

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter to Lord Burghley from Wilfride Samonde accompanying an elegy by Samonde on the death of Oxford's first wife, Anne Cecil, who died 5 June 1588. Nothing further is known of Samonde.

Upon the Death of the Right Honourable Lady Anne, Countess of Oxford

To the Right Honourable the Lord Burghley, Lord High Treasurer of England

The philosopher [=Aristotle], right honourable, perceiving the motions of the stars, the order of the signs & the planets, the rare constitution of the clouds & elements, not being able to find the true course of so divine a work, and therewithal calling to mind th' excellency of man, beautified with so many ornaments far excelling all other creatures, who yet notwithstanding must needs die, cried out with a loud voice, *O ens entiu{m} miserere mei* [=O thing of things, have mercy on me].

Bias, being demanded what the most certainest thing to man was, answered, *Death*. Being asked what was the uncertainest, he said, *Death*. For as we are most assured we shall once die, so have we least assurance of the time, place or manner of our death.

We see that neither the honour of Caesar, the wealth of Croesus, the strength of Hercules, the beauty of Adonis, the skill of Aesculapius, the poverty of Irus, nor the folly of Codrus can serve for a *supersedeas* at the summons of death. Happy therefore is he unto whom the object thereof is ever of most special regard.

The old saying, *Nemo ante obitum feolix* [=No man is happy before death], is most true, sith in this world the soul lives but in a prison and the body in bondage. How happy then, right honourable, is this virtuous & most honourable Lady, the deceased Countess (now no more your Honour's but the Lord's child), who being dead from the world in his fear, lives as an angel in heaven to her greater glory. This only resteth (in all reverence be it spoken) to comfort your Lordship, that it hath been your good hap to see her matched honourably, to live virtuously, and to die Christianly, sith of necessity it is that all do die, but not unto everyone betideth one & the selfsame quality.

Many were the virtues of her whom I have dared to write upon, but not able to be deciphered in so small a quantity. I humbly do submit unto your Lordship herein the show of my goodwill & duty owing unto her while she lived, performed now in this slender action after her death, prostrating myself and them with all humility to your honourable censure, whom I pray the Almighty to have in his eternal tuition.

Your Lordship's in all dutiful services most willing to be commanded,

Wilfride Samonde

---

Upon the Death of the Right Honourable Lady Anne, Countess of Oxford

And is there naught but daunted is by death?  
Can neither learning, wit nor policy,  
Nor wealth nor honour keep a man from death?  
Plato, that most divine philosopher,  
Could speak of death, but could not death prevent.  
The filed phrase of Tully's eloquence  
Caused others die, yet is he dead himself.  
Croesus by wealth did give his foes the foil,  
And yet of death himself received the foil.  
Caesar, that mighty monarch of the earth,  
A god on earth, if earthly men be gods,  
Who with a beck controlled the state of Rome,  
Controlled by death in midst of Rome did die.  
To speak of Pompey with his victories,  
Of stout Achilles which besieged Troy,  
Of wise Ulysses' weather-beaten bark,  
Of Hannibal with all his stratagems,  
Of princely Priam and his stately court  
Of Trojan dames bedecked with pearl & gold,  
And yet to see them all consumed to dust  
Would but revive an old-concealed grief.

Then sith that all do homage unto death,  
Sith wisdom, wealth, nor high authority,  
Sith neither monarch with his princely crown,  
Nor dilatories used in the law,  
Nor any force can keep a man from death,  
With mournful sighs we justly may confess  
Death is a king, & none a king but he.

None King but he, none tyrant else but he,  
Which like a butcher all imbrued with blood  
Delights in naught but deadly tragedies,  
And never ceaseth, like a greedy wolf,  
With gnawing teeth to tear our flesh in tway  
T' appease the hunger of his stanchless maw,  
His stanchless maw which never is appeased,

Nor is he thus contented with the spoil  
Of kings or other mighty men at arms,  
But like a coward doth extend his reign

On stately ladies, void of manly force,  
Who being frighted with his ugly shape  
Do post their souls from out that princely place,  
That princely place where it was wont to rest.  
O cruel death, too cruel & unkind,  
To bend thy force gainst so divine a sect,  
Whom goddess Nature, framing like herself,  
Hath made the angels of this massy earth,  
If on the earth may any angels be.

Saba [=Sheba], the Queen of great devotion,  
So much commended in the Holy Writ,  
Who took her journey from the farthest south  
For to confer with prudent Solomon,  
In midst of honour & her chief renown,  
Compelled by death resigned her princely crown.

That warlike Queen, the Queen of Amazons,  
Who with her force had foiled so many foes,  
Assailed by death her wonted force did want.  
And Helena, King Menelaus' wife,  
Who with her beauty caused others die,  
Obtained by beauty no remorse of death.

And friendly Dido, poor Aeneas' friend,  
Could find of death ne love nor courtesy.  
A thousand more there be of stately dames  
Whom merciless, without regard at all,  
Death hath compelled instead of princely robes  
To put on meaner weeds of dust & clay,  
Too base attire for such sweet souls as they.

Amongst the rest, nor can I without tears  
Recount the sequel of this tragedy,  
Amongst the rest, I say, untimely death  
Hath caused virtue, love & honour die.

And you sweet dames, whose passing virtues shine  
Like Phoebus when he mounting from the east  
In royal sort displays his golden beams,  
Which giving light unto th' inferior souls  
Brings wished life to all he shines upon;

And you sweet dames, whose firm & loyal love  
Like precious balm hath healed the cureless wound  
And cured the scars of your affectionates;

And you sweet dames, sprung forth of princely blood,  
Bedecked with honour & with greatest fame,  
Bred from the loins of high & mighty Jove,  
And worthy therefore to be honoured,  
Now may you mourn, & clothe yourselves in woe,  
Scarce worthy of your wonted dignity,  
Sith they by whom your dignity were bred,  
Both virtue, love & honour now be dead.

Virgil amongst his learned Aeniads  
Recounting of the false & traitorous wrong  
Used by Aeneas to the Carthage Queen,  
Commendeth Anne, the sister of the Queen,  
For many virtues worthy of account,  
But had he lived with our virtuous Anne,  
And seen her dealings every way upright,  
For modesty a chaste Penelope,  
Another Grissel for her patience,  
Such patience as few but she can use.  
Her Christian zeal unto the highest God,  
Her humble duty to her worthy Queen,  
Her reverence unto her aged sire,  
Her faithful love unto her noble Lord,  
Her friendliness to those of equal state,  
Her readiness to help the needy soul,  
His worthy volume had been altered  
And filled with the praises of our Anne,  
Who as she lived an angel on the earth,  
So like an angel she doth sit on high  
On his right hand who gave her angel's shape.  
Thrice happy womb wherein such seed was bred,  
And happy father of so good a child,  
And happy husband of so true a wife,  
And happy earth for such a virtuous wight,  
But happy she thus happily to die.  
And now, fair dames, cast off your mourning weeds;  
Lament no more as though that she were dead,  
For like a star she shineth in the skies,  
And lends you light to follow her in life  
Whose holy life, if so you imitate,  
As she is now, so shall you angels be.

Finis, per W. Samonde