

SUMMARY: The document below is a heavily-corrected draft of a letter dating from 1606 from Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612) to Francis Norris (1579-1622), 2nd Baron Norris of Rycote and 1st Earl of Berkshire, who had married Oxford's daughter, Bridget Vere (1584-1631).

It appears from the letter that Norris had let it be known far and wide that he hated his wife, that he had implied she was unfaithful and that Elizabeth Norris was not his daughter, and that Bridget lived in fear that he might kill her. Cecil ends the letter with a demand that Norris provide Bridget with a suitable pension, and advises that Bridget will live in future with her sister, Elizabeth Vere (1575–1627), and her husband, William Stanley (1561-1642), 6th Earl of Derby.

On 15 July 1608, Bridget was in Lancashire with her sister, the Countess of Derby, when John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton that Sir Robert Cecil intended to visit them after the King ended his summer progress:

They go this progress as far as Holmby, and then the Lord Treasurer [Sir Robert Cecil] means to make a step toward Lancashire to visit his nieces Derby and Norris.

See McClure, Norman Egbert, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939) Vol. I, p. 261.

From the *ODNB* entry for Francis Norris:

Shortly after 28 April [1599] he married Lady Bridget de Vere (1584–1630/31), daughter of Edward Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford. They had one daughter, Elizabeth (1600?–1645), but by 1606 he and Bridget were living apart. An illegitimate son, Francis Norris (d. 1669), was born of his union with Sarah Rose.

My Lord, although I have received from your Lordship a letter so full of profession of your care of my niece, your wife, of your respect to myself, and purpose to afford her all things worthy of her, as I hold it my part to take notice thereof with thanks, yet when I consider how great a contradiction there is between your private professions and those proceedings of yours whereof the world takes notice, I must no longer conceal from you how much her friends have cause to complain of her misfortune, for as there can be nothing more common than the discourse of your Lordship's hatred to live with her, so is there nothing which can make the same more visible now by effect than your proceeding at this time, and therefore because your Lordship may no longer please yourself with thinking it sufficient for you to express care and kindness privately and to set her upon the open stage of scorn and practice, I think it a better dealing for us that have interest in her first to speak clearly what we conceive of your actions, and that done, to move you to resolve of those ways which honour and equity must challenge at your hands.

Whereas you are content to make your quarrel that she is grown so subject to fears of your intention to destroy her, your Lordship hath judgment enough to conclude whether she have cause or no. If there be, it is in you to amend, and not in her. If none, your Lordship shall do well to proclaim her a madwoman, or else that exception will serve to little purpose.

If you will say that I have no reason to suspect your love to her when you have professed to me so much by your letters in her behalf, you must pardon me and all her friends to receive much satisfaction by any of them when your Lordship hath left it under the same hand (much about the same day you wrote to me) that the sight of your wife was no better to you than the sight of a basilisk.

If your Lordship will say that those things may be secret, I must answer your Lordship that whensoever Chelsey [=Chelsea?] House hath aught in keeping which may tend to the injury of her father's daughter, it shall want neither art nor malice to divulge it, neither need there any more to overthrow any woman's fortune than once to have it spread that her husband hath left her, be the cause what it will.

Therefore as your Lordship seeth on our side a disposition to use plainness, so am I for my part as ready to yield to the best way of quietness, and as there is no other choice but to go on with a friendly course of separation, I am required in the name of her best friends to offer it you according to your own desire.

Only this is it which we must add, that we expect with this that you will as quietly and certainly resolve us what we shall trust to for her support, not (as we have heard) by offers of weeks' and monthly allowances in petty fragments, somewhat like to the form that noblemen use to pay their servants' board-wages, but in some better fashion by assuring a yearly pension, such being her birth and that addition which she hath given to your fortune, as she hath many friends that will expect no less than is her(?) due in honour and reason.

Thus have I have [sic] thought good directly and clearly to impart our resolution, wherein we desire your Lordship will let it be known with expedition what it is you will allow her and how it shall be assured, lest we that betrayed her to you when she was free should now be accused to neglect her when you have taken the ways to make her miserable.

As for your complaint against the nurse, if she may be believed she hath cause to complain of you, but therein I have nothing to do nor mean to meddle, the same being in my conceit too base a matter to trouble any of us both.

For your child, seeing the mother is now to leave her husband, I could wish your Lordship left the child, if you think good.

And thus expecting to hear from you before her going to the Countess of Derby, where we intend she shall remain without your trouble, I end as one that have ever(?) wished cause to be,

[no signature]

Endorsed: 1606, copy of my Lord's letter to the Lord Norris concerning his wife, the Lady Norris