THE LIMNER COMPANY



NICHOLAS DIXON (1660 - 1708)

Cabinet portrait of King James II (1633-1701) when Duke of York; circa 1661

Circa: Circa 1661

Circa 1661

17.2 x 13.1 cm (6 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 5 $^{1}/_{8}$ inches)

Watercolour on vellum

The present work is after a portrait by Sir Peter Lely previously in the Smyth collection at Ashton Court[1] (current whereabouts unknown). It replicates Lely's glamourous yet martial image of the Duke, which itself follows the full-length portrait type at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery [accession no. PG 901], depicting James seated before a column. It was clearly a favoured portrait type, being copied also by John Greenhill (c.1644-1676)[2], who worked in Lely's studio, and a later copy by an unknown artist can also be found at Christ Church, Oxford[3].

James wears the military attire of a royalist officer, including the crimson sash of the royalists, a sword at his left side, an armour breastplate, a buff jerkin with sleeves of a much richer gold fabric, possibly cloth of gold, and a cravat with fine lace edging. In Lely's full-length oil painting, James is seated holding a commander's baton in his right hand, whereas here the baton is absent and James instead stands, gazing imperiously downward at the viewer with his right hand resting atop a half column in a casually confident stance.

<u>Military Career</u>

James had an impressive early career in the military, and since boyhood had demonstrated considerable physical bravery. Just a child at the outbreak of the English Civil War, both he and his elder brother, Charles (later Charles II), were present at the Battle of Edgehill and narrowly escaped capture by Parliamentarian cavalry. Later, James was held under house arrest and when informed of his

father, Charles I's arrest in 1647, he had to be physically restrained from shooting the messenger with a longbow.[4] He was allowed a to visit his father in captivity, who urged him to be loyal to his elder brother and do his utmost to join him and his mother exiled in France. After two failed attempts, James did make a daring escape in 1648, masterminded by Colonel Joseph Bampfield, fleeing during a game of hide and seek while under house arrest at St James's Palace.

James endeavoured to fight for his elder brother's cause at every opportunity. After the French pledged support to Charles, he enlisted in the French army in 1652 and saw action in the Franco-Spanish War and campaigns in the Fronde. Following his first engagement, he was commended by his future father-in-law, Edward Hyde (1609-1674), who described him as having 'behaved himself with extraordinary courage and gallantry'.[5] At this time, James seems to have had a particularly enthusiastic interest in the mechanisms of military manoeuvres, recording them at length in his memoirs. Indeed, he would often talk of military tactics when trying to seduce women, which, despite this questionable technique, he did very successfully.

When the Spanish agreed in to support Charles's restoration, Charles had to persuade James to fight with them in the Franco-Spanish War. He was reluctant to fight against the French as his former brothers-in-arms, but his father's wishes for him to support Charles prevailed and he enlisted with the Spanish army in 1657.

At the Battle of the Dunes, he commanded several regiments of English, Scottish, and Irish royalists fighting with the Spanish against the French and an English Parliamentarian force in 1658. Two years later, he was offered the post of High Admiral by the Spanish king, a position he had been appointed in England (in an honorary capacity) by his father when he was just 5 years old. With little hope of returning to England at the beginning of 1660, James was preparing to take up the position with the Spanish when Charles received the invitation to reclaim the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland. James was therefore able to assume the role that had originally been given to him by his now deceased father, as of Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy.

On the restoration of the monarchy, James lived extravagantly but took his position as head of the navy seriously. He championed the navy's role in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, during which he saw battle at sea and witnessed the death of the Earl of Falmouth at such close quarters that he was spattered with his blood. He led a successful campaign against the Dutch in the Americas – a legacy remaining to this day in the city of New York, which was named in his honour after it was captured from the Dutch by an English fleet.

The same period also saw a great embarrassment however, when the Dutch sailed up the River Medway and destroyed the fleet moored at Chatham in June 1667. The navy's largest warships were lost, and the flagship Royal Charles captured and towed back to the Netherlands. Yet the blame was laid not at the feet of the Lord High Admiral, but his father-in-law, the now Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde. To James's credit, he spoke in Hyde's defence in the House of Lords, despite the majority feeling being against Hyde, his own dislike of the man and the danger of the blame being redirected towards himself. James also sagely warned his brother of the dangers of alienating his chief minister, but his intercession was to no avail, and Charles even sent James to dismiss Hyde in person.

It may be that James was riding a wave of good favour as just the previous year, his courage during the Great Fire of London had been widely reported. The inaction of the Lord Mayor of the city had led Charles to put James in charge of the firefighting operations in the early stages of the fire. James, with

little regard for his own safety, toiled day and night at the water pumps and making fire breaks, for which he was greatly endeared to the people.[6]

James's military career would come to an end following the Test Act of 1673, which prohibited Catholics from holding public office. He resigned as Lord High Admiral and the same year took the staunchly catholic princess, Mary of Modena (1658-1718) for his second bride.

