

Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, "Quaker Lady," 1675.

Two unpublished letters of that learned lady, Anne, Viscountess Conway, of Ragley Hall, Co. Warwick, a Quaker convert, addressed to her friend, Dr. Henry More, the distinguished Cambridge Platonist, with a short biography of the writer, and some other particulars.

The present writer has recently come into the possession of five letters of more than ordinary interest, which were no doubt amongst the papers of Richard Ward, A.Moer. ctr, of Ingoldsby, Co. Lincoln, the friend and biographer of Dr. Henry More.

They consist of (i.) two long letters of Lady Conway of 1675-6 ; (ii.) a letter of Edmund Elys (divine and poet, also champion of the early Quakers), addressed, in 1680, to his friend, Dr. Henry More ; and (iii.) two letters of the above-named Richard Ward, addressed in 1699 and 1714, to John Davies, D.D., of Heydon, Co. Cambridge, who was the friend of Dr. More and attended him in his last illness.

Dr. Henry More (1614-1687), the theologian, philosopher, author, and saint, was one of the most learned and noble characters of the seventeenth century. "*The Life of The Learned and Pious Dr. Henry More, Late Fellow of Christ's College in Cambridge, To which are annex'd Divers of his Useful and Excellent Letters* is the title of his biography, printed in 1710.

This *Life* was dedicated to Dr. John Sharp (1645-1714), Archbishop of York, friend of Dr. Henry More, and in 1667 chaplain to Sir Heneage Finch (1621-1682), who was Lord Chancellor in 1675, and eldest brother of Anne, Lady Conway. Although written in the fulsome, verbose and stilted style of the period, this biography of some 688 pages, with a fine portrait by Loggan, is a work of great interest and has often been quoted.

Dr. William Owtram (1626-1679), the pious divine, is here quoted, speaking of Dr. More "as the Holiest Person upon the Face of the Earth," whilst another

authority said " That he look'd upon Dr. More as the most perfect Man he ever knew."

Dr. More's biography, character and letters accord with these remarkable testimonies, and we think our late friend, William Tallack, in his " Cambridge Platonists,"¹ fully agreed with the verdict of the good doctor's contemporaries.

Space prevents any biographical details of Dr. Henry More, but allusion must be made to the Letters published in his *Life*, of which there are eleven, and quotations from others, including the second of Lady Conway's letters which are the subject of this paper. Dr. More's letters include two to the above-named Dr. John Davies, one to William Penn, several to Edmund Elys, and one to Lady Conway.

Although Dr. More was by no means enamoured of Quakerism, in a letter to Dr. John Davies (of *circa* 1675-6 apparently) he says :—

The Quakers Principle is the most Safe and Seasonable here, *to keep close to the Light within a Man.* But if you will needs have me to add any thing further, that may tend to the keeping a Man in a perpetual *Calmness and Peace of Spirit*, it is *this* : To do all the good we can, expecting nothing again, as from Men, but it may be evil Language and as harsh Deeds : And thus our *Expectation* will never be *disappointed*, nor the *Peace and Repose* of our Mind *disturbed.* . . . " *Mind not high things, but condescend to Men of meaner Ability.*"²

Again, in a letter to Lady Conway in 1651-2, he says :

But above all Things, *relieve* those that are in *Want* ; especially such as, so far as you can perceive, have a good Mind towards God, and his Son *Jesus Christ* ; of whatever Sort or Profession they be ; the *Papists* themselves not excepted. For in so doing, you shall do *Your self* good haply both in *Body and Soul.*³

But perhaps the most interesting letter in the series is that addressed to William Penn (Letter viii.), which occupies no less than forty pages. This is a truly Christian and catholic minded epistle, such as one would expect from a man of Dr. More's character. It is a valuable controversial discourse on Quakerism, and while taking great exception to the principles and usages of the

¹ *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 1889, 187.

² *Life*, pp. 247, 248.

³ *Life*, p. 309.

early Friends, the writer says of Penn's *No Cross No Crown*, "It is, in the main, very sober and good." Of Penn's answers to John Faldo's *Quakerism No Christianity* (1672-1673) Dr. More says:—

But there are sundry Passages, in those two Books of yours, very nobly *Christian*; and for which I have no small kindness and Esteem for you, they being Testimonies of that which I cannot but highly prize wherever I find it. And I wish the *Quakers* would disincumber those *excellent* things they profess, and give Witness to, from such things as make them seem so *uncouth* and *ridiculous*. That the most *Excellent* Things of the *Gospel* be not slighted, condemned, or suspected by Man, through the *Odness* and *Indiscretion* of such as seem the most Zealous Professours of them.

