



EDWARD DE VERE NEWSLETTER No. 22

Published by De Vere Press
1340 Flemish Street
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 3R7 Canada

Was Anne Lyly, sister of the poet John Donne, a promoter of the ill-fated marriage of Walter Calverley and Philippa Brooke?

A letter from Philippa Brooke's mother Anne, Lady Cobham, suggests that this was indeed the case.

Anne Brooke, wife of Sir Henry Brooke *alias* Cobham, and sister-in-law of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, wrote to Sir Robert Cecil on May 30, 1599 to enlist his help in the matter of a proposed marriage between her daughter Philippa and Walter Calverley. The letter, preserved among the papers at Hatfield House, reads as follows:

Good Sir. May it please you to understand that there is a marriage intended betwene my daughter Phillipe and Mr Coverley of Coverley and for that I am loath to deale in so waightie a cause without my Lord Cobhams advise and yours therein I have thaught good to sende Mr Lyly unto you who can particularley declare all his whole estate unto you. Likewise I have sent an other Gentleman unto my Lord Cobham to desire his Lordship to imparte it unto you. Now I beseeche you good Sir (whom hath bene allways a father to my children) That you will in this so deale with Mr Lyly that if you shall finde it fitt it may be brought to passe (which gentleman is kynne to Mr Lyly's wife who is the firste welwisher of this matche towards my Daughter). I understande by Mr Lyly that he is in wardeshipp till Aprill next to the Ladie Gargrave of yorke Shiere who hath tendered unto him her daughter and his wylinge to give XV CII in mariage with her. But it hath pleased God that he hath taken some likinge of my daughter that he is content to take her with a lesser portion. Thus Referringe this cause to my Lord Cobham and your wise consideration I humbly take my leave beseechinge god to increase you with much Honor. From Durham house this xxxth of May 99 (Cawley 9-10).

Anne Brooke's request that Sir Robert Cecil involve himself in this matter can be explained on a number of grounds; however, the most likely ground for Cecil's involvement is that in 1589 he had married Elizabeth Brooke (1562-97), daughter of William Brooke, Lord Cobham (McKeen 570, 744). Anne Brooke was Elizabeth Brooke's aunt, and Cecil was thus being asked to concern himself in the affairs of his late wife's family.

The letter indicates that the "firste welwisher of this matche" was the wife of one Master Lyly, and that Master Lyly himself took an active part in the marriage negotiations. Master Lyly's Christian name is not mentioned in the letter; however, there are cogent reasons for identifying Master Lyly as William Lyly.

The details of William Lyly's life are sketchy. Nothing is known of his early years, although Bald considers it likely that he was a native of Hawstead in Suffolk and that he was born in the 1550's. From 1583 to 1590, he served in Paris on the staff of the English ambassador to France, Sir Edward Stafford. A few years after his return to England, he married Anne, elder sister of the poet John Donne. On April 11, 1594, Anne Lyly and John Donne received the inheritance of their brother Henry, who had died in 1593, and a document survives in which Anne Lyly and her husband William Lyly acknowledge receipt of Anne's share. From October, 1596 to January, 1598, William Lyly was with the English forces sent to Picardy to aid the King of France. After 1598, Lyly appears to have settled at Hawstead. The precise date of his death is not known, but Joseph Hall,

the minister at Hawstead, records that Lyly was "swept away by the pestilence" on a visit to London in 1603 after the accession of King James I. On August 16, 1603, letters of administration were granted to Anne Lyly, "relict of William Lyly, formerly of Hawstead in the County of Suffolk, deceased" (Bald 72-83).

One of the principal reasons for identifying William and Anne Lyly with the Master Lyly and his wife referred to in Anne Brooke's letter is the fact that Anne Lyly came from a Catholic recusant family. Elizabeth Heywood, the mother of John Donne and Anne Lyly, was a devout Catholic throughout her life, and brought up her children in that religion. John Donne's brother Henry was committed to Newgate for harbouring a priest, and died in prison (Bald 81). The Calverleys were also recusant Catholics, and at least two of the Calverleys suffered imprisonment for their faith during Elizabeth's reign (Cawley 7). It is thus quite likely that these two recusant Catholic families were known to each other. (In addition, Anne Brooke's letter states that Master Lyly's wife was "kynne" to Walter Calverley, and it may still be possible to trace this connection.)

A further reason for identifying William Lyly as the person mentioned in Anne Brooke's letter is the fact that both William Lyly and Anne Brooke's husband, Sir Henry Cobham, served in the Elizabethan diplomatic service. Cobham (1537-92) travelled abroad on a number of diplomatic missions, principally to Spain, and was ambassador at Paris from 1579-1583 (DNB, 610-11). It is thus very likely that William Lyly was known to Sir Henry Cobham and his wife Anne Brooke.

Finally, it is clear from surviving historical documents that William Lyly and Anne Brooke moved in the same social circles, and were connected to Sir Robert Cecil through Sir Robert and Lady Anne Drury. Lady Anne Drury was the daughter of Sir Nicholas Bacon of Redgrave; Sir Nicholas's half-brother, Sir Francis Bacon, was a first cousin to Sir Robert Cecil (Bald 26). Anne Brooke, as noted earlier, was the aunt of Sir Robert Cecil's wife, Elizabeth Brooke. William Lyly appears to have enjoyed

a fairly close relationship with the Drury family. Lyly witnessed documents of Sir Robert Drury's, and served with Sir Robert's uncle, Sir Edward Stafford, in Paris (Bald 82). In addition, both William Lyly and Sir Robert Drury resided at Hawstead in Suffolk during the late 1590's (Bald 83). Thus, the relationships between the Lyly, Drury, Cecil and Brooke families afford strong evidence that the Master Lyly and his wife referred to in Anne Brooke's letter of May 30th, 1599 are, in fact, William Lyly and his wife Anne.

Subsequent relations between the poet John Donne, William Lyly's brother-in-law, and Sir Robert and Lady Anne Drury cast additional light on the relationship between the Lyly and Drury families. John Donne wrote an elegy in 1611 on the death of the Drurys' daughter Elizabeth, and later that year travelled with the Drurys to France (Bald 68-9, 87-90).

From the foregoing discussion, it appears clear that the "firste welwisher" of the marriage between Philippa Brooke and Walter Calverley -- a marriage which has, since 1605, been connected with the anonymous Elizabethan play, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* -- was Anne Lyly, sister of the poet John Donne.

Works Cited

- Bald, R.C. *Donne & the Drurys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Cawley, A.C. and Barry Gaines, eds. *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.
- Dictionary of national biography*. Vol.4. (DNB)
- McKeen, David. *A memory of honour; The life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham*. Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1986.

WALTER CALVERLEY'S RELATIONS BY MARRIAGE