First Marriage

Dating circa 1661, the present portrait was painted shortly after James secretly married Anne Hyde (1637-1671). They had met in 1656 when Anne was maid of honour to his sister, Princess Mary of Orange, and love or lust, they immediately began a dalliance. When Anne fell pregnant, James promised to marry her and they wed on 3rd September 1660. The marriage was not made public however until December of that year when it was met with much consternation generally and the horror of the bride's father and bridegroom's mother. As a commoner, Anne was considered too lowly for an English prince, and James was thought unsuitable on the basis of his rakish ways and poor prospects; Anne's father, Edward Hyde, even remarked, 'that he had much rather his daughter should be the Duke's whore than his wife'.[7] In spite of his disapproval, it was Hyde who commissioned the SNPG portrait[8] from Sir Peter Lely as a pair with a portrait of Anne, and another exists version as a double portrait with Anne [National Portrait Gallery, NPG 5077].

Despite theirs being a love match, James had no qualms engaging in extramarital affairs from the outset, as the memoirs of one contemporary describe:

The Duke of York, having quieted his conscience by the declaration of his marriage, thought that he was entitled, by this generous effort, to give way a little to his inconstancy: he therefore immediately seized upon whatever he could first lay his hands upon: this was Lady Carnegy, who had been in several other hands.[9]

James's reputation for womanising surpassed even the Merry Monarch's, as Charles himself remarked to the French ambassador in 1677: 'I do not believe there are two men who love women more than you and I do, but my brother, devout as he is, loves them still more'.[10] The privilege of his position allowed him to be 'the most unguarded ogler of his time'[11], and his advances were, for the most part, seemingly welcomed…

The duke was for some time entirely taken up with the pleasures of the chase, and only now and then engaged in those of love; but his taste having undergone a change in this particular, and the remembrance of Lady Robarts wearing off by degrees, his eyes and wishes were turned towards Miss Brook; and it was in the height of this pursuit that Lady Chesterfield threw herself into his arms…'[12]

His philandering did not impede what was a marriage of great affection, but it would end with her premature death in 1671. Anne and James had 2 surviving children, both of whom would become queens regnant: Mary (1662-1694, r.1689-1694) and Anne (1665-1714, r.1702-1714).

Dixon's Cabinet Portraits

The present work is perhaps Dixon's earliest extant cabinet portrait. Approximately a year later, circa 1662, he would paint a cabinet portrait of Anne (now at the Cleveland Museum of Art [The Edward B. Greene Collection 1940.1205]), and their comparison is indicative of Dixon's increasing ambition at this early period. Her's is larger, measuring 23 x 28cm, and the composition is more complex, showing her in three-quarter-length and seated at a dressing table with a mirror and jewellery box, the table covered in a Persian rug. Dixon would paint James's portrait on a grander scale again a decade later as the Prince of Wales [Art Institute Chicago, ref. 1960.127]

Cabinet portraits were expensive to commission and would have been lucrative not only for their earning potential, but for their intended public display, offering a promotional opportunity rarely afforded a miniature artist. Dixon seems to have produced quite a number of cabinet portraits in comparison to his predecessors at the Stuart court, perhaps with pretentions for a royal appointment. His ambition would pay off when he was appointed the King's Limner (miniculator regis) to Charles II in 1673.

[1] Sold by Pritchard & Co. in 1947: Smyth sale, Ashton Court, 3-13 June 1947, lot 996 (as Duke of Gloucester). The archive record states it was, at the time of the entry, in the 'collection of G. R. Stanton of Bath', possibly the energetic Curator of Archaeology & Anthropology at Bristol City Museum.

[2] Dulwich Picture Gallery, accession no. DPG416.

[3] Accession no. LP 92.

[4] (Turner, 15) quoted in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 29, p.658

[5] ODNB, p.659

[6] A broadside printed by Stephen Bulkley, for Francis Mawbarne, 1666, also appeared in London Gazette on 10 September 1666 – National Archives, Catalogue ref; SP 29/170 f150 https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/great-fire-of-london-examine-the-evidence/a-true-relation-of-the-sad-and-deplorable-fire/

[7] Millar, O., *Sir Peter Lely 1618-80*, the catalogue for the exhibition at 15 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1, 1978 (National Portrait Gallery), p.54

[8] https://artuk.org/discover/stories/from-flattering-royalty-to-warts-and-all-selected-highlights-of-sir-peter-lelys-works

[9] Hamilton, Count Anthony, translate with notes by Walpole, Horace, *Memoirs of Count Grammont*, 1888 (Gebbie & Co., Philadelphia), p.190

[10] (Turner, 61 quoted in) ODNB, p.661

[11] Hamilton, p.197

[12] Hamilton, p.195