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James II and VII in Exile

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Bonnie Prince Charlie Entering the Ballroom at Holyroodhouse before 30 Apr 1892. Royal Collection Trust/ ©Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018



James first experienced exile in his teens. In 1648, when his father was imprisoned by Parliament, James fled to Holland disguised as a girl, later joining his mother in France and ending up fighting with the French army in the Spanish Netherlands. Exile had its privations but James was young and enjoyed his first experience of foreign travel and military life. He also came to appreciate that the reality of Catholicism differed markedly from the way it was represented in Protestant England. From 1660 to 1685 he was Charles II's heir presumptive, as Charles had no legitimate children. James extended his experience of warfare and his attraction to Catholicism hardened into conviction. He came to believe that only the Catholic Church could claim to be the one true church amid all the squabbling Protestant denominations. That certainty never wavered, even when it led to his sacrificing high office and challenges to his right to succeed to the throne. When he became King of England he set out to grant Catholics freedom of worship and full access to public office. In order to promote the Catholics' interests he worked first with the Anglican Tories, then with Dissenters and Whigs; he provoked widespread opposition and the great majority of his subjects refused to oppose William of Orange's invasion in 1688. Hitherto James had believed firmly that he was right and that God's providence would sustain him. Now, as kinsmen and protégés turned against him and his subjects showed their hatred for his religion and questioned the legitimacy of his infant son, James's self-confidence collapsed. He resolved to flee to France to preserve his and his son's right to the throne and (hopefully) regain his crown with Louis XIV's help.

James's experiences in 1688 did much to shape his behaviour in exile. He never doubted the legitimacy of his claim to the English and Scottish thrones or the truth of the Catholic religion, but his conviction that God approved, and would support, his conduct and policies was badly shaken. He felt obliged to try to recover his throne but was uncertain whether God approved of his efforts. Lacking a clear sense of direction and purpose he became prone to vacillation, unwilling to commit wholeheartedly to one line of policy rather than another. After seemingly reaching a decision he would change his mind; having apparently endorsed a plan he would seek the advice of others. His court was full of faction and intrigue and he seemed to lack the ability or will to assert his authority: there were too many difficult decisions and he began to wonder whether, in the great scheme of things, these policy decisions really mattered in comparison with the saving of his soul.

Kingship in Exile

'Ruling' in exile was radically different from ruling in a settled kingdom, in which the king commanded large financial, military and administrative resources and in which he could expect that his commands would be obeyed. In exile, James was a supplicant, pleading his cause in the face of widely divergent expectations. The most powerful figure that he had to contend with was Louis XIV, King of France. Louis received him courteously and with due pomp and ceremony, and placed at his disposal the chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris. The chateau was elegant, but somewhat run-down; as more and more Jacobite exiles from James's three kingdoms flocked to his court it became overcrowded, but it provided a not inappropriate setting for the royal family, who were

also well received at nearby Versailles. Louis was the most powerful monarch in Europe, but from 1688 he was embroiled in a war with most of the other major powers; James's replacement by Louis's inveterate enemy William III and II ensured that this war also became a war of the English and Scottish succession. As the war dragged on even France's vast resources became seriously overstretched and many starved as they could not produce enough food to satisfy the royal tax collectors. Louis (despite his outward courtesy) became irritated by the demands of his guests and by James's lack of urgency about recovering his throne.

In 1689, James's supporters threatened the Scottish government and Catholics seized control of most of Ireland. Louis hoped that they could thwart William's plans for military intervention in the Low Countries, but the Scottish insurrection disintegrated after the death of its leader, John Graham, Viscount Dundee. Louis sent James to take command of the Irish war effort - he was, after all, an experienced soldier - but his leadership was bedevilled by indecision and the very different priorities of James and his Irish supporters. James hoped to use Ireland as a springboard for an invasion of England or Scotland; the Irish Catholics' main concern was to recover the lands they had lost over the previous century and to re-establish Catholicism. James saw Ireland as a subordinate kingdom and knew that major concessions to the Irish Catholics would drastically reduce his chances of being restored in England. The Irish war effort was hampered by a severe shortage of money and munitions - one regiment at the siege of Derry had only seven usable muskets - and James lacked the will- power or fixity of purpose to impose order and discipline on the army. One failure followed another and the French military