Surely an admirable sentiment!

Dr. More concludes this letter in these words:—

I have nothing more for the present to add; but that the Trouble I have given both you and my self, in Writing this *Letter*, is from meer *Kindness* and *Good-Will*; and that I hope you will take it so. And therefore Committing you to *God*, and the Gracious Guidance of the *Spirit* of his Son, the Lord *Jesus Christ*, I take leave, and rest

Your Affectionate Friend,

To serve you,

H. M.⁴

Such was the man to whom Lady Conway addressed her letters.

Before giving some biographical details of this highborn lady, brief reference should be made to the other letters of the correspondence in the writer's possession.

That of Edmund Elys is a letter of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ pages, dated "From the King's Bench [Prison], December 29th, [16]80," addressed "For the Reverend Dr. More, Fellow of Christ's College in Cambridge." It is signed "E. E."

It is a curious letter. Elys asks Dr. More's opinion on the lawfulness or otherwise of what he believes to be the Black Art, as to whether by some singular jugglery with a Bible and a key, which he describes, discovery can be made of a thief.⁵ He then goes on to speak of his want of prudence, and adds:—

⁴ *Life*, pp. 349, 350.

⁵ See *The Secret Woman*, chap. v., by Eden Phillpotts. A recent and adverse reference to this "method of tearing the heart out of destiny" may be found in *The Equinox*, *The Review of Scientific Illuminism*, vol. i. no. 2, p. 68 (September, 1909).—EDS.

J must confess my softness & childishness in Externall things has made me a *Prey* to many with whom J haue dealt in Worldly Matters But sure J am the Great, & Good God *does*, & will make All things work together for my good. And J trust J shall Liue to Pay every farthing of the money J owe And to stop the Mouth of Calumny &c. to the Glory of God & the Comfort of Those that haue *Charity* to Discern that the "Life which J Liue in the Flesh J Liue By Faith in the Son of God."

To this letter Dr. More wrote an excellent reply, printed in his *Life*, giving him sound advice, but as Elys was then living, apparently, his identity is not disclosed.⁶

Edmund Elys, who was rector of East Allington, Co. Devon, and also of Totnes in that county, was a man of considerable learning, piety, and industry. In 1658, he published his *Miscellanea* in Latin and English verse, and short essays in Latin prose, and his numerous published works are, for the most part, given in Wood's *Athenæ Oxoniensis*. Joseph Smith in his *Catalogue of Friends' Books*,⁷ gives a long list of such works of Elys (1693-1708) as championed the principles of Barclay, Penn, and the early Quakers, and controverted the libels of George Keith and Francis Bugg, the Quaker apostates.

Chalmers in his *Biographical Dictionary*,⁸ in his account of Elys, says:—

The most remarkable of his numerous works, which are mentioned by Wood, is the pamphlet he published against Dr. Tillotson's sermons on the incarnation; and the most estimable is his volume of *Letters*, etc. [which contain communications from Doctors Sherlock, Bentley, More, Barlow and others.]

The remaining manuscript letters of the series previously alluded to are two of Richard Ward, rector of Ingoldsby (the scene of Dr. More's former incumbency), addressed to the doctor's intimate friend, Dr. John Davies, of Haydon, Co. Cambridge.

Like his friend, Elys, he seems to have been "no manager," and he was at one time in pecuniary straits, as is evident from his long letter of 1699, when he was "now turned of forty."

⁶ *Life*.

⁷ 1867, i., pp. 572-575. [All these pamphlets are in D.—Eds.]

⁸ 1814, vol. xiii., pp. 178-179.

At the end of this letter is a statement of his income and expenditure (1½ pages folio), with his accounts for May, June and July, 1699, etc.

The remaining letter of 1714 is endorsed by Ward, "My own of ye past [oral] offices," in which he speaks of "The excellent Mr. Herbert (whom I verily believe to have been a singularly sincere and exemplary priest, wise, humble, patient and faithful)." It is a long and interesting letter.

