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978-1-108-07778-1 - The Letters of Queen Victoria: Volume 3: 1854–1861

Edited by A. C. Benson and Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher

Excerpt

[More information](#)INTRODUCTORY NOTE
TO CHAPTER XXIII

At the meeting of Parliament, on the 31st of January 1854, the Ministry were able triumphantly to refute the charge of illegitimate interference in State affairs which had been made by a section of the Press against Prince Albert; they were, however, severely attacked for not acting with greater vigour in Eastern affairs. In February, the Russian Ambassador left London, the Guards were despatched to the East, and the Russian Government was peremptorily called upon by Great Britain and France to evacuate the Principalities. The Peace Party, Bright, Cobden, and others, were active, but unheeded; the Society of Friends sending a pacific but futile deputation to the Czar. In March, the demand for evacuation being disregarded, war was declared, and a treaty of alliance signed between England and France; Lord Raglan and Marshal St Arnaud were appointed to command the respective armies, Vice-Admiral Sir James Dundas and Sir Charles Napier having command of the Mediterranean and Baltic Fleets respectively. The attitude of Austria was ambiguous, and, after England and France were committed to war, she contracted an offensive and defensive alliance with Prussia, each country engaging to make limited preparations for war. At home, with a view to greater efficiency, the duties of the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, till then united in a single Secretaryship, were divided, the Duke of Newcastle assuming the former office, while Sir George Grey became Colonial Secretary; Lord John Russell also resumed office as President of the Council. The Russians were unsuccessful in their operations against the Turks, notably at Silistria and Giurgevo, while, as the summer advanced, public opinion in support of an invasion of the Crimea rose steadily, the *Times* indicated the taking of Sebastopol as indispensable, and Lord Aberdeen's hand was forced. On the 28th of June, the Cabinet sanctioned a despatch to Lord Raglan, urging (almost to the point of directing) an immediate attack upon Sebastopol; the French Emperor was in favour of the plan, though both Commanders-in-Chief entertained doubt as to whether it was immediately feasible. On the 7th of September, the allied forces (58,000 strong) sailed from Varna, a landing being effected a

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a few days later at Old Fort, near Eupatoria; at about the same time an important interview took place at Boulogne between Prince Albert and the Emperor Napoleon. The signal victory at the Alma, on the 20th of September, was followed by the death of St Arnaud, and the appointment of Canrobert as his successor. Decisive successes were next obtained at Balaklava on the 25th of October, and at Inkerman on the 10th of November; but on the 14th a fierce gale did immense damage to life and property, both at Balaklava and on the sea. Meanwhile, indignation at home was aroused by the tidings of the breakdown of the commissariat and transport departments, and the deplorable state of the hospitals; Miss Florence Nightingale, who had sailed from England with a number of nurses, arrived at Scutari early in November, and proceeded to remedy deficiencies as far as possible; while Lord John Russell vainly urged on the Premier the substitution of Lord Palmerston for the Duke of Newcastle as Secretary for War. Sir Charles Napier, who, previously to his departure with the Baltic Fleet, had been fêted at the Reform Club, and extravagantly lauded by Cabinet Ministers, was by the month of October engaged in a recriminatory correspondence with the First Lord of the Admiralty. At about the same time the Patriotic Fund was established under the presidency of Prince Albert.

In Parliament, the last vestige of the old Navigation System, limiting the coasting trade to British ships, was repealed, and a Bill also passed for preventing corrupt practices at elections. Owing to the war, the Reform Bill was withdrawn, Lord John Russell, on announcing the fact in Parliament, being overcome, and giving way to tears. In the short session, which took place during the latter half of December, a Foreign Enlistment Act was passed, providing for a force of 10,000 foreigners, to be drilled in this country.

The Exhibition Building, which had been constructed in Hyde Park in 1851, and had been re-erected at Sydenham, was opened with great ceremony by the Queen, and was henceforth known as the Crystal Palace.

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CHAPTER XXIII

1854

The Earl of Aberdeen to Queen Victoria.

LONDON, 6th January 1854.

