

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 7 March 1575 from Dr Richard Masters to Lord Burghley, advising that he has informed the Queen of Anne Cecil's pregnancy, and that hearing of it, the Queen recalled Oxford's words before he left England in the first week of February 1575 that if Anne were pregnant it was not by him.

Oxford confirmed this statement when he returned to England in April 1576. Elizabeth Vere was born 2 July 1575, and Lord Burghley recorded that:

he confessed to my Lord Haward, that he laye not with his wiff but at Hampton Court. and that than the child cold not be his because the child was born in Iuly. which was not the space of twelve monthes

Lord Burghley's wording suggests that Oxford suspected the Queen would use a pregnancy to keep him in England, and therefore stopped sleeping with Anne Cecil several months prior to his planned date of departure so that Anne could not possibly be pregnant when he left England, which he assured the Queen of shortly before he left, according to Dr Masters' letter below. Oxford revealed to Lord Henry Howard (see above) that the last time he had slept with Anne was at Hampton Court, which was *earlier* than the 12-month period which ran from when Oxford first deliberately stopped sleeping with Anne to the birth of Elizabeth Vere on 2 July 1575, so of course the child could not be his.

The most striking facts revealed in Dr Masters' letter are that after a lengthy illness during which she had been let blood and purged, Anne Cecil's pregnancy had become evident about Shrove-tide (that is, February 13-15, one to two weeks after Oxford left England), that she was extremely distraught at the pregnancy, doubted that Oxford would accept the child as his, and requested Dr Masters to prepare 'medicines *ad menses promotiones*' for her which would likely have terminated the pregnancy.

For Anne Cecil's illness in November or December 1574, see a letter from Thomas Smith to Lady Burghley in which Smith defends the properties of a medicine he has sent Lady Burghley to treat Anne's illness, BL Lansdowne 19/50, ff. 116-17.

Dr Master mentions that during his conversation with the Queen, he shared with her 'my Lady's double reckoning, viz., *a retentione et a consortio Comitiss*', which would appear to be calculations Anne Cecil had prepared concerning her most recent menses and the date at which she had last had sexual relations with Oxford, a calculation which already at that early date had persuaded Anne that Oxford would not accept the child as his.

Dr Masters concludes the letter below by urging that attention be paid to the date of the first quickening in order to determine the date of conception. Since the birth of Elizabeth Vere occurred on 2 July 1575, only 4 months after Dr Masters wrote this letter, the circumstances of the pregnancy are peculiar, and it is little wonder that Oxford was persuaded on his return to England in April 1576 that the child was not his. On the other hand, there is little reason to question Anne Cecil's faithfulness to Oxford. For a Latin

epitaph attesting to her virtues, see BL Cotton Julius F.X., f. 115 under 'Osborn' on the Documents page of this website. For the inscription on her monument in Westminster Abbey, which also attests to her virtues, see:

<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/mildred-cecil,-lady-burghley>.

It is also noteworthy that Leicester was in the next room, where he doubtless overheard the entire conversation between Dr Masters and the Queen, and that to make doubly certain Leicester was aware of the details Dr Masters had revealed about Anne's pregnancy, the Queen called Leicester in and repeated the entire conversation to him:

Then she asking, and being answered of me, who was in the next chamber, she calleth my Lord of Leicester and telleth him all.

It may thus have been Leicester who first started the rumours that Oxford was not the father of Anne Cecil's daughter, Elizabeth Vere. From the 1585 addition to *Leicester's Commonwealth*:

Although to say true, his Lordship hath not always gained much at this play, but hath oftentime so fished that instead of a fish he hath taken a frog, and at sometime lost both hook and line and pain and honour and all. And of his such practices I could bring you many examples, as that of the Earl of Arundel and his lady, between whom he sought all means to nourish discord, hoping by that means to subvert the greatest and most honourable family of England. The same he attempted between the Earl of Oxford and his lady, daughter of the Lord Treasurer of England, and all for an old grudge he bare to her father, the said Lord Treasurer. The like he sought to do between the Earl of Southampton and the Countess, thinking by so doing to satisfy his appetite and fond lust, although he was frustrated of his intent therein.