We now come to speak of the principal subject of this paper, Anne Finch, Lady Conway, of whom, singularly enough, no life has been written, although biographical notices have appeared at intervals. The principal materials for Lady Conway's biography, besides Dr. More's and Van Helmont's works, are contained in Ward's *Life of Dr. More*,⁹ in which he says:—

We have particular Obligations to *Ragley*, and its Woods, as the *Place* of his [Dr. More's] Composing divers of them [his learned treatises]; at least in part. There was a Design once (from certain Hands I could mention) of Printing some *Remains* of this *Excellent Lady*: Upon which Occasion (for wise and good Reasons, though in the Name of *another* Person) he thought fit to write the *ensuing Account*, by way of *Preface* to the *Reader*. (pp. 202, 203.)

Here follows Dr. More's account¹⁰ although under the signature of Baron Francis Mercury Van Helmont, Lady Conway's intimate friend and physician.

Anne Finch, later Viscountess Conway, was the youngest daughter of Sir Heneage Finch (d. 1631),¹¹ Speaker of the House of Commons, and of an ancient and illustrious family, by his second wife, Elizabeth, daughter of William Cradock, of Co. Stafford, Esq., widow of Richard Bennet, Esq.

We do not know the exact date of her birth, but her eldest brother, Heneage Finch, first Earl of Nottingham (1621-1682),¹² the Lord Chancellor, was born, as we see, ten years prior to the death of their father, the Speaker.

"Ann Finch was educated with her brothers, and soon showed that her mental gifts were equal to theirs

⁹ pp. 192-209, 289-310, etc.

¹⁰ pp. 203-209.

¹¹ *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, xix. 7.

¹² *D.N.B.* xix. 8.

in every respect." Sir John Finch (1626-1682)¹³ the Physician and Ambassador to Constantinople, 1672-1682, was Anne's younger brother, and an early pupil of Dr. More. He was buried in Christ's College Chapel, Cambridge, his epitaph being written by his former tutor.

To continue our account of Anne Finch:—

Besides the ordinary acquirements and accomplishments of her sex, her studies in Greek, Latin and Hebrew introduced her to a host of authors, many of them now only known to men of antiquarian taste and research. She read with much appreciation the works of Plotinus and Plato, and studied the most abstruse treatises of theosophy and mysticism. . . Her understanding was singularly quick and apprehensive, her judgment sound and solid, and her sagacity and prudence in affairs of moment were such as astonished all those who had occasion to consult with her. In the cultivation of these great natural endowments she became mistress of the highest theories, whether of philosophy or religion, having the greatest facility for physical, metaphysical, and mathematical speculations, and was qualified to search into and judiciously sift the most abstruse writers of theology.¹⁴

In spite of her great learning, and her many writings, although Dr. More undoubtedly benefited by them, as his published works testify, Lady Conway published nothing in her life-time. After her death, however, a collection of philosophical treatises was published in Latin at Amsterdam in 1690, the first being a translation of a work by Lady Conway, "a certain English Countess learned beyond her sex." This treatise was re-translated and published in London in 1692.

Anne Finch married, 1651, as the first of his three wives, the Honourable Edward Conway, son and heir of Edward Conway, Viscount Conway of Conway Castle and Baron Conway of Ragley, and Viscount Conway of Killultagh in Ireland by Frances, daughter of Sir Francis Popham, Knt., of Littlecote, Wilts.

He succeeded to the Viscountcy upon the death of his father in 1655, and was created Earl of Conway in December, 1679. He died without surviving issue in 1683, aged about sixty, and was described by a witty contemporary as possessing "a very full purse and a very empty

¹³ *D.N.B.* xix. 18.

¹⁴ "Anne, Viscountess Conway," by S. H. Steevens, *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 1874, p. 198; quoted in *Evesham Friends in the Olden Time*, by Alfred W. Brown, 1885, pp. 126-7.

head"; the latter of which statements, however, could scarcely be true of a man who was Secretary of State 1681-1683, and a Privy Councillor.

Lord Conway had issue by his first wife, Anne Finch, an only son, Heneage, who died of smallpox in London, 14th October, 1660, aged eighteen months, and "lieth buried at Arrow."

We have already spoken of Lady Conway's mental gifts, and we must combat the erroneous description of her character in *The Dictionary of National Biography*,¹⁵ which speaks of her as "an hysterical invalid." In spite of the acute paroxysms of pain she suffered in her head from her marriage to her death (some twenty-eight years later), and which she endured with the courage and patience of a martyr, she was a remarkably sane and level-headed woman, as the letters which follow testify.