Lord Aberdeen presents his humble duty to your Majesty. He cannot wonder at the indignation expressed by your Majesty at the base and infamous attacks made upon the Prince during the last two or three weeks in some of the daily papers.¹ They are chiefly to be found in those papers which represent ultra-Tory or extreme Radical opinions; but they are not sanctioned by the most respectable portion of the Press. Lord Aberdeen has received some information respecting the origin of these attacks; but it is vague and uncertain. At all events he believes that your Majesty may safely make yourself at ease upon the subject, as he is satisfied that these hostile feelings are shared by few. It is much to be desired that some notice of the subject may be taken in Parliament, when, by being treated in a proper manner, it may be effectually stopped. Lord Aberdeen has spoken to Lord John Russell, who will be quite prepared to moot it in the House of Commons.

¹ A section of the Press, favourable to Lord Palmerston, had insinuated that his resignation was due to "an influence behind the throne." Similar attacks were made by other journals, and not abandoned upon Lord Palmerston's re-admission to the Cabinet: the most extravagant charges of improper interference in State affairs were made against the Prince, and it was even rumoured that he had been impeached for high treason and committed to the Tower! The cartoons in *Punch* usually present a faithful reflection of current popular opinion, and in one of them the Prince was depicted as skating, in defiance of warning, over dangerous ice.

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It cannot be denied that the position of the Prince is somewhat anomalous, and has not been specially provided for by the Constitution; but the ties of Nature, and the dictates of common-sense are more powerful than Constitutional fictions; and Lord Aberdeen can only say that he has always considered it an inestimable blessing that your Majesty should possess so able, so zealous, and so disinterested an adviser. It is true that your Ministers are alone responsible for the conduct of public affairs, and although there is no man in England whose opinion Lord Aberdeen would more highly respect and value, still if he had the misfortune of differing from His Royal Highness, he would not hesitate to act according to his own convictions, and a sense of what was due to your Majesty's service.

The Prince has now been so long before the eyes of the whole country, his conduct so invariably devoted to the public good, and his life so perfectly inattackable, that Lord Aberdeen has not the slightest apprehension of any serious consequences arising from these contemptible exhibitions of malevolence and faction.

Your Majesty will graciously pardon Lord Aberdeen for writing thus plainly; but there are occasions on which he almost forgets your Majesty's station, and only remembers those feelings which are common to all ranks of mankind.

Queen Victoria to the Earl of Clarendon.

WINDSOR CASTLE, 9th January 1854.

The Queen thanks Lord Clarendon for his letter just received with the enclosures.

As the proposed answer to the Emperor contains perhaps necessarily only a repetition of what the Queen wrote in her former letter,¹ she inclines to the opinion that it will be best to defer any answer for the present—the more so, as a moment might possibly arrive when

¹ See *ante*, vol. ii. pp. 559, 561, 565.

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1854]

PERSIA

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it would be of advantage to be able to write and to refer to the Emperor's last letter.

With respect to the Persian Expedition¹ the Queen will not object to it—as the Cabinet appears to have fully considered the matter, but she must say that she does not much like it in a moral point of view. We are just putting the Emperor of Russia under the ban for trying “to bring the Sultan to his senses” by the occupation of part of his territory after a diplomatic rupture, and are now going to do exactly the same thing to the Shah of Persia!

The King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria.

LAEKEN, 9th January 1854.

MY DEAREST VICTORIA, — I wrote you a most abominable scrawl on Friday, and think myself justified in boring you with a few words to-day.

The plot is thickening in every direction, and we may expect a great confusion. The dear old Duke used to say: “You cannot have a little war.” The great politicians of the Press think differently. The Duke told me also once: “At the place where you are you will always have the power to force people to go to war.” I have used that power to *avoid* complications, and I still think, blessed are the peacemakers.

How the Emperor could get himself and everybody else into this infernal scrape is quite incomprehensible; the more so as I remain convinced that he did not aim at conquest. We have very mild weather, and though you liked the cold, still for every purpose we must prefer warmth. Many hundred boats with coal are frozen up, and I am told that near two hundred ships are wanting to arrive at Antwerp. . . .

I am much plagued also by little parliamentary nonsense of our own here, a storm in a bottle; this is the way of human kind, and in such cases it always

¹ Under the belief that Persia had declared war against Turkey, and that diplomatic relations between England and Persia were suspended, the Cabinet had agreed upon the occupation of the Island of Karak by a British force.

