

Letter from Leith (1617)

[Anthony Weldon]

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 28640, ff. 142v–144v

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[*Left margin:* This was writte[n] here before this booke came to be filled before & after it.]

The Copie of parte of a most stinking letter full of fowle uncharitable censure malice & enuie sent from out of Scotland into England in the year 1617 when King Iames was there.

First for the Countrie I must confesse that it is too good for those that inhabite it, & too badde for others to be at the charge of conquering it. The aier might be wholesome but for the stinking people that inhabite it. The grounde might be made fruitfull had they witte to manure it. Their beastes be generallie small (women excepted, of which there are no greater in the worlde. There is good store of fowle; as fowle linnen, fowle houses, fowle dishes, fowle pottes, fowle trenchers & napkins, fowle sheetes & shirtes, with w[hi]ch sorte of fowle we haue beene enforced to fare as the children of Israel did with their fowle in the Wildernes. They haue good store of Fishe too, & good for those that can eate it rawe; but if it come once to their handes it is worse then three dayes ould. For their butter & their cheese I will not meddle with it at this time, nor any man I thinke at any time that loues his owne life. They haue also greate store of deere, but they are so farre from the places where I haue yet beene, as I rather believe it then will goe to disproue it. I confesse all the deere that I haue mette with, was deere lodging, deere horsemeate, deere Tobacco & deere English beere. As for Fruite, for their grandmother Euah her sake they never planted any; & for other trees, had Christ beene betrayed in this Country (which he should haue beene, if he had come as a stranger among them) Iudas had sooner founde the grace of repentance, then a tree to hang him withall selfe on. They haue many hilles wherein they say is much treasure, but they shewe none of it. Nature hath only discovered to them some Mines of Coales to shewe to what ende she created them. I sawe little grasse but in their pottage & no Flowers but such as modestie forbiddes to name. The Thistle was not giuen them for naug{ht} for that is the fairest flower in their gardens. The worde Hays is heathen Greeke vnto them, neither man nor beaste knowes what it meanes. Corne is reasonable plentifull at this time, for since they hearde of the Kings comming, it hath beene as lawfull for the Common people to eate wheate, as it was of ould for any but the Priests to eate of the Shewe-breade. They prayed long for his comming & fasted long for his well-fare-long welfare. All his followers were

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welcome but his guarde, those they saide looked like Pharoah's leane kine & threatned a Dearthe wheresoever they came. They wou~~d~~perwould perswade the Footemen that Oaten Cakes would make them long winded / & the children of the Chappell they haue brought to eate of the[m] for the maintenance of their voices. They commend the brave minds of the Pensioners & gentlemen of the Chamber who chuse rather to goe to Ordinaries then alwaies to be eating of the Kings provision.

They likewise commend the yeomen pages of the Buttry for their retirednes & silence, in that they will heare xx knockes before they will answere one. They persuade the Trumpeters that Fasting is good for them, for emptines say they causeth winde, & winde causeth their

Trompets to sounde sweetly. The bringing of Here-haughts they say was a needles charge, seeing they knowe their piedegrees well enough. & the Harbingers might well haue bene spared since they brought so many beddes with them. And of the two evils since the leaste is to be chosen, they wishes the beddes might remaine with them & the pore Harbingers keepe their places & doe their office as they returne. His Hangings they likewise desire to remaine there to put them in minde of his Majestie. They promise to dispense with the woven Images, but for the graven Images in his newe beautified Chappell they threaten to pull them downe at his departure to make them a burnt offering to appease the Indignation they suppose god hath conceived against them for suffring such Idolatrie to enter that kingdome. The Organes may finde merry because of affinitye with their Bag-pipes. The Skipper that brought over the Singing men with the Papisticall vestiments complains of a swimming in his heade, ever since he came aborde his ship, wherefore the Pastor of the parish perswaded him to sell the p[ro]fane vessell & to distribute the mony among the brethren. I must confesse that his Majestie was receiued into the Parish of Edenborough (for a Citie I cannot call it) with greateshowtes & joyes, but with no *[Left margin:Shewes]* shewes & charge, for Pageants they hould Idolatrous. From the Castle they gaue him pieces of Ordonance which surely he gaue the Castle since he was King of England. At the entrance of the towne they presented him with a golden bason, carried before him on mens shoulders from whence I thinke it came. They p[ro] tested that if Christ had come from heaven, he could not haue bene

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more welcome, which I believe, for he summoned but a Parliament but Christ would haue summoned a Iudgment. He was conveyed by the Youngers of the Towne some 100 habberts (deerely shall they rue in in respecte of the Charge of the crosse) to the high Church where the only bell they had, stode vpon tip-toes to beholde his fayer face. Here I entreate you to spare him an houre since there I left him. To reporte the speeches of the people concerning his never sampled entertainment would make this discourse as tedious to you, as the Sermon was to those that were constreined to endure it. After the Preachment he was conducted by the same heralds, to his Pallace, of which I speake not because it is a place sanctified by his Divine Majestie, only I wish it had bene walled well, for my frends sake that waited on him. To bringing the Mayor backe againe to his lodging (who accompanied his Majestie) were to much to amplifie my story. Because the gentlemen lodge there 3 stories high, I will only speake of the people in their degrees & qualities. For the Lordes spirituall, they may well be so called being neither Fish nor Flesh, but what it pleaseth their earthlie god their king to name them. Obedience they hould better then Sacrifice & therefore they make a mocke at Martyrdome saying Christ was to die for them not they for him. They will rather subscribe then surrender, & dispense with small things rather the[n] trouble themselues with hote & greates disputations. They will rather acknowledge the king to be their heade, then wane where with to pamper their bodies. They haue taken greates paines & care to compass their Bishopricks & they will not loose them for a trifle. The pore Deacons whose defects will not raise them to Dignities, spende their study to disgrace those that are in leaste authority degree about them, & because they may not write Bishops they proclaime they never heard of any. The Scriptures say they speake of Deacons & Elders, but not of Deanes & Bisshops. Their discourses are full of distinctions, their Sermons of raylings & their Conclusions heresies & treasons. For their Religion I confesse it is about my reach & I will never stretch for it. They Christen without the Crosse, marrie without the ring, receive the