Of Lady Conway's friends the most intimate was Dr. Henry More, with whom she corresponded as early as 1651-2. Her he describes as "that incomparable Person" and "the greatest *Example of Patience and Presence of Mind*, in highest Extremities of Pain and Affliction, that we shall easily meet with. Scarce any thing to be found *like her*, since the *Primitive* times of the *Church*."¹⁶

In Dr. More's Dedicatory Epistle to his *Immortality of the Soul*, addressed to Lord Conway, he says:—"I call to mind the pleasant retirement I enjoy'd at Ragley, during my abode with you there; . . . the solemnness of the Place, those shady Walks, those Hills and Woods, wherein having lost the sight of the rest of the World and the World of me, I found out in that hidden solitude the choicest theories."

Another of Lady Conway's intimate friends, and her resident physician, was Francis Mercurius, Baron Van Helmont, son of John Baptist Van Helmont, the famous Brabançon physician. Of him and Lady Conway is a most interesting account in *The Gentleman's Magazine*,¹⁷ under the title of "A Pupil of Van Helmont," to which we must refer the reader as well worthy of perusal. To

¹⁵ Index and Epitome vol. But vol. xii. 50 does not agree with this statement.

¹⁶ *Life*, pp. 203, 208.

¹⁷ November, 1906, pp. 464-474.

Van Helmont, however, is elsewhere partly attributed, from his belief in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, the "vain and speculative notions" which contributed to the "sad apostacy of George Keith (1639?-1716)"¹⁸

Both Van Helmont and Dr. More were amongst the heartbroken friends who watched the "passing," upon the 23rd February, 1679, of this "singularly sweet and lovable" woman, Anne Viscountess Conway. Dugdale also records in his *Warwickshire* that as Lord Conway was absent in Ireland, Van Helmont preserved her body in spirits of wine and placed it in a coffin with a glass over the face. Some eight weeks succeeding her death, *viz.*, 17th April, 1679, she was buried in the family vault at Arrow, where her lead coffin still remains, with only the simple inscription scratched upon it : "Quaker Lady."

Reference must now be made to Lady Conway as a convert to Quakerism. At exactly what period she became a Friend is uncertain, but her letters show pretty conclusively that she became convinced of the soundness of Quaker principles through reading the controversial works of the early Friends. Later, when she became acquainted with some of the founders of the Society, Fox, Penn, Barclay, Keith and others, and witnessed that their lives answered their profession, she was fully convinced and identified herself with this then suffering community.

The letters which follow show that George Keith visited her in 1675, that she was anticipating the pleasure of a visit from William Penn (possibly not the first), and that Van Helmont had "grown a very religious Churchman," going "every Sunday to the Quakers' Meeting" !!

From another source¹⁹ we learn that Isaac Penington addressed three letters to Lady Conway,²⁰ prior to October, 1679, the date of his death. In 1677 George Fox visited "her that was called Lady Conway [at Ragley], who I

¹⁸ *D.N.B.* xxx. 318.

¹⁹ *Evesham Friends in the Olden Time*, by Alfred W. Brown, 1885, where is a most interesting chapter upon Viscountess Conway, of Ragley Hall, pp. 124-138.

²⁰ *Letters of Isaac Penington*, John Barclay's edition, 1828, pp. 125, 128, 250.

understood was very desirous to see me, and whom I found tender and loving, and willing to have detained me longer than I had freedom to stay."²¹

Robert Barclay, the Apologist, who was personally acquainted with Lady Conway, records that the Friends' Meeting House at Aberdeen was "mostly bought with his own money, and some by his means obtained from the Countess of Conway, one of the same persuasion in England."

It is of interest also to record that the original manuscript of William Penn's Journal of his travels on the Continent in 1677 (which was at one time in the present writer's possession and now belongs to Friends in America, fell into the hands of Lady Conway, having been given or lent her by one of the Peningtons. Upon Lady Conway's death this manuscript having been found amongst her papers by "a person who much frequented that family," William Penn was induced to publish it in 1694.

Whether Friends' meetings of a public character were ever held at Ragley Hall is doubtful, as its noble mistress was so constantly ill; but many private religious meetings took place in her chamber.

The conversion of Lady Conway to Quakerism was a terrible trial to her beloved and honoured friend, Dr. Henry More, who "broke out into almost uncontrollable grief when he heard that she had decided to take this step." Upon which "he speedily issued a series of controversial tracts attacking what he called the 'crooked and perverse teaching of Quakerism.'"

The worthy doctor had somehow got hold of the notion that the Quakers held Familist opinions, and he designates them as "undoubtedly the most Melancholy Sect that ever was in the World"; he allowed, however, that there were "some amongst them, *good* and *sincere-hearted* Men," although he was "well assured that the *generality* of them were *prodigiously Melancholy*, and some *few* perhaps *possessed with the devil*."

