

Thomas Wentworth
Earl of Strafford
to

CR

His Last Letter
to King Charles
1641



Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford
1639 by Anthony van Dyck

May it please your Sacred Majesty,

It hath bin my greatest grieffe in all these troubles to be taken as a person which should endeavour to represent and set things amisse between your majesty and your people; and to give counsellis tending to the disquiet of the three kingdomes.

Most true it is, that this mine owne private condition considered, it hath beene a great madnesse, since through your gracious favour I was so provided, as not to expect in any kind to mend my fortune, or please my mind, more, then by resting where your bounteous hands had placed me.

Alay, it is most mightily mistaken, for unto your majesty it is well knowne, my poore and humble advises concluded still in this, that your majesty and your people could never bee happy, till there were a right understanding betwixt you and them; no

other means to effect and settle this happinesse, but by the councell, and assent of parliament; or to prevent the growing evils upon this state, but by entirely putting your selfe in the last resort, upon the loyalty and good affections of your English subjects.

Yet, such is my misfortune, this truth findeth little credit, the contrary seemeth generally to be believed, and my selfe reputed, as something of seperation between you and your people; under a heavier censure then which I am persuaded no gentleman can suffer.

Now, I understand the minds of men are more incensed against me, notwithstanding your majesty has declared, that in your princely opinion, I am not guilty of treason, nor are you satisfied in your conscience to passe the bill.

This bringeth me into a very great streight, there is before me the ruine of my

children and family hitherto untouched, in all the branches of it with any foule crimes. Here is before me the many illls, which may befall your sacred person, and the whole kingdome, should yourselfe and parliament part less satisfied one with the other, then is necessary for the preservation both of king and people. Here are before me the things most valued, most feared, by mortal man, life or death.

To say, Sir, that there hath not beene a strife in me, were to make me lesse man, then God knoweth my infirmities give me. And to call a destruction upon myselfe and young children (where the intentions of my heart, at least have beene innocent of this great offence), may be believed, will find no easie consent from flesh and bloud.

But with much sadnesse, I am come to a resolution, of that which I take to be most becoming in me, to looke upon that which is

most principall in itself; which doubtless is the prosperity of your sacred person and the common-wealth, infinitely before any private man's interest.

And therefore, in few words, as I put my selfe wholly upon the honour and justice of my peers, so clearly as to beseech your majesty might have spared that declaration of yours on Saturday last, and entirely to have left me to their lordships; so now to set your majesty's conscience at liberty, I doe most humbly beseech your majesty, in prevention of mistakes which may happen by your refusall to passe this bill; and by this meanes remove (praysed be God), I cannot say, this accursed (but I confesse) this unfortunate thing forth of the way, towards that blessed agreement, which God, I trust shall ever establish betweene you and your subjects.

Sir, my consent shall more acquit you herein to God, then all the world can doe

besides. To a willing man there is no injury done. And as by God's grace I forgive all the world with a calmnesse and meeknesse of infinite contentment to my dislodging soule, so, Sir, to you can I give the life of this world with all the cheerfulnesse imaginable; in the just acknowledgment of your exceeding favours. And only begge that in your goodnesse, you would vouchsafe to cast your gracious regard upon my poore sonne, and his thre sisters, lesse or more, and no otherwise, then as their (in present) unfortunate father, may hereafter appear more or lesse guilty of his death.

God long preserve your Majestye,
Your Majesties most faithfull and humble
Subject and Servant,

Strafford
Tower, 4th May, 1641

THE LETTER

Bernard Burke:

*Genealogical History of the Dormant, Abeyant, Forfeited,
and Extinct Peerages of the British Empire*,
London 1883 (Reprint Baltimore, Maryland, 1996), p. 576f.

THE PERSONS

Charles I. Stuart, King of England and Scotland:

Born in Dunfermline, November 19th, 1600.

Beheaded in London in front of Whitehall Palace,
January 30th, 1649.

Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford (1640):

Born in London, Chancery Lane, April 13th, 1593.

Beheaded in London on Tower Hill, May 12th, 1641.

Leading Minister to the Crown 1628–1641.

THE PAINTING

Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641, since 1632 in London):

Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford in Armour (1639).

Oil on Canvas. National Trust, Petworth House, Sussex,
England.

THE TYPE

Set in 17pt “Duc de Berry” and “Frutiger” type by T_EX.

August 21, 2000.