

SUMMARY: In this letter of 7 March 1575 Dr Richard Masters advises Lord Burghley 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 early February 1575 that if Anne were pregnant it was not by him. The most striking facts revealed in the letter are that after a lengthy illness during which she had been let blood and purged, Anne Cecil's pregnancy had become evident at Shrove-tide (that is, February 13-15), that she was extremely distraught at the pregnancy, doubted that Oxford would accept the child as his, and requested Dr Masters to prepare medicines for her which would bring on an abortion. Dr Masters concludes the letter by urging that attention be paid to the date of the quickening in order to determine the date of conception. Since the birth of Elizabeth Vere occurred on 2 July 1575, only 4 months later, 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 no reason to question Anne Cecil's faithfulness to Oxford.

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 and to rejoice, she would cry,

Alas, alas, how should I rejoyce, seeing he that should rejoyce with me is not here, and to say truth, 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 rejoyce, 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.