

First Letter to Henry Bullinger

Lady Jane Grey

Anglican · Reformation · Letter

STROMATA 08

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

INTRODUCTION

Written by a teenaged noblewoman to the Zürich reformer Heinrich Bullinger sometime around 1551, this letter records one side of a remarkable correspondence between a Swiss patriarch of the Reformation and the young Englishwoman who would, within two years, briefly wear the crown and then lose her head for it. Jane Grey writes in Latin, with the easy command of patristic example—Jerome's circle, Origen's pupils—that her humanist tutors had cultivated in her, and she places herself deliberately in that lineage of pious women instructed by learned men. The letter belongs to a small body of writings that document the formation of Reformed piety among the English nobility before the Marian reaction, and it preserves the voice of a mind shaped by Bucer in his last months at Cambridge.

Learned Sir, I give you, as I shall continue to do while I live, unceasing thanks; but cannot engage ever to requite your kindness, since it does not appear that I possess the ability of making suitable returns for it; unless, indeed, you should be of opinion that I return a favour while I treasure it in memory. These professions of gratitude are not made without cause. I have received from you a profound and eloquent epistle which has proved highly grateful to me, not only in regard to your condescension in writing from a distant country, and under the pressure of years, to me who am unworthy of your notice; but also because your writings are of no ordinary cast, not calculated merely to amuse, but abound in pious and divine thoughts, fit for instruction, admonition and consolation, and especially suited to my age, sex and rank in life. In this epistle, as in all those which you have published to the edification of the Christian community, you have shewn yourself not only a scholar of singular erudition, but also a skilful, prudent, and pious counsellor, a man who can relish nothing which is not excellent; think nothing which is not divine; enjoin nothing which is not profitable; and do nothing which is not virtuous, pious, and worthy of so venerable a father. O happy me, who am favoured with such a friend, and so wise a counsellor! for as Solomon says 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety', and who am connected by the ties of friendship and intimacy, with so pious a divine, and so intrepid a champion of true religion. On many accounts I consider myself indebted to God, the greatest and best of beings, but especially for having, after I was bereaved of the pious Bucer, that most learned man and holy father, who night and day, and to the utmost of his ability, supplied me with all necessary instructions and directions, and by his advice promoted and encouraged my progress in probity, piety, and learning; for having I say, granted me in his place, a man so worthy to be revered as yourself, who, I hope, will

continue as you have begun, to spur me on, when I loiter, or am inclined to delay. No better fortune can, indeed, await me, than to be thought worthy of the wise and salutary admonitions of men so renowned, whose virtues, who shall sufficiently eulogize? And to experience the happiness enjoyed by Blesilla, Paula, and Eustachia, to whom the divine Jeronymus imparted instruction, and who were brought by his discourses to a knowledge of sacred truths — or the happiness of the aged lady, to whom the divine John addressed an exhortatory and truly evangelical epistle — or lastly, the happiness of the mother of Severus who profited by the lessons of Origen and was obedient to his precepts. These worthies were not so much honoured and celebrated for beauty of person, exalted rank, and large possessions, as their glory and happiness were promoted by the instructions of wise men, who did not disdain, though singularly illustrious for erudition and piety, to conduct them as it were, by the hand, to every thing excellent, and to suggest to their minds such thoughts, as might conduce to their eternal salvation and future felicity. That you, who are not inferior to these wise counsellors in understanding, learning and piety, will condescend to manifest for me a like kindness is my unceasing petition. My unreserved requests may carry with them an appearance of boldness, but when you consider that they originate in a desire of extracting from the storehouse of your piety, instruction for the guidance of my conduct, and for the confirmation of my faith in Christ my Saviour, your goodness cannot, your wisdom will not, allow you to censure them. From the little volume of pure and unsophisticated religion, which you lately sent my father and me, I cull daily, as out of a delightful garden, the sweetest flowers. My father also, as far as the pressure of his occupations allow, is sedulously engaged in the perusal of it. Whatever benefit, however, either of us may derive from the perusal, we are bound to render thanks to you and to God on your account, since it would not be just to receive with ungrateful minds, benefits so numerous and truly divine, conferred by the supremely good and great God, through the instrumentality of you and men such as you; not a few of whom Germany now sends forth to this glorious work. If it be customary with mankind, as indeed it ought to be, to return favour for favour, and to be mindful of benefits, surely they are more strongly bound to cherish and express the most ardent gratitude for divine favours, though they are unable to make adequate returns.

I now come to that part of your letter which contains a panegyric on myself. Your praises, as I cannot claim, so also, I ought not to allow. Such of my actions as bear the characteristics of virtue, I must ascribe solely to that great Being who is the author of all my natural endowments. To Him, O worthy man! may your prayers be continually directed on my behalf. May He so direct my thoughts, that I may be found not unworthy of his great goodness. My noble father would have written, both to thank you for the important services in which you are engaged, and also for your singular politeness in inscribing with his name and publishing under his auspices, your tenth decade, had not weighty business of his majesty the King called him to the remotest parts of Britain: but as soon as public affairs afford him leisure, he is determined on writing to you.

To conclude, as I am now beginning to study Hebrew, if you can point out the way in which I may proceed in this pursuit to the greatest advantage, you will confer on me a great obligation.

Farewell, bright ornament and grace of the Christian Church. May the supremely great and good God, long preserve you for us, and his people.

Your most devoted,

Jane Gray.

Source: <https://archive.org/details/memoirsremainsof00grey/page/5/mode/2up>

These texts are drawn from *Memoirs and Remains of Lady Jane Grey*, a compilation of her letters, prayers, disputations, and scaffold writings. The Internet Archive copy used here is available at <https://archive.org/details/memoirsremainsof00grey>. The compilation was first published in the nineteenth century; the letters to Bullinger were originally in Latin and appear here in English translation (translator unattributed in this edition). The translations are themselves pre-1900 and are public domain. Original spelling has been lightly modernised in places by the nineteenth-century editors; the texts are otherwise presented as found. No independent transcription has been made against manuscript sources.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/first-letter-to-henry-bullinger>