



RAGLY
A Beautiful Seat with Regular Gardens in the County of Warwick, belonging to Popham Conway Esq.

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

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LETTER I.

A folio sheet, measuring $13\frac{3}{4}$ by 9 inches. Watermark, shield with bugle, surmounted by a crown, beneath is the figure 4, and under this the monogram W.R. The Letter is one of $1\frac{3}{4}$ pages and 66 lines, and in an excellent clear hand.

Ragly, 29 November, 1675.

Dear Doctor

J haue had a great desire to write to you ever since J receiued your first from London, but J am continually under so weighty a pressure of excessiue sufferings, that I cannot doe what J would.

Upon your first from Cambridge, mentioning your indisposition J did immediately hasten the sending you the [? Qu]—assa for pills Monsieur Van Hellmont¹ had ordered for you, w^{ch} J hope, you accordingly receiued, and may doe well to keep y^t by you, if any such occasion should againe happen, w^{ch} J am glad by your last to understand you are at present freed from.

George Keith² gave me a visit in his journey to Scotland, J could not prevail with him to stay above 2 or 3 weekes, but y^t time y^t J had while he was in the house, I spent wth much satisfaction in his company (though J was very ill and in my bed, when J did see him). J am glad, you had an opportunity of so free and full a converse wth severall of these Quakers, when you were at London, by w^{ch} meanes you will be able to give a better judgment of their principles and practices then you could doe upon the reports of others, who either through prejudice or ignorance had doubtlessly misrepresented them to you.

The reading of their bookes lately had in a great measure freed me from former prejudicate opinions, but their conversation doth much

¹ Francis Mercurius Van Helmont, Lady Conway's physician, previously named; he had dabbled in "chemistry, alchemy, painting, engraving," weaving and even bootmaking; after Lady Conway's decease in 1679 he removed to Hanover, and amongst other occupations endeavoured to form a universal language out of Hebrew (a kind of Esperanto); always retaining the utmost affection for his quondam pupil at Ragley, he died at Berlin in 1699, surviving Lady Conway twenty years.

² (1639?-1716) "Christian quaker" and S.P.G. Missionary, an apostate from Quakerism, *vide D.N.B.* xxx. 318.

more reconcile me to them. What a Quaker told you of G. Fox being acquainted wth Rice John³ is true and that he hath been sometimes to hear at his congregation (as he has been at most other congregations), but they certainly affirme, that he never was of his congregation nor agreed in opinion wth him, and J hope we may beleive the account they give of themselves, that they never were infected with what you call Familisme,⁴ though perhaps some simple people amongst them may have expressed themselves in suspected termes out of ignorance.

J am sure this new notion of G. Keiths about Christ seemes farr removed from Familisme, he attributing by y^t more to the externall Person of our Saviour, then J think any ever hath done; he was speaking of it here, for it seemed very clear to him, and he was very full of it, but J haue had more thought about it since he went upon the reading his letter to you and that to Peganius (w^{ch} J haue also sent you a copy of) w^{ch} J had not leisure to doe before, upon the perusing of w^{ch}, I cannot but judge the opinion worth your serious consideration, and J hope, you will not think your time mispent in urging such solid reasons as you may have agst it in answer to what of reason and particular experience he alledges for it, his opinion if true, would facilitate the understanding of many places in Scripture, as well as it would make better sense of the Cabbalists⁵ Seir Aupin and Arich Aupin, but J will leave this till J see your answer to his letter and to his answer to your Remarks, in those passages related to the extension of the Soul of Christ, w^{ch} if J did not mistake him, he told me you intended a serious confutation of. J could wish you would lett me see your answer to him, if you will send it hither, J know how to send to him, and J shall take great care of the conveyance of what you send, and now J am mentioning this, J would desire you to send me his answer to your Remarkes, for J haue a mind to see all, he has to say for this opinion, and it shall bee kept safe for you agst you come. I haue also another request to you, y^t you would give me another copy of your Poems,⁶ for the confidence J had of your prouiding me againe, made me part wth mine to G. K., and J hope you will pardon my great freedome with you.

G. K. in his letter to Peganius⁷ seemes to be of the Jewes opinion, that there may be many soules in man, and y^t our sensitive soul is really

³ Rice or Rhys Jones, of Nottingham, ex-Baptist and Ranter, opponent of Fox in 1654 and 1657; he and his followers were denominated "Proud Quakers" and his society was soon broken up.

⁴ The doctrines of the Familists or Family of Love; this sect "taught that the essence of religion consisted in the feelings of divine love." The Familists degenerated into gross immorality, and Dr. Henry More, Baxter, Fox and Penn wrote against them. (*Lloyds Encyclopædic Dictionary*.) How Dr. More could associate the Quakers with them seems inexplicable.

