

SUMMARY: In this letter dated 12 March 1583 to Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Burghley points out the false allegations which have been made against Oxford to the Queen by Thomas Knyvet and his men. The most serious allegation is that one Gastrell had killed one of Thomas Knyvet's men known as Long Tom. However Lord Burghley offers proof that Gastrell has been acquitted of the killing of Long Tom both by the coroner and at trial, and even had he been guilty, it would have had nothing to do with Oxford since Gastrell was not one of Oxford's men, either at the time or at present. Lord Burghley also points out that Knyvet and his men have misinformed the Queen by falsely claiming that Gastrell had challenged one Roper to fight, whereas in fact the challenge was made by Roper to Gastrell. Again, even had a challenge been made by Gastrell, it would have had nothing to do with Oxford since Gastrell was not Oxford's man. In this section of the letter Lord Burghley does refer to Gastrell as Oxford's man ('And for the quarrel of one Roper of the Guards against Gastrell, my Lord of Oxford's man'). However in light of Lord Burghley's earlier emphatic statement that Gastrell was never Oxford's man, it seems clear that Lord Burghley is here merely repeating the allegation as it had been framed by Knyvet, i.e. that Knyvet had reported to the Queen that Oxford's man Gastrell had challenged Roper to fight, whereas in fact Gastrell was not Oxford's man and the challenge had come from Roper, not Gastrell. Lord Burghley also refutes false tales which have been reported to the Queen about Oxford's alleged extravagance in the matter of servants. In the balance of the letter Lord Burghley laments the strain Oxford's two-year banishment from court has put upon himself and his wife, and obliquely raises the question of why the Queen has been so obdurate. One suspects that Lord Burghley knew the answer to the question, but realized that it was pointless to raise it. For the Queen to have remained obdurate for two years, someone had to have been daily influencing her against Oxford. The fact that the Queen appointed Leicester to look into the matter of Thomas Knyvet's allegations against Oxford suggests that that person was Leicester. Lord Burghley's letter to Sir Christopher Hatton thus appears to have been an attempted end-run around Leicester. Realizing that the truth about Gastrell having been acquitted of the death of Long Tom and about Gastrell not being Oxford's man would never reach the Queen so long as Leicester was in charge of the investigation, Lord Burghley chose to place the information in the hands of Sir Christopher Hatton so that the truth would reach the Queen through Hatton. It is evident from Lord Burghley's letter that at this point Sir Christopher Hatton was an ally in attempting to reinstate Oxford in the Queen's favour. The transcript below is taken from Nicolas, *Sir Harris, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton* (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), pp.321-4.

Good Mr Vice-chamberlain, my lack of health and strength serveth me not to write as much as I have cause, but yet many urgent necessities constrain me to write somewhat for ease of my mind, which I pray you to interpret after your friendly manner.

I perceived yesterday by my Lord of Leicester that you had very friendly delivered speeches to her Majesty tending to bring some good end to these troublesome matters

betwixt my Lord of Oxford and Mr Thomas Knyvet, for the which your doings I do heartily thank you, and beseech you to continue your former good meaning, though the event expected and desired hath not followed.

And now perceiving by my Lord of Leicester some increase of her Majesty's offence towards my Lord of Oxford, and finding by Master Thomas Knyvet that he only being called and demanded of her Majesty what he would say herein, he did, as served his turn, declare to her Majesty that his men were evil used by my Lord of Oxford's men, and namely that one of his men was killed by a man of my Lord of Oxford's, and no redress had, I cannot but think that her Majesty had just occasion given by such an information to be offended towards my Lord of Oxford or his man, and did therefore, like a prince of justice and God's minister, command the matter to be examined, which was done yesterday at great length by my Lord of Leicester, to his trouble and my grief, and I doubt not but my Lord of Leicester will honourably declare to her Majesty how my Lord of Oxford resteth untouched, or at least unblotted, in any kind of matter objected by Mr Knyvet, whom we heard at great length, and his men also. But because Mr Knyvet's man called Long Tom, that once served and was maintained by my Lord of Oxford, a bad fellow to serve any honest man, came to his death, I am bold to send to you the inquisition before the coroner of London with the verdict of the jury and the depositions of the ocular witnesses, by all which, and by a new acquittal at Newgate, Gastrell, the party named my Lord of Oxford's man, and yet was not then his man nor yet is, though Mr Knyvet report him so to be, was and standeth acquitted of the death of the said Long Thomas, so as where her Majesty had just cause to conceive somewhat hardly of my Lord of Oxford, I doubt not but when her Majesty shall be informed by my Lord of Leicester of the truth which he hath seen and not disproved, her Majesty will diminish her offensive opinion, and I trust also, after you have read these writings which I will on my credit avow to be true, you will be of the same mind, and as opportunity may serve will also move her Majesty in this case to think otherwise hereof than the informer meant to induce her to think.