[f. 181r] After my duty, it may please your Lordship to understand that, having her Majesty this Monday morning in the chamber at the gallery's end next to the green, sitting alone, I said that the confidence I had in my messages made me presume to come to her in that place, for being at London with my wife that had been sick, I heard say that my Lord Treasurer had left word at my house that I should not return unto the court until I had spoken with him, whereupon fearing lest he had been sick upon his purgation taken the Friday, I went unto him and found him mickle well, saving for his cough and often neezing, and understanding of my speedy return to the court, he desired me to say thus much to your Highness, that seeing it had pleased your Majesty oftentimes to inquire tenderly after my Lady of Oxford's health, it is now fallen out so (God be thanked) that she is with child evidently, and albeit it were but an indifferent thing for her Majesty to hear of, yet it was more than indifferent for your Lordship to signify the same unto her.

Herewithal she arose, or rather sprung up from the cushions, and said these words, Indeed it is a matter that concerneth my Lord's joy chiefly, yet I protest to God that next to them that have interest in it, there is nobody can be more joyous of it than I am.

Then I went forth and told her that your Lordship had a pretty likelihood of it upon your coming from the court after Shrove-tide, but you concealed it, *Ne si adversum evaderet Audires parturiunt montes* etc. And that now, because your Lordship did fear the concealing of it any longer, doubting lest the matter might otherwise come to the court, your Lordship thought it good and a piece of duty to have it imparted unto her Majesty rather by yourself than by any other. And here again she bade me make her thanks with that words repeated as before by comparing your Lordship's joy and interest to hers.

After this I had leisure to show her of my Lady's double reckoning, viz., *a retentione et a consortio Comitiss*, and that my Lady, being here at Shrove-tide, had dealt with me to prepare some medicines *ad menses promotiones*, but I counselled her to stay a while.

Her Majesty asked me how the young lady did bear the matter. I answered that she kept it secret 4 or 5 days from all persons, & that her face was much fallen & thin, with little colour, and that when she was comforted & counselled to be gladsome [f. 181v] and to rejoice, she would cry, Alas, alas, how should I rejoice, seeing he that should rejoice with me is not here, and to say truth, [+I?] stand in doubt whether he pass upon me & it or not, and bemoaning her case would lament that after so long sickness of body, she should enter a new grief and sorrow of mind.

At this her Majesty showed great compassion, as your Lordship shall hear hereafter. And repeated my Lord of Oxford's answer to me, which he made openly in the presence chamber to her Majesty, viz., that if she were with child, it was not his. I answered that it was the common answer of lusty courtiers everywhere so to say. I told her also that she ought to think the case to be hard, when that she was let blood and purged, the physicians having greater regard to the stock than to the branch, but I trusted now they were both in safety.

Then she asking, and being answered of me, who was in the next chamber, she calleth my Lord of Leicester and telleth him all, and here I told her that though your Lordship had concealed it a while from her, yet you left it to her discretion either to reveal it or to keep it close.

And here an end was made, taking advantage of my last words, that she would be with you for concealing it so long from her, and surely she showed herself unfeignedly to rejoice, and in great offence with my Lord of Oxford, repeating the same to my Lord of Leicester after he came to her.

Thus much rather to show my goodwill than otherwise, desiring your Lordship that there may a note be taken from the day of the first quickening, for thereof somewhat may be known noteworthy. From Richmond the 7th of March, 1574.

Your Lordship's most bounden,

Richard Masters

Addressed: To the right honourable the Lord Burghley, the Lord Treasurer of England

Endorsed: [In Lord Burghley's hand: vij Martij 1574 D Masters' report of his message to the Queen's Majesty] [In another hand: concerning the Lady Oxford being with child]