⁵ A Cabalist is "one who professes acquaintance and faith in the Jewish mystic doctrines of the cabala, a system of Jewish theosophy, bearing a certain similarity to Neo-Platonism" (*Lloyds Encyclopædic Dictionary*).

⁶ *Philosophical Poems*, apparently, published in 1647, 8vo.

⁷ We do not identify this writer.

distinct from y^t endued with understanding since [?] his finding them to agree with him in his opinion, about the extension of the soul of Christ, has been an occasion of his so readily adhering to them in this other opinion.

W. Pen writt to me by G. K. intending it seemes to haue giuen me a visit, if his businesse had not hindered him at the same time, in his letter he mentioned to me his hauing been with you at London, and expressed some expectation of your giuing a better testimony of the Quakers in print (upon your now better information of them) then you had formerly done; and J understood G. K. so as if you had promised to write some thing in their behalf, therefore if you did not tell them so they did mistake you, for they beleive you doe intend it.

J haue acquainted Monsieur van Hellmont with the great care you took of Peganius his affaire when you were at London, and of your recommending it so effectually to my Brother's⁸ Chaplaine and ready to write to him att any time about it, when there shall be occasion: for w^{ch} we are both much obliged to you, at present, J think, there is nothing more to be done, till Peganius his answer comes to what he writ to him about it. My L^d⁹ writes to me y^t he doubts not, but My L^d Keeper¹⁰ will keep a place longer then two months (in w^{ch} time he may be here) vacant for him, but for another to take a preferment for him and then to resigne it most think unlawfull, because of the oath they take upon their admission; he advises him also to take orders in our Church rather then the Lutheran, as supposing that will be lesse disputed or suspected. Monsieur Van Hellmont will write this Poste to Mr. Knorr¹¹ and acquaint him with what Dr. Cudworth¹² advises concerning the Zoar[?].¹³ J hope J haue not omitted the taking notice of all the particulars of your letters, however J cannot at present add any thing more, except unalterable being

Dear Doctor,

Most affectionately yours,

ANNE CONWAY.

Monsieur van Hellmont is growne a very religious Churchman, hee goes every Sunday to the Quakers meetings.

When you send the above desired papers be pleased to direct them To M^r Daniel Bilger¹⁴ at Esq^{re} Boyl's¹⁵ house in the Pell-mall, London; hee will take care of sending them hither.

⁸ The Lord Chancellor's.

⁹ Viscount Conway.

¹⁰ The Lord Chancellor.

¹¹ Not identified.

¹² Ralph Cudworth, D.D. (1617-1688), author of *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 1678. See *D.N.B.* xiii. 271.

¹³ We do not understand this allusion.

¹⁴ Not identified.

¹⁵ The Hon. Robert Boyle (1627-1691) the natural philosopher, chemist and saint (*D.N.B.* vi. 118). Mr. Boyle settled in Pall Mall, London, in 1668, with his sister Lady Ranelagh, whom he only survived a week. It is interesting to remember that Dr. Thomas Birch (1705-1766), an ex-Quaker, published Robert Boyle's *Life* in 1744.

LETTER II.

Another letter of the same sized sheet and watermark, 2½ full pages folio, 106 lines.

Ragly, 4 February 1675/6.

Dear Doctor

Since my last J must wth thankes acknowledge the receipt of three letters from you, one from London and two from Cambridge, y^e last of w^{ch} was accompanied wth what was also very acceptable to me, viz., a fair copy of your Poems (w^{ch} is a book J highly value) and your letter to G. K. wth your particular and serious examination of his new opinion, both w^{ch} J haue perused wth much satisfaction, your arguments agst his opinion hauing much of strength and solidity in them. Your Letter to him containes very sober and usefull cautions and as you say, J think, it will be very hard for them to prove from involuntarie paine or greif experimentally felt, y^t there is another liuing being in them distinct from their owne souls. The places of Scripture interpreted by you, as alledged by them in favour of their opinion, doe certainly fall short of a proof of any such far extended soul distinct from the Deity, as G. K. supposeth, whether they be to be understood just so as you haue explained them or not. But J cannot think y^t he would be understood to meane, what you would inferr from his Letter to you (though J confesse his expressions haue given you just occasion to take y^t advantage of him) y^t the lesser soul of Christ is onely plastical and not of the same nature wth the souls of other men ; but this by the by, we shall understand his meaning best by his next reply. Your answeres to the collection you haue made of the proofs of his opinion seemes to me very considerable and such as makes his arguments fall short of a proof of what he would assert, but me thinkes his 10th. 11. 12. 13. 14. makes the best shew for his assertion.

