prayer of the Turks against the Christians (London: 1683).

¹ Mehmed IV (1642–1693), Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1648–1687)
² Louis XIV (1638–1715), King of France
³ Prince Alexander Benedict Sobieski (1677–1714)
⁴ Maria Anna Victoria (1660–1690). As wife of the Crown Prince of France, she had the title Dauphine.
⁵ Godfrey of Bouillon (1060–1100) commanded the Latin knights during the First Crusade