

Letter from Leith (1617)

[Anthony Weldon]

Transcript

Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.345, ff. 37–42

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Newes out of Scotland rather a Description of Scotland

Sweethart

Being ful of busines I could not write so often as I would, yet if you looke ouer leafe, you shal see that I haue not been, altogether vnmindeful, of your request that I should send you newes, but my hart is not set vppon a merry pin. I doe not weigh so much the state I hop'te for in this kingdom, as I envy your mans Toms happines, in that he liues in a country where he may haue wholesome ale, for his mony, & a hansom mayde for his mistres, I feare if it should please God to setle me a fortune heere, The Diuel would make me run away from it, for to liue heer a while were to liue in heauen euer after, The forbidden fruite w[i]th [th]e golden Indyas grow not on this side tweede & folly twere for Satan to tempt on w[i]th any thing else, Nothing but women haue power ouer mee

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And nothing heer seemes more vgly to mee, of them hereafter I will discourse as followeth, I pray remember my seruice, to my honorable M[ist]r[es]s I would not wish to be king of Scotland vnlesse it were to make her queene, I haue sent you a breife description of this kingdome w[i]th the natural condition of [th]e people for [th]e country I confess it is too good for them that inhabite it, & to bad for others to beare [th]e chore to conquere it, [th]e ayre mighte be wholesome but for [th]e stinking people [tha]t liue in it & [th]e ground mighte be made fruitful had they wit to manure it. Their beasts generally are smal, women only excepted then w[hi]ch there are no greater in [th]e worlde, there is greate store of foule, as foule houses, foul dishes & pots, foule linnen foul trenchers, and napkins foul sheet and shirts, w[i]th w[hi]ch sort of foul we had like to haue been famished, as [th]e children of traal were w[i]th [th]e fowle in [th]e wildernes, they haue great store of fish too & good for them that can eat them raw, but if they once come into their hands they are as good as 3 dayes old, for [th]e butter and cheese I will not medle w[i]th it, nor any man els [tha]t lous his life. They haue also great store of deare but they are so far from [th]e places I haue been at, that I had rather beleiue it, then to goe to disproue it. I confesse al [th]e deare I met w[i]th was deare lodging deare horsemeat & dear Tobacco and English beere, As for fruit for their Grandam Eues sake they neuer planted any, for other trees had Christ been betrayed in [tha]t country (as doubtles he should haue been had he com as a stranger among them) Iudas had sooner found [th]e grace of repentance then a tree to hang himselfe. They haue many hils in w[hi]ch they tel me there is much treasure, but they shew none of it, Nature hath only discouered vnto them som mines of Coales to shew to what end she created them, I saw but litle grasse, saue only in pottage, and no flower but such as modesty forbids mee to name, The Thistle was not giuen them for nought

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for it is the fayrest flower in their gardens, the word Hay is heathenish Greeke to them, neither man nor beast knowes what it meanes, Corne is reasonable plenty at this times, for since they heard of [th]e Kings com[m]ing it hath been as vnlawful for [th]e people to eat wheate, as it was in [th]e old time for any but [th]e Preists to eat [th]e shew bread, They praye long for his com[m]ing, and fasted long for his welfare, Al his followers were welcome but [th]e gard, those they say look like the Paroh's leane kine, & threatned a dearth wheresoeuer they come, they would p[er]swade [th]e footmen [tha]t oaten caken cakes would make them long winded, & [th]e children of [th]e Chappel they brought to eat of them for [th]e maintenance of their voyces. They say our Cookes are sa^{too} saucy, & for [th]e Groomes and horsmen they wish them giue their horses no [*Left margin: worse*] more meate then they will eat themselues, They com[m]end [th]e braue mindes of Pensioner Gentlemen of [th]e chamber, who choose rather to go to [th]e tauerne Th then to be alwayes eating [th]e kings p[ro]vision, they also com[m]end [th]e yomen of [th]e buttery & cellar, for their retirednes & silence, that wil heer twenty cry ere they wil answeere one. They p[er]swade [th]e Trumpeters that fasting is good for men of their quality, for emptines they say causeth winde & winde they say makes [th]e trumpet sound sweetly. The badge of Heraldry they say mighte wel haue been spared, for they al knew his pedegree wel enough, and [th]e harbingers were at a needles charge because they brought so many bed w[i]th them, and of two euils the les being to be chosen, they wish [th]e beds may remaine there & [th]e poor harbingers keepe their places, & doe their office when they returne. His Hangings also they desire should hang there as relicks to put them always in remembrance of his ma[jes]tie & they p[ro]mise to dispense w[i]th [th]e wouen images heerin but as for [th]e grauen images in [th]e chappel new beutifyde, they threaten to pul downe soon after his departure, & make of them a burnt offering to appease [th]e indignation they conceiue is imagined against