As to the rest of the brabbles and frays, my Lord of Leicester can also declare upon what small occasions of repute and light carriages of tales, whereof my Lord of Oxford is nowise touched, these brabbles are risen. And for the quarrel of one Roper of the Guards against Gastrell, my Lord of Oxford's man, it is confessed that Roper challenged Gastrell that he had complained of him, whereas in truth yourself knoweth it was my Lord of Oxford that did complain to you of Roper and of one Hall, so as Roper was therein too busy. And hereupon he wrote a long speech to Gastrell to challenge him to fight, and so also Costock made the like challenge, whereby appeareth that these frays grow by challenges made to my Lord of Oxford's men, and yet it must be informed that my Lord of Oxford's men do offer these frays.

Good Mr Vice-chamberlain, these things are hardly carried, and these advantages are easily gotten, where some may say what they will against my Lord of Oxford and have presence to utter their humours, and my Lord of Oxford is neither heard nor hath presence either to complain or defend himself, and so long as he shall be subject to the disgrace of her Majesty (from which God deliver him), I see it apparently that how

innocent soever he shall be, the advantages will fall out for his adversaries, and so I hear they do prognosticate.

It hath been also informed her Majesty that he hath had fifteen or sixteen pages in a livery going before him in Cheapside, but if these tongues that uttered this were so much lessened by measure in their mouths as they have enlarged in their number they would never be touched hereafter with making any verbal lie. Indeed I would he had less than he hath, and yet in all his house are, nor were at any time, but four. One of them waiteth upon his wife, my daughter; another in my house upon his daughter Bess; a third is a kind of tumbling boy; and the fourth is the son of a brother of Sir John Cutts, lately put to him. By this false, large, lying report, if her Majesty would cause it to be tried, she should find upon what roots these blasphemous branches do grow.

But I submit all these things to God's will, who knoweth best why it pleaseth him to afflict my Lord of Oxford in this sort, who hath, I confess, forgotten his duty to God, and yet I hope he may be made a good servant to her Majesty if it please her of her clemency to remit her displeasure, for his fall in her court, which is now twice yeared, and he punished as far or farther than any like crime hath been, first by her Majesty and then by the drab's friend in revenge to the peril of his life. And if his own punishment past and his humble seeking of forgiveness cannot recover her Majesty's favour, yet some, yea many, may think that the intercession of me and my poor wife so long and importunately continued might have obtained some spark of favour of her Majesty, but hereof I will in no wise complain of too much hardness but to myself. I would I could not, in *amaritudine animae*, lament my wife's oppressing of her heart for the opinion she imprinteth therein of her misfortune, a matter not to be expressed without mistaking, and therefore both I and she are determined to suffer and lament our misfortune, that when our son-in-law was in prosperity he was cause of our adversity by his unkind usage of us and ours, and now that he is ruined and in adversity we only are made partakers thereof, and by no means, no, not by bitter tears of my wife, can obtain a spark of favour for him that hath satisfied his offence with punishment and seeketh mercy by submission, but contrariwise, whilst we seek for favour, all crosses are laid against him, and by untruths sought to be kept in disgrace,

But good Master Vice-chamberlain, pardon me herein for my heart too full to stay my pen, and yet I will end because I will no further trouble you with my troubles, which are ordained of God for myself, and so I will patiently take them and lap them up to carry with me to the grave, where, when I shall be, I am sure they shall not follow me. When I began to write, I neither meant nor thought I could have scribbled thus much, but the matter hath ministered me the cause, for I take no pleasure therein. God preserve her Majesty and grant her only to understand the true hearts of my poor wife and me, and then I doubt not the sequel of her gracious favours in far greater matters than we have required. We have not many years to live, perchance not many days, and the fewer I am sure to find lack of her favours of whom we seek to deserve well by our daily services.

From my house in Westminster this 12th of March 1582 [=1583].

Yours assuredly, as you see, very bold,
W. Burghley