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THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

[CHAP. XXIII]

pleases me to think that I am not bound to be always their working slave, and I cast a sly look at my beautiful villa on the Lake of Como, *quite furnished*. . . . My beloved Victoria. Your devoted Uncle.

LEOPOLD R.

The King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria.

LAEKEN, 13th January 1854.

MY BELOVED VICTORIA,—I grieve to see how unjustly you are plagued, and how wonderfully untrue and passionate are the attacks of part of the Press. Abuse is somewhat the *staff of life in England*, everything, everybody is to be abused; it is a pity, as nothing more unproductive as this everlasting abuse can well be imagined. As nothing ever gave the slightest opening to this abuse, it is to be hoped that it will be soon got over—the meeting of Parliament will now do good in this respect. As far as your few continental relations are concerned, I don't think they will be able to fix anything upon your faithful servant. I have done England at all times good services, in the sense of her best interests. I hold a position of great geographical importance for England just opposite the mouth of the Thames. Successes of vanity I am never fishing for in England, nor anywhere else. The only influence I may exercise is to prevent mischief where I can, which occasionally succeeds; if war can be avoided, and the same ends obtained, it is natural *that THAT should be tried first*. Many English superficial newspaper politicians imagine that threatening is the thing—I believe it the worst of all systems. The Emperor Nicholas and Menschikoff wanted by threatening the Turks to get certain things, and they have by that means got a very troublesome and expensive affair on their hands. I wish England too well to like to see it, but one of these days they will get into some scrape in the same way. The foolish accusation that we are doing all we can to break up the French Alliance is certainly the *most absurd of all*; if anything can be

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1854]

THE COMTE DE CHAMBORD

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for our local advantage, it is to see England and France closely allied, and for a long period—for ever I should say. . . .

I have heard, and that from the Prussian Quarter, that great efforts are making on the part of Russia, to *gain over* Louis Napoleon. I understand, however, that though Louis Napoleon is *not* anxious for war, that his opinion is favourable to the continuation of a good understanding with England. That it should be so is, I must say, highly desirable. The poor Orleans will be grieved and hurt by all these things. The death of the child of the poor Queen of Spain will not be a favourable omen for Spain.¹ . . .

With my best love to Albert. Believe me ever, my beloved Victoria, your truly devoted Uncle,

LEOPOLD R.

Queen Victoria to the Earl of Aberdeen.

WINDSOR CASTLE, 16th January 1854.

The Queen sends the answer she has this morning received from the Duc de Nemours, which she hopes is on the whole satisfactory as regards the reported visit of the Count de Chambord.² The Duke does not see in so strong a light as *we* do, the danger of even the *report* being believed—probably from living so much out of the world as he does. What would Lord Aberdeen wish her to do farther, and what does he think can be done in the way of contradiction? The Queen wishes likewise to have Lord Aberdeen's opinion and advice on the following subjects. He knows that we have invariably received the poor Orleans family (in particular our own near relations, the Nemours) from time to time *here* and in London, and that the Queen has *always* from the first year done this *openly* but *unostentatiously*. It is by *no means*

¹ A daughter had been born to the Queen of Spain on the 5th of January, and lived only three days.

² Son of the Duc de Berri, and known formerly as the Duc de Bordeaux. (See *ante*, vol. i. p. 619.) The Duc de Nemours denied all knowledge of the rumoured visit, and thought its importance had been exaggerated.

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her intention to change her conduct in this respect—but since the great noise caused by the “fusion” she thought it better *not* to invite the Nemours either to Osborne or here, hoping that by *this time* these tiresome rumours would have ceased. They have not, however, and we think that perhaps it would be wiser *not* to see them here, *at any rate* till after the meeting of Parliament, though it is very painful to the Queen to hurt their feelings by apparent neglect. Is Lord Aberdeen of this opinion, and does he think that it will *not* be misconstrued into an *admission* of having encouraged *intrigues* or of *submission* to the will and pleasure of Louis Napoleon?

For the Queen would never submit to such an accusation, nor would she continue (after the excitement is past) to exclude these poor exiles from occasional visits—which have been paid and received ever since '48, and which would be unworthy and ungenerous conduct.

Likewise does Lord Aberdeen think that a morning visit to the Duchess of Aumale to enquire after her health would be imprudent?