advisers who accompanied him to Ireland kept Louis and his ministers fully informed of James's shortcomings. Any lingering confidence that the French might have had in him was destroyed by his precipitate flight to France after his defeat at the Boyne. He still expressed confidence that the Jacobites could defeat William's forces in Ireland if Louis would provide the necessary men and ships; Louis claimed to be too ill to receive him and refused to allow James to accompany him to the siege of Mons in the spring of 1691. In fact, the Jacobites' resistance remained strong throughout 1691 and they surrendered on terms at Limerick; nearly 21,000 Irish Catholic soldiers ('Wild Geese') left Ireland and became an important component of the French armies⁽¹⁾. William's relative failure in Ireland encouraged claims that there was a real prospect of a Jacobite rebellion if the French launched a seaborne attack on England. Louis was persuaded (perhaps against his better judgment) to authorise an invasion of England, but in May 1692 an Anglo-Dutch fleet routed the French off La Hogue.

After La Hogue Louis effectively gave up hope of restoring James by force; he resolved as early as June 1693 to recognise William, as de facto king of England and eventually did so in the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697.⁽²⁾ Relations between Versailles and Saint-Germain became more distant and Jacobite claims that an insurrection was imminent in England were received with scepticism. However, the fact that Louis was still James's patron and protector ensured that he would receive no significant support from other Catholic powers. The two great Habsburg monarchies, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, had a long-standing tradition of hostility to Bourbon France, and lesser powers (and often the papacy) followed in their wake.

James's appeals to Madrid, Vienna and Rome met with indifference, sometimes polite and emollient, sometimes not. As king of England James had expected to receive preferential treatment at Rome, which had irritated the pope. As an exile his pleas to the pope to send money or rally the Catholic powers of Europe against William achieved little^[3].

James also became a supplicant in dealing with his former subjects. The Irish had resented his refusal to reverse over a century of land confiscations and penal legislation against Catholicism. Eventually such memories faded, along with those of his precipitate flight after the Boyne, but for the moment Irish Catholic views of James were negative. His English subjects' memories were initially similar. In January 1689 Commons and Lords, and Tories and Whigs, agreed that experience showed that it was inconsistent with the safety of a Protestant kingdom to be governed by a Popish prince. Divisions of Whig and Tory soon resurfaced, but most Tories still believed that a Dutch or German Protestant king with a shaky hereditary claim to the throne, though far from ideal, was a lesser evil than a Catholic. As Catholics in England were a small minority James needed to win support among Protestants (which meant in practice Tories) to stand any chance of recovering his throne. James claimed that he had been driven out of England by an unrepresentative minority, that most of the English hated William's regime, and that if he (James) landed in England his people would rally to him. The French were politely sceptical, arguing that a successful rebellion was the essential precondition for an invasion. But was a rebellion likely? The English ruling elite was much less heavily armed and had less power over men than its Scottish or Irish counterparts. It was true that some

who had deserted James in 1688, like John Churchill, later Duke of Marlborough, now sent assurances of their loyalty, but this could be seen as a form of insurance in case James managed to return. Many others (the 'Compounders') argued that James needed to reassure the Tories that he would respect the laws and constitution, abandon his attempts to promote Catholicism and uphold the interests of the Church of England. The Compounders probably spoke for the majority of James's English supporters, but they were a minority of his English Protestant subjects and Protestants were a small minority at James' court. James was particularly influenced by John Drummond, Earl (later Jacobite Duke) of Melfort, a Scottish convert to Catholicism. Most of James's courtiers, whether Catholic or Protestant, and most of Louis's advisers, regarded Melfort as chronically incompetent and a brazen liar; but James was swept along by Melfort's self-confidence and submitted reluctantly in 1694 to Louis's demand that he dismiss him.

Louis and his ministers argued that James had no hope of regaining his throne unless he could persuade his Protestant subjects that he would not rule as he had done in 1685-8. In April 1692 James issued a declaration, drafted by Melfort, which included no promises to respect the laws or redress his subjects' grievances^[4]. After strong protests from French ministers and many of his English advisers James issued a new declaration in April 1693. This included promises to defend the Church of England and observe the Test Acts^[5]. James had deep reservations about making these assurances; when the declaration failed to trigger any sort of rebellion he resolved to make no more. When presented with draft declarations and other documents he sent them out for consultation, not

because he hoped to reach any sort of consensus, but as a way of avoiding decisions. It was alleged that he said he was reluctant to trust his own judgment; he was particularly concerned to consult the queen and was always willing to embrace reasons for inaction, a trait which became even more marked after the Treaty of Ryswick.