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them in [th]e brest of [th]e almighty, for suffring Idolatry to enter [th]e kingdom, the organs I think will finde mercy, because as they say, there is some affinity between them and their bagpipes, The shipmen [tha]t brought [th]e singing men w[i]th [th]e Papistical vestments, complaynes. [tha]t he hath been troubled w[i]th a strange singing in [th]e head euer since euer they come on ship bord, for remedy where of [th]e Parson of [th]e Parish hath p[er]swaded him to sel [th]e p[ro]phane vestments and to distribute [th]e mony among [th]e faythful brethren. For his ma[jes]ties entertainment I must confesse ingeniously, he was receiued into [th]e p[ar]ish of Edenborough (for city I can[n]ot name it w[i]th great shouts of ioy, but no shew of charge, for pageants they hold them idolatrous things, and not fit to be vsed in so reformed a place. From [th]e castle they gaue som peices of ordinance, w[hi]ch surely he gaue [th]e castle since he was king of England, & at [th]e entrance of [th]e towne they pr[e]sented him w[i]th a golden basen, w[hi]ch was carried before him on mens shoulders to [th]e Pallace, [th]e place I think from w[hi]ch it came, They p[ro]test that if Christ had come from heauen he could not be more welcome, and I beleiue it for his ma[jes]tie came but to sum[m]on #^{them} to a p[ar]laiment, & Christ would haue sum[m]oned them to iudgement, which they desire not to heare of. he was conveyed by [th]e yonsters of [th]e towne w[hi]ch were some 100 Halberd men (dearely shall they rue it in respect of the charge) to [th]e high crosse- & [th]e high church, where they had stuck the only bel on his tiptoes to behold his faire face. To report his entertainment were to make this discourse seem as tedious vnto you as [th]e sermon seemd to them that were constrained afterward to endorse it in parchment. He was conducted to his

pallace by [th]e same Halberd men of w[hi]ch I forbear to speake because it { } was a place sanctifyde by his diuine ma[jes]tie, only I wish it had been better.... for my freinds sake that I wayted on him. To bring [th]e Maior back againe to his lodging were too much to amplify my story, I will truly, faythfully &

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breifly speake of [th]e people according to their degrees and qualityes./

for their Lords Spiritual (they may be so cald indeed) for they are neither fish nor flesh, but what it shal please their e[ar]thly god their king to make them, they hold obedience to be better then sacrifice, they make a mockery of martirdome saying Christ was to dy for them not they for Christ, They will rather subscribe then surrender, and dispence w[i]th smal things rather then trouble themselues w[i]th disputations, They will rather acknowledge [th]e king to be their head, then want where w[i]th all to pamp[er] their bodyes, They haue taken paines and trauel to compasse their Bishopricks & therefore will not loose them for a trifle, for [th]e poore Deacons (whose desert will not lift them vp to dignity) their study is to disgrace them that haue gotten [th]e least degree before them, & because they can[n]ot write themselus bishops, they p[ro]claime they neuer hard of any. For [th]e religion they haue, it is aboue my reach and (god willing) I will neuer search for it. They Christen w[i]thout [th]e crosse and marry w[i]thout [th]e ring, receiue [th]e sacrament w[i]thout reuerence, and dy w[i]thout repentance, & bury w[i]thout diuine seruice. They keepe no holydays nor acknowledge any Saint but S[ain]t Andrew who they say got that honour by repr[e]senting Christ in an oaten cake after 40 dayes fast, they say [tha]t he [tha]t translated [th]e English bible was because he spake of a miracle done w[i]th barley loaves, when they say they were oaten cakes, & that no other bread of that quantity could haue sufficed a 1000 people. they vse no prayer at all for they say it is needles, God knowes their wants w[i]thout praying, & what he doth he loueth to doe freely. They hold fornication for a pastime wherein mens abilityes are improued, womens sterility discovered.

for [th]e Lords temporal and temporizing gent: if I were not to speake euil of any, I could not speak much good of them, only I must let you know, they are no Scottishmen, for as soone as they crawle from [th]e breasts of [th]e beasts their mothers, their careful fathers post them away for france. The wonders of [th]e contry are these. The Lord Chancelour

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is beloued and honoured, [th]e m[aste]r of [th]e Roules wel spoken of, The whole counsel who are iudges are free from al suspition of corruption. The country although it be mountanous affords no monsters, but women, of w[hi]ch [th]e greate ones as countesses and L[ad]ies are kept in iron grates like lyons, The ladyes are of opinion that Susanna could not be chast because she bathed so often, Pride is a thing bred in their bones and their flesh naturally abhors cleanlynes, To draw downe then by degrees from [th]e citizens wius to [th]e country gentlewomen, & so to de com[m]on Dames were to bring you from Newgate to Bridewel. I finde my pap[er] in consumption, therefore to conclude. The men of old times did not more wonder, [tha]t [th]e great messias should be bourne in so poore a towne as Bethlem, as I doe so braue a Prince as King James to be borne in so stinking a towne as Edenborough farewel. From Lousy Edenborough.

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Additional MS 28640, ff. 142v–145v
- 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
- 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/WeldonLetterLeith1617v2.html>