

SUMMARY: The document below is a copy of a letter dated 1 December 1596 from Robert Devereux (1565-1601), 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex, to Lady Anne Bacon (c.1528-1610) in response to Lady Bacon's letter of the same date admonishing him for having compromised the reputation of her great-niece, Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth Vere (1575-1627), who had married William Stanley (1561-1642), 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, at Greenwich Palace on 26 January 1595.

Essex sailed to Cadiz from Plymouth on 3 June 1596, and returned to Plymouth on 8 August. His reply to Lady Bacon is thus only a partial refutation of her allegation, since he states that 'since my departure from England towards Spain I have been free from taxation of incontinency with any woman that lives', but fails to deny earlier transgressions.

For Lady Bacon's letter, see Lambeth MS 660, ff. 149-50.

For an original spelling transcript, see Allen, Gemma, ed., *The Letters of Lady Anne Bacon*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 44, (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 266-7.

Madam, that it pleaseth you to deal thus freely with me in letting me know the worst you hear of me, I take it as great argument of God's favour in sending so good an angel to admonish me, and of no small care in your Ladyship of my well-doing. I know how needful these summons are to all men, especially to those that live in this place. And I had rather with the poor publican knock my breast and lie prostrate, or with thee(?) confess, when I have done all I can, I am an unprofitable servant, than Pharisaiically to justify myself. But what I write now is for the truth's sake, and not for mine own. I protest before the majesty of God, and my protestation is voluntary and advised, that this charge which is newly laid upon me is false and unjust, and that since my departure from England towards Spain I have been free from taxation of incontinency with any woman that lives. I never saw or spoke with the Lady you mean but in public places, and others being seers and hearers, who if they would do me right could justify my behaviour. But I live in a place where I am hourly conspired against and practised upon. What they cannot make the world believe, that they persuade the Queen unto, and what they cannot make probable to the Queen, that they give out to the world. They have almost all the house to serve them for instruments. Yea, the very oracles (I mean those that are accounted to be plain and sincere) do [Greek word] *phillippisein*, do speak the [-largest] language of the strongest faction. Plutarch taught me long since to make profit of my enemies, but God teacheth it me much better now.

Worthy Lady, think me a weak man, full of imperfections, but be assured I do endeavour to be good, and had rather mend my faults than cover them. I wish your Ladyship all true happiness, and rest at your Ladyship's commandment,

Essex

Burn, I pray you.  
1 of December 96

Addressed: To the honourable Lady, the Lady Anne Bacon

Endorsed: Du Comte d' Essex a Madame Ann Bacon le 2/3 decembre 1596