J think it will not be easy for him to free his opinion from those seeming absurdities, you take notice, it is entangled with, many of w^{ch} J did apprehend it to be involved with before J read what you writt and therefore was the better pleased to find them so fully insisted on and largely expressed to my hand by so judicious and able a pen w^{ch} certainly will give him occasion very seriously to consider y^e point in his reply to such weighty objections as are contained in your papers to him. But J cannot imagine that he would be understood (w^{ch} you seeme to suppose) that this far extended soul of Christ did preceed the H. Ghost, for y^t being y^e life of the Deity, it is a contradiction to fancy y^e Deity ever destitute of. J shall be sure to keep a copy here of your letter and examination to G. K. and send him the original very suddenly together wth your remarks as you haue appointed, 6. of w^{ch} Kettleby¹⁶ sent hither last week according to your order, one J suppose you designed for Monsieur van Hellmont, and another for Coke¹⁷ and one J pretend to for my self, but there then

¹⁶ Walter Kettilby, bookseller, at the Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Churchyard.

¹⁷ Not identified, unless Roger Coke (fl. 1696) the political writer, who wrote against Thomas Hobbes, as did the Cambridge Platonists.

remaines two undisposed of, w^{ch} J wait for your directions about; J hear Mr Boyle¹⁸ sayes you had better neuer haue printed it, for you are mistaken in all your experiments.

J wonder you are so long in determining concerning your Prebend,¹⁹ but I am so wholly ignorant both of the nature of the place and also of those affaires that occasion your irresolution, that J haue nothing to say concerning it, but onely what My Lord writt to me, y^t My L^d Chancellour or Mr Sharp²⁰ told him, y^t if you did not resolve suddenly, that something of the profitt of the place would be lost, if you should accept afterwards of it.

Peganius seemes to[o] farr engaged at the present in some affaires to quit the place, where he is, and therefore there will be no occasion as yett to make use of your assistance in his behalf to Mr. Sharp (though Monsieur van Hellmont is very sencible of your kinde offer in mentioning your readinesse to doe it), but the condition of his affaires may perhaps be altered before any things falls to be offered him here and then he would be willing to accept of what was desired for him, J perceive, wherefore we judge it best to be silent concerning him at present, it being time enough to mention his refusal, if it should happen to be offerd before he can embrace it.

J haue sent you here enclosed a relation of an unusual manner of death, w^{ch} J receiued lately from Mr Bromley,²¹ whose Brother was in y^e beginning of December last released from his tedious sicknesse: should J adventure upon a presage concerning my owne condition, from the redoubling of my afflictions, y^e continuednesse of my great paines, increase of weaknesse wth additionall new distempers, J might fancy my release also not farr off, from those weighty sufferinges, J have groaned under so many yeeres longer then he was exercised wth his disease, but life and death are in the hands of the Almighty, and what he designes for me, J desire, I may be enabled to glue my self up to, willingly wth out murmuring who onely knowes what measure of sufferings are necessary for me.

J think you mistook me in what J writt of the Quakers, if J rightly remember it, for J never thought that none of the Familists might turne Quakers, either at the first rising of y^m or since, but y^t G. Foxe was never listed into y^t Sect, before his taking up this forme; J am of your opinion that there are many bad people amongst them, as well as of other professions, and doe also beleve that their converse with you might be of good use to them, for the clearing up of their understanding, and advauncing their progresse towards the best things, and therefore y^t your Conversation wth y^m at London might be (as you expresse it) charitably intended, like that of a Physitian frequenting his patients for the increase or confirmation of their health, but J must professe y^t my converse wth them is upon a contrary account to receiue health and refreshment from y^m.

¹⁸ The Hon. Robert Boyle, before-mentioned.

¹⁹ That of Gloucester, see later on.

²⁰ John Sharp (1645-1714), Archbishop of York, previously named, and at this time domestic chaplain (1667-76) to Sir Heneage Finch, Lord Chancellor.

²¹ Not identified, but probably one of the Bromleys of Holt Castle, co. Worcester.