The King's Religion

Since his conversion to Catholicism, in about 1668, religious conviction had been at the core of James's being. In 1679 he wrote, 'What I have done was not hastily but upon mature consideration and foreseeing all and more than has yet happened to me'. Through the Exclusion Crisis^[6] and Monmouth's rebellion^[7] he remained confident that God would preserve him and uphold His cause. But in the second half of 1688 everything fell apart. His two daughters deserted him. His nephew William organised a massive sea-borne expedition against England during the autumn gales, which was driven to a safe landing in Devon by a 'Protestant wind'. James soon came to see his reverses and misfortunes as divine punishment, but for what? He was sure that God could not be displeased by his promotion of Catholicism, so suspected that he was being punished for his sins of the flesh^[8]. As failure followed failure suspicion became conviction and regaining his kingdom became subordinate to saving his soul. In this process a key figure was Armand-Jean de Rancé, Abbé of La Trappe, one of the most rigorous and ascetic Benedictine monasteries in France. James first visited La Trappe on 12/22 November 1690, about four months after his defeat at the Boyne. He discussed his concerns about salvation with Rancé at considerable length and a month later the Abbé wrote him a long letter, stressing the need for James to

subject himself totally to God and to seek His help in mastering his passions^[9]. The doors of Christ's kingdom, he added, were opened only to those who lived humbly, detached from worldly things: the way to infinite glory lay through sacrificing transitory (worldly) greatness. James followed the Abbé's guidance. He increasingly lost interest in recovering his kingdom: 'if Thou would have me obscure and low', he wrote, 'Thy blessed will, not mine, be done'. His life became increasingly austere and his devotions lengthier and more rigorous. He mortified his flesh, which he blamed for his misfortunes, scourging himself and wearing an iron chain studded with spikes next to his skin. His will contained no provision for masses to speed his soul through purgatory: he believed he deserved to suffer to the utmost for his sins. 'May I always be prepared for death', he wrote, 'the sooner the better.' Death came to him on 25 August/5 September 1701^[10]. In his will, he pardoned William, 'having always regarded his enemies as the instruments of divine justice'. The exemplary piety of his last years convinced many that he deserved canonization, but moves to persuade the Church to make him a saint came to nothing. James did not die for his faith, but his religion, together with a mixture of political misjudgement, misunderstanding and bad luck, led to his expulsion from his kingdoms. His Catholicism also provided a means of explaining and coming to terms with his misfortunes and ultimately of overcoming them: he welcomed death as bringing him finally and forever into the presence of God.

Sources

The Stuart papers at Windsor are less rich for James II and VII's reign than for the subsequent decades. On the king in exile the most useful are numerous letters from Rancé to the king (notably that of 21 December 1690,

RA SP/Main/1/58] and accounts by Thomas Sheridan of the politics of the court of Saint Germain (RA/SP/M/6 and 7). Sheridan's accounts are full of bias and special pleading but they do give a lively first-hand picture.

NOTES

^[1] James II, 5 Jan 1692. RA SP/Main/1/67.

^[2] The concluding treaty of the Nine Years' War, or the War of the League of Augsburg (1688-1697), which France and her Jacobite allies lost to the Grand Alliance of the Dutch Republic, England, Scotland, the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, Savoy and Sweden.

^[3] James II to [the Cardinal of Norfolk], 15 Jan 1691. RA SP/Main/1/59.

^[4] James II to all his Loving Subjects, 20 April 1692. RA SP/Main/1/69.

^[5] A series of laws culminating in the Test Act of 1673, whereby receiving Communion in the Church of England was made a precondition for holding public office. Act of the Privy Council of Scotland, 3 Nov 1681. RA SP/Main/1/11.

^[6] An attempt between 1679 and 1681 by certain elements of Parliament to pass bills to prevent the Roman Catholic James from succeeding his Protestant brother, Charles II, to the throne.

^[7] Also known as the West Country Rebellion, this was an attempt in May-July 1685 to overthrow the new James II, led by James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate Protestant son of Charles II and Lucy Walter. He was executed for treason on 15 July 1685.

^[8] "James II's instructions to his son (1692-c. 1706)". RA RCIN 1006012 f.22.

^[9] Armand Jean, Abbé de La Trappe, to James II, 21 Dec 1690. RA SP/Main/1/58.

^[10] Father Francis Saunders, 'Narrative of the reading of the will to the King', [1701?]. RA SP/Main/2/12.

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