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Sacraments without reverence, die without repentance, & burie without Divine service. They keepe no Holidaiies, nor acknowledge any Sainte but St Andrewe, who (say they) gate that honour by presenting Christ with an oaten cake after his 40 dayes faste. They say that they which translated our English Bible were the sonnes of some Maltsters because they speake of a miracle done with barly loaves whereas they sweare they were Oaten cakes, for no other breade [*Left margin:qua[n]titie*] of that qualitie could haue sufficed so many thousands of people. They vse no prayer at all, for they say it is needles god knowing their wants. Their Sabbaths exercise is Preaching in the morning, & persecuting their backbiters in the afternoone. In the Morne they goe to Church to heare the lawe, & to the craggess & mountaines in the afternoone to lowse themselues. They holde their noses if you speake of Beare-baying & stoppe their eares if you talke of play. Fornication they make a pastime wherein mans abilitie is approved & the fertilitie of the woman discovered. Adultery they shake their heades at Theft they raile at Murther they winke at Blasphemie they laugh at. They thinke it is impossible to misse heaven, if they leave Rome behinde them / & to be opposite to the Pope is to be presently with god. To conclude I verily thinke that if god & his Angels at the last day should come downe in their white garments, they would runne a way & cry, the children of the chappell are come againe to torment vs, let vs flee from the abomination of these boyes & hide vs in the mountaines. For the Lords temporall & temporising gentlemen, if I were apte to speake all of any I could not say much of them? Only I must let you knowe they are noble Scottish men for so soone as they are fallen from the breastes of the beastes their mothers, their carefull Sires poste them away for France, whither as they passe the Sea suckes from them what they haue sucked from their rude Dames There they gate her freshe newe bloude, here they learne to stande, to speake, to discourse, to {conge} to courte women & to complement with men. They come to England to gette them Cloathes, & they returne home to weare them. They spared for no coste to welcome their king nor for complement or courtesie to welcome our Country{n}men. Their followers are their

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fellowes, their wiues their slaves, horses their maisters, & their swords their judges: therefore haue they fewe Lawyers & not verie rich. Their Parliament holdes but 3 dayes, their statutes are but 3 lines & their suite is determined in 3 wordes. The wonders of the king dome be these The Lord Chancellor is beloued, the M[aste]r of the Rolles well spoken of, & the Iudges are free from suspition of Corruption.

The Country though Mountainous affordeth no monsters but women. The Countesses & Ladies are kept like Lions in grates of iron. Merchants wiues are prisoners but not in such strong houldes, they haue wooden cages like our English boare-frankes. The madnes of the men is jealousie. The Ladies thinke Susanna not chaste because she bathed so often. Pride is bredde in their bones, yet their flesh naturallie abhorres elenlines cleanlines. Their breathes stinke of pottage, linnen of pisse, & handes of pigges turdes, their bodies of sweate, & their splawe-feete offende not in sockes. To be tied to one of them in marriage were to be tied to a carrionlike carkas in a ditehe-stinkinge ditche. Their vsuall oyntments be brimston & butter or scabbes oyle of bayes & stavesarre for lice. Curiositie is newly come among them & will not long continue. I had rather be the meanest servant of 24 to my pupilles Chambermaide, the M[aste/istress?]'s Minion to the fairest Countesse there. If I should

discover further from the Citi sens wife to the Country gentlewoman & common Dames, it were to bring you from Newgate to Bridewell & the Dames of Seacole lane that converse with ragges & maribones, things with them of greate fame. In Houndes-ditche are Helens & the greasie bawdes in Turnbull are Greekish Dames to these. Men of ould did not more wonder that the Messiah was borne in pore Bethleem then I doe that so brave a prince as King Iames was borne in so stinking a towne as Edenborough in lowsie Scotland.

From Lowth neere Edenburgh this xxth of Iune

What the Authors religion way was may be gessed at by sundrie passages, & this whole discourse may worthily cause to vs^{to} name him

Rayling Rabshakeh.

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Harley MS 444, ff. 241r–245v
- British Library, Harley MS 6865, ff. 26x–28x
- British Library, Additional MS 64876, ff. 37r–38v
- Beinecke Library, Osborn b200, ff. 280–287
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 47, ff. 1r–7r
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 792, ff. 299–301
- Bodleian Library, MS Dodsworth 61, ff. 57r–59v
- Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 1048, ff. 47r–50r
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 237, ff. 64r–67v
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 74, ff. 97r–98r
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.345, pp. 37–42
- Nottingham University Library, CI LP 37
- Nottingham University Library, Mi LM 32
- Queen's College, MS 121, ff. 476–481
- Queen's College, MS 130, ff. 93–96
- St John's College, MS K.56, item 6
- The National Archives, SP 14/92, /70
- UT Austin MS, BL Microfilm 751 Phillips MS 12341, pp263–270
- University College, MS 152 [on deposit at the Bodleian], ff. 160–169

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<https://mpese.ac.uk/t/WeldonLetterLeith1617.html>