The deluded though spiritually-minded and repentant James Nayler, he, through ignorance of the true facts of the case, described in a letter to a Familist as "a proud, lustful, imposturous Villain; and an insolent

²¹ *Journal*, ii. 319.

Rebel against *his* Person, against *whom* whosoever doth kick, shall cast himself into Shame and Reproach enough at last."

But Lady Conway having "found great peace" in her adoption and experience of the Quaker views of Truth, stood her ground, as she was quite able to do, and her conversion happily in no way interfered with the friendship so long existing between Dr. More and herself, to whom she was "that incomparable Person" to the last.

In Ward's *Life of Dr. More* is an extract from one of Lady Conway's letters,²² (Letter VI. in the volume), dated Kensington, Feb. 11. 1651/2, and subscribed, "Sir, Your sincerely affectionate Friend and Servant, A. C." In this she refers to Des Cartes,²³ and asks four questions, the first of which was "Whether God did create the *Matter* for the *Enquipment* of Souls, since they *fell* by it?" and others as abstruse.

To this Dr. More replied in a very long letter (VII.),²⁴ signed "Your Ladyship's Affectionate Friend and Servant: Hen, More." As far as we are aware this unfortunately is the only one of the doctor's letters to the Viscountess preserved, although Lord and Lady Conway appear to have greatly treasured all the doctor's correspondence in their life time.

Extracts from two of Lady Conway's letters are quoted by Ward,²⁵ one of which is the second letter printed in extenso in this paper. Whether any letters of Lady Conway exist, either printed or manuscript, than those referred to in this account, we cannot say. We have, moreover, received from the Marquis of Hertford, of Ragley Hall, Alcester, who also holds the title of Baron Conway of Ragley and Killultagh, a courteous letter dated "Ragley Hall, Alcester 8—10—09," in which he writes, "There is one small portrait here catalogued as *Countess* of Conway, but none of *Viscountess* Conway. There is a very fine portrait of Van Helmont by Sir

²² pp. 289-290.

²³ René Descartes (1596-1650), "father of modern philosophy."

²⁴ pp. 291-310.

²⁵ pp. 196-200.

Peter Lely. I am sorry to say we have no documents or manuscripts relating to Viscountess Conway."

Unless, therefore, there are letters in the British Museum or elsewhere, the originals in the writer's possession, an accurate transcription of which follows²⁶, are the only ones now remaining.

Tunbridge Wells.

J. J. GREEN.

To be continued.

Jonathan Backhouse and the Bank Notes.

An interesting and amusing story of Mr. Backhouse and a "Commercial" was told of the late Jonathan Backhouse by Joshua Monkhouse of Barnard Castle, and vouched for by him as having actually taken place.

"Before the time of railways, near the beginning of the century, the commercial traveller of that day made his visits to the towns of the County of Durham either by mail coach or other conveyance, and sojourned for some days in each town, where he was an important person, especially at the head hotel or hostelry of the place. It so happened that one of those gentlemen, after having dined freely at the 'King's Head,' Barnard Castle, was boasting to a company present in the commercial room of his own importance and wealth, and exhibiting in proof a sheaf of bank notes taken on his journey. Jonathan Backhouse, attired in the usual dress of the Society of Friends, unknown to the rest of the company, was in the room quietly reading his newspaper, when he was attacked by the wealthy commercial, and by a series of sarcastic remarks held up to ridicule as a man out of harmony with the spirit of the time and place. Following up this raillery the commercial, displaying his handful of notes, offered to bet the Quaker £5 or any sum, that he could not produce as much money as he was exhibiting. Mr. Backhouse after a great deal of banter, said he did not bet, but to show his indifference to money offered to put a £5 note in the fire if the commercial would do the same. Suiting the action to the word Mr. Backhouse took out a £5 note, and put it into the fire. The commercial, not wishing to be behind, did the same. Mr. Backhouse offered to repeat the process, but the commercial, considerably cowed, declined; when Mr. Backhouse quietly thanked him for having burned one of his (Mr. Backhouse's) bank notes, for which he had received £5, while the note he (Mr. Backhouse) had burned was on his own bank, and had only cost him the paper."

From *A History of Banks, Bankers and Banking*, etc., by Maberly Phillips, 1894, p. 149.

²⁶ In consequence of illness it is not possible to include Lady Conway's letter in this issue.