

Letter to James I Before his Trial (1603)

Sir Walter Raleigh

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 11600, ff. 22r–22v

22r

S[i]r Walter Rawleigh to his Ma[jes]tie before his tryall./

It is one part of the office of a iust & worthy prince to heare the complaints of his uassals, especially of such as are in greate misery I knowing it among many other pr[e]sumptions gathered against me your Ma[jes]tie hath beene perswaded that I was one of them who were greate and therefore the more likely to proue disloyall but the great god so releiue me in both worlds as I was the contrary & I tooke as great comforte to behould your Ma[jes]tie & alwayes learning some good & bettring my knowledge by hearing your Ma[jes]ties discourse. I doe therefore humbly beseech your souerayne Ma[jes]ties not to beleue any of those in perticular who under pretence of offences to the king doe easily worke there perticular revenges. I trust noe man vnder the color of making examples shall perswade your Ma[jes]tie to leaue the word mercifull out of your stile for it will noe lesse profitt your Ma[jes]tie and become your greatnes then the word inuincible it is true that the lawes of England are noe lesse ieaalous of the kinge then Cæsar was of Pompeia his wife for notw[i]thstanding that she was cleared of hauing accompanied w[i]th Clodias yet for being suspected he condemned her. for my selfe I protest before the euer liuing god, and I speake it to my M[aste]r & soueraigne that I neuer inuented treason concented to treason nor performed treason against him, and yet I know I shall fall *in manibus eorum a quibus*

non possu[m] euadere

22v

non possum euadere unlesse by your Ma[jes]ties great compassion I be susteyned o[u]r lawe therefore (most mercifull Prince) knowing her owne crueltie and knowing that she is wonte to compound treasons out of presumptions and circumstances, doth giue this charitable aduice to the king her superior: *non solum sapiens esse rex sed et misericors, vt cum sapientia misericordetur quam iudicij*: I doe therefore one the knees of my heart beseech your Ma[jes]tie to take counsell from your owne sweet & comfortable disposition and remember I haue serued your Ma[jes]tie 20 yeares for w[hi]ch your Ma[jes]tie hath giuen mee noe rewarde and it is more fitt I should be in debted vnto my soueraigne lord then the king vnto his poore vassall saue me therefore (most mercifull prince) that I may owe your Ma[jes]tie my life it selfe then w[hi]ch there cannot be a greater debte lend it me at least (soueraigne lord) that I may pay it for your seruice when your Ma[jes]tie shall please if the law destroy mee you Ma[jes]tie shall put me out of your power and I shall haue none to feare but the king of kings./

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Additional MS 40838, ff. 31v–32r
- British Library, Additional MS 4108, f. 114r
- British Library, Additional MS 44848, ff. 166r–166v

- British Library, Additional MS 69394, ff. 64r–v
- British Library, Additional MS 73087, ff. 24v–25v
- British Library, Egerton MS 3876, f. 215r
- British Library, Harley MS 1576, f. 209v
- British Library, Harley MS 1576, f. 212v
- British Library, Harley MS 39, ff. 353r–353v
- British Library, Harley MS 4761, ff. 18r–19r
- British Library, Harley MS 6242, ff. 88v–89r
- British Library, Sloane MS 3520, ff. 10v–12r
- Beinecke Library, Osborn fb243
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 781, f. 92
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 830, f. 113
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 217, ff. 5r–6r
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 82, ff. 240v–241v
- Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.5.23, pp436–437
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS G.b.9, ff. 136v–137v
- Gonville & Caius College, MS 73/40, f. 215r
- Hatfield House, CP 102, item 67
- Huntington Library, HM 36836, ff. 118–120
- Inner Temple Library, Petyt MS 538/36, ff. 78r–79v
- London Society of Antiquaries, MS 291, ff. 35r–36r
- Queen's College, MS 121, f. 500
- Queen's College, MS 130, ff. 139–140
- Queen's College, MS 32, ff. 16v–17r
- University College, MS 152 [on deposit at the Bodleian], ff. 43–45

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<https://mpese.ac.uk/t/RaleighLetterJames1603.html>