It goes very much against the Queen's feelings of generosity and kindness to neglect the poor exiles as she has done this winter, but the present moment is one of *unparalleled* excitement and of great political importance, which requires great prudence and circumspection. There is an admirable article in the *Morning Chronicle* of to-day, taking quite the *right line* upon the infamous and *now* almost ridiculous attacks on the *Queen* and Prince. Has Lord Aberdeen any idea who could have written it?

The Queen sends a letter she has received from her Uncle, which may amuse and interest him. To make the statement of the Queen's intercourse with the Orleans family quite clear, she should add, that when the family visit the Queen, or she visits them, that it is put into the Court Circular, and this of course gets copied into country papers and foreign papers; but after consideration the Queen thought this the wiser course,

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1854]

MR GLADSTONE'S ATTITUDE

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for with all the spies who are no doubt about—if this were not done, and the Queen's visits and *vice versa* were suppressed and *yet* found out—it would give them an air of *mystery* which is just what we wish to avoid.

The Earl of Aberdeen to Queen Victoria.

LONDON, 17th January 1854.

. . . With respect to your Majesty's custom of seeing the French Royal Family, Lord Aberdeen humbly thinks that there is no good reason for making any change. It has always taken place without parade or ostentation; and knowing, as Lord Aberdeen does, that no political object is in view, he would feel ashamed to advise your Majesty to do anything at variance with that sympathy which your Majesty has been careful to keep within the bounds of prudence and moderation. . . .

Lord Aberdeen hopes that he may venture to congratulate your Majesty on the commencement of a change with respect to the newspaper attacks upon the Prince. He observed the article, to which your Majesty refers, in the *Morning Chronicle* of yesterday; and he believes he may certainly say that it was written by Mr Gladstone, although he would not wish it to be known. There was also a very sensible letter in the *Standard* of last night, signed D. C. L. This is the signature always assumed by Mr Alexander Hope,¹ in his contributions to the Press, and Lord Aberdeen does not doubt that it is written by him. It is only a wonder to find it in such a quarter; and it shows some disposition on the part of that scurrilous paper to alter its course. There is perhaps no great objection to the papers dealing with the subject as they think proper, before the meeting of Parliament, provided the *Times* takes no part at present; for as this paper is

¹ Mr A. J. Hope (afterwards Beresford-Hope), at this time out of Parliament, had written over the signature "D. C. L." a series of letters to the Press on the Papal claims.

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supposed to be influenced by the Government, this belief would injure the effect of anything that might appear in its columns.¹ . . .

Queen Victoria to Lord John Russell.

WINDSOR CASTLE, 21st January 1854.

The Queen has received Lord John Russell's letter of the 19th, and the Bill as now agreed upon by the Cabinet, which she hopes may meet the wishes of the Country and pass into law.² From what she understands the chief argument used in opposition to the measure will be, that corruption and bribery is the evil which the Country really complains of, and not an unequal distribution of the representation, and that a new distribution or even extension of the franchise will not touch the evil, and may be said perhaps in some instances to tend towards increasing it. The success of the measure will therefore, she concludes, in some degree depend upon the Bribery Bills which will accompany it. How far are these advanced? and what expectation has Lord John Russell of succeeding in framing such a measure as would remove that ground of objection to the Reform Bill?

Queen Victoria to Mr Gladstone.

WINDSOR CASTLE, 7th February 1854.

The Queen must apologise for having kept the enclosed papers so long, and in now sending them back she does so without feeling sure in her mind that she

¹ On the re-assembling of Parliament, the charges against the Prince were at once refuted by the Prime Minister and Lord John Russell; and his right to assist the Queen completely established by those Ministers, with the concurrence of Lord Derby and Mr Walpole, on behalf of the Opposition, and Lord Campbell, the Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench.

² Notwithstanding the impending war, the Government considered itself bound in honour to bring in a Reform Bill. Lord Palmerston and his special supporters were opposed to the project, but the measure was brought forward on the 13th of February. After a chequered career it was withdrawn. The Bill for the prevention of corrupt practices at elections was introduced on the 10th of February, and after many vicissitudes and several Ministerial defeats in the Commons as well as in the Lords, it was, in a modified form, carried.