They haue been and are a suffering people, and are taught from the consolation [that] has been experimentally felt by them under their great tryals to administer comfort upon occasion to others in great distresse, and as Solomon sayes, a word in due season is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

The weight of my affliction lies so very heauy upon me, y^t it is incredible how very seldom J can endure any one in my chamber, but I find them so still, quiet and very serious, y^t the company of such of them as J have hitherto seene, will be acceptable to me, as long as J am capable of enjoying any, the particular acquaintance with such liuing examples of great patience under sundry heauy exercises, both of bodily sicknesse and other calamitys (as some of them haue related to me) J find begetts a more lively fayth and uninterrupted desire of approaching to such a behaviour in in like exigencyes, then the most learned, and Rhetorical discourses of resignation can doe, though such are also good and profitable in their season ; J should not haue run into this digression, but to take from you all occasion of wonder, if you should heare, y^t J sometimes see some of y^m, that can see no body else, for if my condition would permit it, J should desire more of their company and the knowledge of their particular experiences being refreshing to me and J hope may be of some use, but J haue not seene above 2 or 3 of these suffering persons since G. K. went away, though W. P. and some others did then seeme to intend me a visitt, neither is y^t true you heard reported y^t Monsieur van Hellmont has Quakers meetings here though he continues a frequenter of their meetings abroad but has not altered either his garb or language.

J thank you for your caution in the close of your last letter, when any shall dine here, but you must excuse me, y^t J doe not think it advisable to put your counsell in practice.

J am not in love wth the name of a Quaker, nor yett wth what you terme their rusticity, but their principles and practices (at least most of y^m) as far as J am capable to judge are Christian and Apostolical ; and the most of them as farr as J can see or hear liue as they preach, w^{ch} makes me hope (if my presage doe not deceiue me) to be better serued by such in my chamber, then I haue yett been by any of any other profession, but of this J shall best judge after tryal, w^{ch} J am now experienceing, a woman in the place of Pordage J haue just now taken upon tryal and she is already come to me, her father was a gentleman of an estate and left each of his daughters 1500^{lb}. a piece to their portions. J am also changing my two maides into Quakers, in the place of one of w^{ch} J have taken Mary Waril.²² She comes to me, I think, about a fortnight hence, her father was also a gentleman and has left her a portion y^e Interest of w^{ch} has maintained her wthout necessitating her to serve, y^e other J haue not yett pitched upon, but intend she shall be of the same profession, for if they proue what they seeme to be, lovers of quiett and retirement, they will fitt the circumstances J am in (y^t cannot endure any noise) better then others.

J pray God give us all a clear discerning betweene Melancholly Enthusiasme and true Jnspiration, y^t we may not be imposed upon to

²² Not identified ; there were Warrels at Greenwich at this period.

beleue a lye, y^e great difference of opinion in this point amongst the learned and experienced occasions much perplexity in minds lesse exercised, and so not so well fitted for judging.

J haue now made shift to lengthen this letter even to the exercise of your patience, but cannot doubt of your excusing a fault, w^{ch} my condition secures you from being committed often. J shall be glad to hear of your receipt of this at your first leisure, and of your resolve as to the affair of Gloucester²³ (if it be determind) and when J may hope to see you here.

Monsieur van Hellmont has now given one of your Remarkes to Mr Wilson,²⁴ so that there remaines but one undisposed of.

J shall ever remaine,

Dear Doctor,

Your very affectionate and obliged Friend,

ANNE CONWAY.

Bedfordshire County Records.¹

1824. 14th January. Letter from Jeramy Willis to Lord —.

“ Mr. Samuel Reeve, one of the surveyors of the road of Leighton Bussard, requested I would see your lordship on the subject of a letter he wrote relative to a bridge blown down at a flood on the 31st of October last, at the end of the town of Leighton Bussard, standing upon the stream dividing the counties of Buckingham and Bedford. I understood the object to be if the court of Quarter Sessions will assist in rebuilding the bridge.”

Letter dated at Leighton, from Samuel Reeve to Lord Tavistock.

“ As one of the surveyors of this town, I beg leave to inform thee that an application will be made to the court of Quarter Sessions at Bedford for the repair of a bridge which divides the counties of Bedford and Buckingham and the parishes of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade, which was washed down by the late calamitous flood ; fearing thy health may not permit thy attendance at the Sessions, and feeling the importance of the assistance and influence, we have taken the liberty of soliciting that thou would request the chairman (W. Wilshire, Esq.), with whom thou art intimately acquainted, to give his sanction and assistance in promoting the interests of this town by a grant from the court ; it is unquestionably a county bridge. Similar application will also be made to the court for the county of Buckingham, and we hope, by a grant from each, the parishes will be enabled to compleat the bridge in a proper manner, without being affected much thereby.”

²³ Dr. Henry More accepted a prebend in the church of Gloucester in 1676, being collated to it by Lady Conway's brother, the Lord Chancellor ; he soon resigned it, however, to Dr. Edward Fowler, formerly incumbent of Northill, co. Bedford, and later Bishop of Gloucester.

²⁴ Not identified.

¹ *Bedfordshire County Records. Notes and Extracts from the County Records—Comprised in the Quarter Sessions Rolls from 1714 to 1832. Volume I., published 1907.*