

SUMMARY: The document below is a copy of a letter dated 1 December 1596 from Lady Anne Bacon (c.1528-1610) to Robert Devereux (1565-1601), 2nd Earl of Essex, 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), 6th Earl of Derby, at Greenwich Palace on 26 January 1595.

Lady Bacon also condemns Elizabeth Vere, stating that it would be better if she were to be 'cut off', i.e. die, than to continue her 'unchaste and impudent' behaviour.

For Essex' partial denial of Lady Bacon's allegation, see his reply by letter dated 1 December 1596 (Lambeth Palace MS 660, f. 281):

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.

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 although he protests his innocence of any current improper involvement with Elizabeth Vere or 'any woman that lives', he fails to deny earlier transgressions.

A few months prior to Lady Bacon's admonitory letter, in a letter dated 17 September 1596 (see CP 44/101), Oxford had expressed concern to his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil, about Elizabeth Vere's inexperience with the pitfalls of life at court:

Also I am most earnestly to desire you that as you are her uncle and nearest to her next myself, that you will friendly assist her with your good advice. You know her youth and the place wherein she lives, and how much to both our houses it imports that she carry herself according to her honour. Enemies are apt to make the worst of everything, flatterers will do evil offices, and true and faithful advice will seem harsh to tender ears. But sith my fortune hath set me so far off as I cannot be at hand in this her troublesome occasions, I hope you will do the good office of an uncle, and I commit unto you the authority of a parent in mine absence.

There are also indications of a strained relationship between Oxford and Essex in the mid-1590. Over a year before Lady Bacon wrote her admonitory letter, Oxford wrote to Sir Robert Cecil on 20 October 1595 mentioning unspecified 'wrongs and injuries' which he had received at Essex' hands which precluded him 'in honour' from asking Essex to forbear making a claim to the Forest of Essex. See Cecil Papers 35/85:

As I was folding up this letter I received a very honourable answer from my Lord Treasurer [=Lord Burghley]. My whole trust in this cause is in you two, my Lord for that he is privy to the whole cause and handling thereof from time to time, and in you for that

I assure myself in so just a matter you will not abandon me. He seemeth to doubt yet of his death, & wisheth me to make means to the Earl of Essex that he would forbear to deal for it, a thing I cannot do in honour sith I have already received divers injuries and wrongs from him which bar me of all such base courses. If her Majesty's affections be forfeits of men's estates we must endure it.

These 'wrongs and injuries' appear to be related to matters other than rumours of impropriety between Essex and Elizabeth Vere.

For Lady Dorothy Stafford (1526-1604), one of the Queen's Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber, mentioned in the letter below, see the *ODNB* entry.

For Essex' marriage to Frances Walsingham (1567–1632) about 1590, see the *ODNB* entry. According to Allen, p. 264:

The countess of Essex had a stillbirth in December 1596.

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. 262-5.

Hearing, my singular good Lord, of your Honour's return from the sea-coasts this day, and I going hence tomorrow, if the Lord so will, I am bold, upon some speeches of some, and with some person(s)(?) at the court where lately I was, to impart somewhat hereof to your Honour because it concerned a party there more near to me than gracious to her stock. I will not deny but before this great suspicion of her unwifelike and unshamefast demeanour hath been brought to me, even into the country, but loath to believe, I laid it up with secret sadness in my breast. And truly, my good Lord, I did not a little but greatly rejoice in heart that it pleased God of his mercy and goodness with the late famous honour he gave you in your late martial exploit with renowned good success, he did also work in you such a change of your mind, before by report inclined to court carnal dalliance, that that honourable and Christian bruit was carried about joyfully to the much gladding of many that unfeignedly loved your Honour's true prosperity.

But *proh dolor*, my good Lord, I perceived by some eyewitnesses here, and which must needs hear and mark, that of late a backsliding to the foul impudent doth plainly appear, and though they did marvel and much blame your dishonourable, and dangerous to yourself, course taking to the infaming a nobleman's wife, and so near about her Majesty, yet she was utterly condemned as too bad, both unchaste and impudent, with as it were an uncorrigible unshamefastness. The Lord speedily by his grace amend her, or cut her off before some sudden mischief. It hath already made her ancient noble husband to undo his house by feeling/falling(?) as one out of comfort, but if a desperate rage, as commonly followeth, he will revenge his provoked jealousy and most intolerable injury, even desperately. And the more because it is said he loveth her, and greatly, as with grief, laboureth to win her. It is great pity she is not delivered to him, and the court to be

cleansed by sending away such an unchaste gaze and common byword in respect of her place and husband.

But you, my good Lord, have not so learned Christ and heard his holy word. In the 3rd, 4, 5 verses of the I chapter to the First Thessalonians it is written, This is the will of God, that ye should be holy and abstain from fornication, and every one know how to keep his own vessel in holiness and honour, and not in the lust of concupiscence as do the Gentiles which know not God. And more, if it please you to read and mark well, it is a heavy threat, that fornicators and adulterers God will judge, and that they shall be shut out, for such things, saith the apostle, commonly cometh the wrath of God upon us. Good Lord, remember and consider your great danger hereby, both of soul and body. Grieve not the holy spirit of God, but honour God that honoured you, and reward him not with such evil for his great kindness towards you. Good my Lord, sin not against your own soul.

My Lady Stafford said, upon occasion in her talk, the good virtuous Countess, your wife, was with child. O honourable and valiant noble, make great account of this God his blessing to you both, and make not her heart sorrowful to the hindrance of her young fruit within her, for it was thought she took before to heart, and that her last did not so comfortably prosper.

If you be with the Lord indeed, he will be with you, and make your very enemies to reverence you. Be strong in the Lord, your and our good patient God. Fear him, and walk uprightly in his truth, and for his promise in Christ he will assist you and look favourably upon you and yours, prosper and increase his blessing upon you & yours, which mercy and grace I humbly do, as I am most bound, call upon him to grant you ever, my dear and worthy Lord, in Christ Jesus. With very inward [-inward] affection have I thus presumed, ill-favouredly scribbled, I confess, being sickly and weak many ways.

Boni consulas te vehement{er} oro et q{uam} optime viuas et valeas vir insignissime et quantu{m} decet mihi Charissime [=Take this in good part, I earnestly beseech you, and may you live in the enjoyment of good health and all felicity, most illustrious nobleman and, as is becoming, most dear to me.]

Primo decemb{ris}

In Christo ex animo,

A Bacona, 'widow' [in Greek]

Endorsed: *De Madame Ann Bacon au Comte Essex le premier de decembre 1596.*